

Preface

This volume is the outcome of a research program conducted by the Nijmegen Institute for Mission Studies between 2006 and 2010, in collaboration with colleagues from Asia, Africa and Latin America. With some of them we have had long-standing relations and scientific exchange. The research program, which culminated in an expert seminar at Radboud University Nijmegen in October 2008, already has had some by-products in the form of doctoral dissertations, lectures, trainings and consultancy. We hereby thank all participants and collaborators for their efforts. The research and the publication would not have been possible without the support of the Catholic Organization for Relief and Development Aid (CORDAID), the Commission Projects in the Netherlands (PIN) of the Netherlands Major Superiors Conference (KNR), the Netherlands Commission for Justice and Peace (J&P), the Missionszentrale der Franziskaner (MZF) in Bonn, Germany, and other sponsors who do not want to be named. We are grateful for their continuous support.

Frans Wijzen

Table of Contents

<i>Frans Wijzen & Sylvia Marcos</i> Indigeneity and sustainability: An introduction	9
<i>Luuk Knippenberg</i> Chasing God: The idea of sustainable development and its implications	31
<i>Sylvia Marcos</i> Spirituality; perspectives from the first Indigenous Women's Summit of the Americas	49
<i>Jose De Mesa</i> "Land is Life": cultural energies of indigenous spirituality	71
<i>Amadou Sow</i> Land rights and land rights violation among the Haal-Pulaar	101
<i>Laurenti Magesa</i> African indigenous spirituality as a paradigm for environmental conservation	127
<i>Cathrien de Pater</i> Spiritual values inspiring indigenous forest management	153
<i>Solomon Dejene</i> Iddir: metaphor for solidarity in Ethiopia	173
<i>Clement Waidyasekara</i> Baradari: A spirituality that sustains community	203
<i>Louise Thoonen & Ien Courtens</i> Conflict and reconciliation in northwest Ayfat, West Papua	227
<i>Froukje Krijtenburg</i> Giryama grassroots and Kenyan state co-operation	243
<i>Anne N. Kubai</i> Gacaca and post-genocide reconstruction in Rwanda	257

<i>Komakech Lyandro</i> Exploring the place of traditional justice in Post-conflict Uganda	281
<i>Jos Demon</i> Traditional Amerindian health care in the Ecuadorian highlands	297
<i>Joop Vernooij</i> Winti: Afro-Surinamese spirituality and health care	321
<i>Jorge Castillo Guerra</i> The Ngobe people of Panama and the Inter-American Development Bank	335
<i>Edwin de Jong</i> Ritual performance and social distinction in Tana Toraja, Indonesia	371
<i>Diego Irarrazaval</i> Autochthonous symbols in an intercultural world	395
<i>Frans Dokman</i> Ubuntu Management in the World Council of Churches	405
About the authors	431

Indigeneity and sustainability: an introduction

Frans Wijzen & Sylvia Marcos

Since the fall of the Berlin wall scholars of international relations and development have showed renewed interest in religion (Thomas 2005; Fox 2007). The topic was discussed widely in the 1960s, when development was seen as a more acceptable form of Christian mission, but because of rapid secularisation it faded from the public debate over the next two decades. However, in the early 1990s Samuel Huntington (1993) hypothesised that the world was no longer ruled by economic and political ideologies but by eight civilisations, all with their religions; and Benjamin Barber (1995) prophesied that new tribes would define narrow identities and fight holy wars against other tribes.

The resistance of indigenous people in Mexico and Nigeria against the exploitation of their land by multinational oil companies in the early 1990s and the United Nations' Year and subsequent Decade of Indigenous Peoples in 1993 should also be mentioned. The global resurgence of religious rhetoric culminated in the confession by former proponents of secularisation theory such as Harvey Cox (1996) and Peter Berger (1998) that they had seriously miscalculated the anticipated marginalisation of religion as a result of modernisation.

As early as November 1996 the Dutch ministers of Development Cooperation and Education, Culture and Sciences organised a conference on 'The power of culture', followed a month later by another conference, 'The world belongs to God', organised by the National Committee on International Cooperation and Sustainable Development. To some observers this came as a surprise, as the Netherlands was perceived as one of the most secularised societies in the world, and among scholars of development and co-funding agencies the attitude towards religion was not particularly friendly.

When Muslim extremists attacked the World Trade Centre in New York and attempted to attack the Pentagon in Washington on 11 September 2001 it was said that Huntington's clash-of-civilisations scenario had come true. In the Netherlands various conferences were held on religion and peace, religion and violence, and religion and development, culminating in the establishment of a Knowledge Centre for Religion and Development by some academic institutions and co-funding agencies in 2004 and a Knowledge Forum for Religion

and Development by the Ministry of Development Cooperation in 2005, following a speech by the then minister on the same topic.

At present the debate is also influenced by the ongoing controversy about the effectiveness and efficiency of international development cooperation (Moyo 2009) and, of course, the monetary and financial crisis from 2007 onwards.

African and Asian spirituality

Since 2005 the Nijmegen Institute of Mission Studies has supported the new concern about religion and development with a research programme on indigenous spirituality and sustainability. Our interest in this topic dates back to the publications of the Forum for African and Asian Spirituality (Balasuriya 1992; Jubilee 1998 Coordinating Secretariat, 1995) long before the inauguration of the Knowledge Centre and Knowledge Forum. The Forum for African and Asian Spirituality was established during the African and Asian Consultation on Spirituality in Colombo, Sri Lanka, 18-25 June 1992. That was the year in which Latin American countries commemorated their ‘discovery’ by Europeans 500 years earlier.

Participants in the African and Asian Consultation on Spirituality regretted that African and Asian peoples were almost completely forgotten during this so-called Columbus Year. They argued that Columbus was not looking for the Americas but for Asia and that his ‘discovery’ of the Americas marked the beginning of the transatlantic trade in African slaves. Thus the ‘discovery’ of the Americas was also the beginning of the oppression of Africa and Asia and of five centuries of European colonisation and, for that matter, imperialism. They analysed the situation on their continents and observed the exploitation of their land, women and cultures.

In their Statement of the Consultation on African and Asian Spirituality the participants noted that “the Church has generally blessed and legitimated this exploitation, either by its silence or by its collusion with the imperial powers. This kind of Christianity has been able to overlook the sins of Mammon and the suffering of the people by setting its sights almost exclusively upon our-worldly or meta-cosmic salvation” (No. 28). The statement concludes that, in view of change, there is a need for a cosmic spirituality: “Many of us who participated in this conference agreed that institutionalised, patriarchal, other-worldly religions cannot be the main source of holistic spirituality. We turned to the spirituality of our indigenous people in Africa and Asia” (No. 77).

Inspired by the biblical idea of a jubilee year (Leviticus 25), the African and Asian participants demanded the cancellation of debts and the restitution of land and possessions expropriated under colonial rule. They committed them-

selves to organising a Vasco da Gama year in 1998 to commemorate Vasco da Gama's discovery of a sea route to Asia via the Cape of Good Hope in 1498. For this purpose the Forum for African and Asian Spirituality was established. Its steering committee invited friends and colleagues in the West to conduct research and organise conferences to investigate the aforementioned forms of exploitation and to look for alternatives in the cosmic spiritualities of indigenous peoples (Jubilee 1998 Coordination Secretariat 1994). The initiative was taken by three institutes attached to Radboud (then: the Catholic) University Nijmegen, namely the Third World Centre (renamed Centre for International Development Issues Nijmegen), the Centre for Pacific Studies and the Institute for Mission Studies. They prepared publications and organised expert meetings with Fr Tissa Balasuriya and Sr Mary-John Mananzan, two of the founding members of the Forum in 1997,

In the 1998-1999 academic year, during the actual Vasco da Gama Year, they introduced an interdisciplinary course entitled 'Globalisation, religion and indigenous spirituality in East and West' in collaboration with the Nijmegen Institute for Comparative Studies in Development and Cultural Change. The course dealt with the relation between religion and economics; indigenous movements and their spiritualities in Africa, Latin America, Asia and the Pacific; the revival of popular and alternative religions in Europe, as well as the popularity of non-Western spiritualities in the West; and the relation between religious and scientific rationalities. After evaluating and revising the course, the Nijmegen Institute for Mission Studies decided to offer a follow-up course entitled 'Indigenous spirituality and sustainable development' (Wijzen 2009).

Questions and objectives

The course that we have been offering since the 2001-2002 academic year has been accompanied by the aforementioned research programme since 2005. In harmony with the renewed interest in religion and development in the Netherlands, but in contrast to the main thrust of development theories and practices in Islam and Hinduism, the Nijmegen Institute for Mission Studies decided to fill a gap and concentrate on indigenous spiritualities, both outside and within the world religions. Apart from our institute staff, colleagues from Africa, Asia and Latin America have been participating in the research, with some of whom we have had long-standing friendly relations and scholarly collaboration. Together with two of the co-authors of this volume, Laurenti Magesa and Jose de Mesa, we submitted a research proposal to the Pew Charitable Trusts as far back as 1997.

Following the Statement of the Consultation on African and Asian Spirituality by the members of the Knowledge Forum, whose legacy has been

taken over by the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians, our questions were:

- ▶ Where does the interest in indigenous spirituality come from? What is the urgency and relevance of the theme?
- ▶ What do we mean by indigenous spiritualities? What are the main characteristics of these spiritualities? Are they in fact holistic?
- ▶ What will the future of these indigenous spiritualities be? Will they disappear in the process of globalisation? Or will they revive?
- ▶ Do these spiritualities lead to sustainable (i.e. human- and environment-friendly) development, as the members of the Forum claim?
- ▶ If indigenous spiritualities survive and revive and if they lead to sustainable development, how are the world religions to relate to them?
- ▶ What is the significance of the debate on the value of indigenous spiritualities for dialogue between Western and non-Western scholars of religion?

Our objectives were and still are to provide a critical appraisal of the assumed positive relation between indigenous spirituality and sustainable development, and by doing so to promote debate between Northern and Southern scholars in the fields of development studies and religious studies. It was and still is our conviction that Northern and Southern participants in that discourse partially misunderstand each other as a result of different rationalities and corresponding views of a good life (Smith 1999).

Key concepts

The term ‘indigenous’ is difficult to define. Its modern connotation probably derives from the 1970s struggles of the Indian Movement in America and the Indian Brotherhood in Canada (Moody 1988; Smith 1999: 6-7). Usually ‘indigenous’ is contrasted with ‘foreign’ or ‘strange’. The equivalents are ‘traditional’ and ‘primal’, which connote ‘primary’, earliest in time. At present some scholars prefer ‘indigeneity’ as an analytical concept, among others to differentiate it from ‘indigenous’ as a folk category which often implies primordialist notions of identity (Nair 2006; Guenther 2006). The International Labour Organisation (1989) specifies:

“... indigenous communities, peoples, and nations are those groups who have a continuous history that originates from earlier stages to the presence of the invasion and colonisation. Groups that develop in their territories or part of it, and consider themselves different to other sectors of the society that are now dominant. These groups are today subaltern sectors and they are decided to preserve, develop, and transmit to the future generations their ancestral territories and their ethnic identity. These characteristics are fundamental to their existential

continuity as peoples, in relationship with their own cultural, social, institutional, and legal systems.”

Indigenous spiritualities, then, could be defined as *the spiritualities of the indigenous peoples or pre-missionary and pre-colonial spiritualities*. As for content, ‘indigenous’ is often equated with ‘integral’, ‘cosmic’ or ‘holistic’. In this book we not only speak about indigenous spiritualities as distinct from the world religions, but also about indigenous spiritualities within the world religions.

The term ‘spirituality’ is no less difficult to define. It is often used to serve diverse interests. Some see it as an alternative to institutionalised religions. Others consider it the core of religion. The book series *World spirituality* is subtitled *An encyclopedia of the religious quest*. The editors say: “The series focuses on that inner dimension of the person called by certain traditions ‘the spirit’. This spiritual core is the deepest center of the person. It is here that the person is open to the transcendent dimension; it is here that the person experiences ultimate reality” (Cousins 2000: xii). Spirituality, then, seems to be synonymous with ‘religious quest’. For the sake of clarity we define spirituality in neo-Tylorian fashion as *belief in and interaction with spiritual beings that inspire people to act or not to act in certain ways*. This definition is new, as up to World War II the term had referred predominantly to practices of prayer, contemplation and fasting by members of religious communities that had nothing to do with the daily life of ordinary people.

The term ‘development’ in our sense stems from the discourse that started in the 18th and 19th centuries as a result of the Enlightenment, aimed at improving the quality of life in less advanced territories in the world. Of course, in those days a ‘better quality’ was what West Europeans and North Americans considered ‘normal’: economic growth and modernisation through education and health care, science and technology. At present development scholars prefer definitions ‘from within’, in people’s own terms, endogenous development (Millar et al. 2006). Development, then, is *the process in which people use their own resources to realise what they consider to be a more satisfactory life* (Theuri 2002:193).

According to international standards, development has to be sustainable. This term stems from German studies of forestry. It was introduced into development discourse by the World Conservation Strategy (Allen 1980) and has come into general usage since the so-called Brundtland Commission Report. It is now used in the Earth Charter and Millennium Goals as well. The qualification of sustainability means that we must “*meet the needs of the present generation, with due regard to the needs of future generations as well as to differences within the present generation*” (Brundtland 1988). In other words, sustainability refers to intra-generational and inter-generational solidarity. Our

development is not to be achieved at the cost of others, either contemporary persons or those yet to be born. The present generation must not satisfy its own needs to the extent that it depletes the natural resources of its descendants.

The Statement of the Consultation on African and Asian Spirituality (Balasuriya 1992) suggests that indigenous spiritualities and epistemologies offer alternatives to modern Western and/or neo-liberal development. Quite a number of scholars endorse this view (Bujo 1997; Odozor 1999; Onwubiko 1999; Eboh 2004), others are sceptical and suspicious of it (Maghimbi 1995; Wijssen 2010). After reviewing the existing literature on the topic, exploring the needs of our partner organisations and taking stock of our competences, the Nijmegen Institute for Mission Studies decided to focus on the relation between indigenous spirituality and *agriculture, business, medicine, law and governance*. Without professing to be exhaustive, we limit ourselves to the African and Latin American discourse that we are most familiar with.

Traditional agriculture

In reaction to environmental destruction as a result of agricultural applications of Western science and technology, many Africans revert to indigenous knowledge about *agriculture* and *environmental care* (Wangiri 1999: 82). The underlying conviction is that the soil in which the ancestors are buried is holy and may not be exploited. In African traditional spirituality the spirit world and the natural world are interconnected. Whoever harms the natural world harms the spirit world. Thus the African attitude to nature is relational (Daneel 1998). Yet there are peoples who do not have this tradition. Their relation to nature may be characterised as exploitive (Brandström 1991). In addition the populations of most African countries are growing rapidly. Agriculture based on indigenous knowledge will not be able to feed them (Getui 1999). Thus it is said that traditional attitudes to nature will not solve global environmental problems (Taringa 2003:212; Ndungu 2005).

In Mexico, as in most Latin American countries, the debate on the sustainability of traditional agriculture is bedevilled by several factors: misunderstandings about the relation between productivity and quality; the clash between professional agronomists' views and the territorial philosophies of peasants; the belief that cities are inherently dependent on surpluses from the countryside or, nowadays increasingly, on imports, and confusion between (extensive) agriculture outside cities and (intensive) traditional gardening in cities; and the loss of historical perspective on colonisation in modern, 'post-colonial' times.

The Mexican agronomists' mindset still assumes that cultivable land is tilled land and that, in order to be tilled by modern methods, it must guarantee a

minimum level of productivity. This contradicts seven facts based on experience:

- ▶ Non-tillage agriculture can be as and even more productive than agriculture on tilled land (Fukuoka 1975).
- ▶ There is a radical difference between northern and tropical soils, where the effects of wind erosion following tillage are more dramatic (Derpesch, Florentin & Moriya 2006), something that is generally ignored by agronomists educated abroad.
- ▶ At least as far as Mexico's main crop, maize, is concerned, quality is inversely proportionate to productivity, so that, in contrast to the increasing flow of imported US maize cultivated at productivity rates of six to eight tons per hectare, there is a trickle of maize to U.S. gourmet stores that is cultivated on traditional, rain irrigated fields whose productivity does not exceed one to two tons per hectare.
- ▶ The peasants' map of cultivated land is much more extensive than the professional agronomists', who – consciously or not – contribute to transforming *milpas* (traditional rain irrigated maize fields) into shallow lands. The peasants' view of convenience and appropriateness is based on a moral economy rather than on quantitative standards of productivity (Thompson 1971; Kaller-Dietrich 2002). Such a view tends to confine exportation of produce to territory generally restricted by natural watersheds, giving subsistence priority over monetary income. Imports according to agronomic criteria tend to favour urban development on expropriated cultivable land.
- ▶ In most parts of the world city dwellers obtain some of their food from urban gardening – horticulture or 'urbiculture' – whose levels of productivity are immensely superior even to tillage agriculture on northern soils (Jacobs 1969; Robert 1994). Known historical forms of urbiculture are Mexico's *chinampas*, Paris's *marais* or *cultures maraîchères*, Amiens's *hortillonnages*, et cetera. After the demise of the Soviet economic system people in the former Soviet Union and other Communist countries like Cuba survived in various forms of 'informal' or *expolar* economies (Shanin 1990: 1-17, 49-74), including urban horticulture. For a brief summary of Shanin's theory of expolar economics, see Rahnema and Robert (2008:112, 226).
- ▶ Clad in a discourse of 'need satisfaction' (Illich 1992), development projects destroy little by little the bases of *self-sufficiency* in villages, towns and cities, making land a *fictitious commodity* (Polanyi 1957:68-76) offered to the highest bidder, mocking any political rhetoric about national autarchy. The fact that up to 1968 the balance of food exports and imports was still positive and that most Mexicans were fed by a still basically traditional, rain-irrigated form of agriculture (the *milpa*) seems to have been forgotten by politicians, planners, economists and agronomists.

Indigenous management

Critics of a neo-liberal market economy advocate the use of Africa's community spirit in *business* and *management* (N'Dione 1994; Latouche 1998). In reaction to what is perceived as typically Western individualism and materialism, decision making in organisations is to be collective and focussed on spiritual capital, not only on material gain. In subsistence economies people work in order to live, not the other way round (Hyden 1983). Advocates of ubuntu management claim that the spirits of the ancestors should provide social capital in the management of organisations and states (Mbigi 2000). But others are critical of African communalism and spiritualism. It is doubtful whether family solidarity works on a large scale. The communitarian spirit causes lack of creativity and initiative, as well as fear of jealousy and witchcraft (Wiredu 1980). Some cyclic rituals (e.g. weddings and funerals) require exorbitant personal and financial investments, which are a constraint on income generation, especially for youths and women.

In Latin America scholars have spoken of the "corporate closed community" proposed by Eric Wolf for the study of Middle America some fifty years ago. Since then this model has been disqualified (Garrard-Burnett & Garma Navarro 2007). Instead, research into the Mayan peoples in Guatemala and Chiapas has revealed parameters for a new concept of community that, following Durkheim, could be called 'moral communities' with their own internal logic, cohesion and organisation (Tapia 2006). The experiences of the CAOI (*Coordinadora Andina de Organizaciones Indigenas*) in Ecuador, Bolivia, Peru, Colombia, the Argentine and Chile suggest that such community organisation has the power to create change. For example, the excessively expensive marriage and funeral rites that had always been a heavy burden have been modified, as their concepts of how to sustain the community imply permanently evolving and adapting to new situations and survival conditions.

Traditional healing

Many people resort to *traditional healing* (Chepkwony 2006). One of the consequences of globalisation is that the gap between rich and poor widens. Thus many people cannot afford Western medicine and go to indigenous healers instead, which they find more compatible with their worldview and more available anyway. In Uganda, for example, the ratio between (Western trained) medical doctors and patients is 1:20.000, whereas the ratio between indigenous healers and patients is 1:100 (Khamalwa 2006:88). Yet if traditional healers claim that all disease is personal, caused by witches and ancestors or willed by God, and that sick people therefore do not need to go to hospital

because modern medicine based on science and technology cannot cure them, they are not promoting the health of their patients. While traditional healers have had positive results in treating the symptoms of HIV/Aids, so far they have been unable to cure the disease, as some of them claim.

In Mexico healing covers a wide range of practices (Marcos 1988). Most of them are effective in healing and promoting a spiritual community as well as physical health. Midwives have great expertise that appears unmatched by Western medicine in regard to several aspects of antenatal care and delivery. Colonial documents (Sahagun, 1576) pictographically depict some of these practices that are still alive today. An impressive, meticulously researched record of the use of medicinal plants already existed when the Spanish conquerors arrived (Codex de la Cruz-Badiano 1991; Lopez Austin 1988; Viesca 1984; Viesca & Lopez Austin 1984). To this day the use of medicinal herbs is still part of traditional medical practices. It is so successful that, in order to defend *their* medicine, many indigenous organisations throughout Latin America are suing multinational corporations for bio-piracy. These corporations expropriate indigenous knowledge, transform it epistemologically into 'laboratory products' and offer these on the global market, not only robbing the indigenous peoples of collective knowledge used for the benefit of whole communities, but also patenting them so as to make their traditional use by their initiators illegal.

Customary law

In many parts of Africa *customary law* and *peace keeping* are being reinstated. In Tanzania the *sungusungu* developed (Masanja 1992; Bukurura 1993; Bukurura 1994). In Rwanda there are *gacaca* people's tribunals and Ethiopia has its *gada-gada* system. Many Africans hold that Western law failed to bring justice and peace to Africa (Mutua 2003; Eboh 2004; Van Notten 2006). Hence they promote traditional reconciliation rituals and conflict resolution, as happened in South Africa (where traditional rituals were mixed with Christians ideas) and is now being proposed in northern Uganda. The *sungusungu* in Sukumaland were effective in bringing peace, but they used means that are unacceptable by Western juridical standards. The *gacaca* tribunals are not popular among either the Hutu, who fear unfair trials, or the Tutsi, who fear reprisals. According to traditional leaders Joseph Kony, who is wanted by the International Criminal Court for his twenty years' leadership in a cruel war in Northern Uganda deploying numerous child soldiers in his Lord's Resistance Army, should be granted amnesty after a traditional reconciliation ritual. But most ordinary people want justice to be done (Allen 2006). And the post-

election violence in Kenya was stopped mainly because international intervention forced the rivals to negotiate.

In Latin America the indigenous movements have created their own community based modes of conflict resolution and justice. 'Western'-style state law has sometimes respected the traditional ways of achieving justice within a local concept of well-being. This is still not the case in southern Mexico, where the *Juntas de Buen Gobierno* of the Mayan Zapatista communities (Fernandez 2010) struggle for recognition of their own way of solving intra- and inter-communal issues of justice. They govern de facto in an autonomous zone in Chiapas. This is also true of the Andean peoples who – principally on the basis of ancestral ways –adequately solve legal problems in their communities. In interaction with society at large they are often victims of state law, which is not translated into their languages. Thus indigenous people throughout Latin America often find themselves in prison without knowing why they have been imprisoned or how to free themselves (Rus, Hernandez & Mattice 2003)

Governance and decision making

In various parts of Africa traditional ways of *governance* and *decision making* are used as alternatives to Western-type democracy (Assefa 1996; Gounden, Pillary & Mbugua 2007). The multiparty system is not really democratic, it is said, as it is based on compromise rather than consensus. In Uganda, and to some extent in Tanzania, chiefs are being reinstated, and nation building in Ethiopia is based on a federal system run on ethnic lines (Abbink 1997). Yet the Sukuma chiefs were not popular and youths and women had no say in the decision making of the elders. Out of 54 member states of the African Union, eighteen have civil wars raging in their territories and four of the five largest refugee populations in the world are African. The Mungiki movement in Kenya is a protest against the power of the elders (Kagwanja 2003; Frederiksen 2007) and many women-led spirit movements protest against male dominance (Waliggo 2002:1-6). Undoubtedly ethnic identities can contribute to national unity, but, as the ethnically based federal system in Ethiopia (which was never colonised) shows, it is difficult to build a nation on ethnicity.

Most indigenous peoples in Latin America advocate a pluri-national state (Tapia 2006; Villoro 1987; CAOI Cordinadora Andina de Organizaciones indigenas; the Zapatista *Accords of San Andres*, see Aubry 2003). Autonomy rather than sovereignty is their objective (Lopez y Rivas 2004). Building a nation on ethnicity has not been the ideal. The objective thus far has been a multicultural framework of interrelated particularities. It is now being tested and more or less adopted in several parts of Latin American countries with a significant indigenous citizenship. Bolivia, whose national president claims

‘indigenous’ identity for himself and his way of governing, is the most advanced country in this respect (Gutierrez 2008). Although it has a majority of indigenous citizens and is ruled by an indigenous president, the country also has a powerful, wealthy *mestizo* minority. In January 2010 it was the first Latin American country to elect its cabinet strictly according to gender equity with ten female and ten male ministers. President Evo Morales invoked *chachawarmi* for this decision. *Chachawarmi* is a word in the Aymara language that expresses the ancestral concept of *complementarity* between men and women. So ethnic influences are incorporated as political concepts, but without claiming exclusiveness. Morales has also called this state measure *equidad de genero*, referring to the demands voiced by the *mestizo* population (Rojas 2010).

Structure of this book

Of course, part of the debate is whether or not the aforementioned principles of sustainable development, inter- and intra-generational solidarity are ‘typically Western’ or ‘truly universal’, and whether or not they could be embraced by other people and eventually accepted by all as a result of historical significance and mutual interaction (Tarimo 2004:28). If the answer is affirmative (and it may not be, as the debate on the universality of human rights shows), they would provide more or less clear criteria to decide whether indigenous spirituality is a blessing or a curse from the point of view of sustainable development.

After our project was launched and the authors had started their research, all except two of them met for an international expert seminar to review their papers. The seminar was organised according to the foregoing themes. Consequently the book comprises six thematic clusters. We start by clarifying two concepts, the first being sustainable development (Knippenberg) and the second indigenous spirituality (Marcos). The former is written in a European context and the second in a Southern context. This already suggests that the discourses on indigenisation and sustainability are not synchronous and may be asymmetrical. Knippenberg is critical of modern societies’ conception of the natural environment as a platform and resource to support humankind and its development. “Nature is here to use and control in a more or less instrumental way.”

By contrast Marcos, from a Southern perspective, systematises a concept of indigenous spirituality arising from the discourses of the First Summit of Indigenous Women of the Americas. In these discourses, platforms, demands and proposals the concept of spirituality that emerges is a “spirituality of community and of reverence and interrelatedness with nature”. In Ecuador,

South America, the most recent constitutional changes (2009) include a concept of nature as a “subject of rights” (Gudynas 2009).

Next there are four articles on land and ecology (De Mesa, Sow, Magesa and De Pater). Jose de Mesa speaks eloquently about the value and sacredness of earth among the 42 ethnic groups in the Philippines. For the indigenous peoples land is life. He reviews ideas about connections to earth and interdependence. His analysis moves between symbolic and literal meanings: land is the well of life, the cradle of consciousness, the soil from which history grows, the arena for social and cultural practices. He sees the danger of globalisation that turns these complex and deep connections with land into a commodity that can be “traded for a piece of paper”. The Philippine bishops have issued a reminder that ecological issues are a matter of life and death, so they recommend joining forces with the indigenous people of the country so as not to lose their land and culture.

Amadou Sow speaks about the Haal Pulaar (Mauritania) and the defence of their territory by indigenous West African peoples. They were the original peoples of the region, before the Berber and Arab conquests. He speaks of the spiritual belief that humans must live “symbiotically with nature”, of having to “keep nature happy” so we may have longer and better lives. By honouring this wisdom we safeguard future generations. Like other indigenous peoples in this volume (Mayans in Mexico and Guatemala), the Haal Pulaar assume that there is no divide between spiritual and everyday life. Sow’s outline of customary law allows us to conclude that the Haal Pulaar have a range of rules that favour sustainable development. However, he says it is illusory to think that such sustainable development can be achieved in the immediate future. He details numerous obstacles, including national and international mechanisms that constrain customary ways of relating to nature. To uphold land rights and further sustainable development indigenous and international law must be harmonised. Some actors, including the indigenous peoples, are treated as second-class citizens even though they maintain a special relationship with nature.

Laurenti Magesa speaks about the environmental spirituality expressed by the traditional phrase ‘this hill is sacred/haunted’. He probes the innermost meaning of this phrase that expresses the spirituality of his native Tanzania, which he calls an environmental spirituality. Like those of Amadou Sow, his data derive from extensive field research and interpretation of the resulting series of interviews with local people. His subjects are the Wakuria people of the Mara region. The overall point of this essay, he points out, is to propose African spirituality as embedded in the myths and traditions of the Wairege/Wakuria people of north-western Tanzania as a paradigm for human relationships, not only with the earth but with the entire cosmos. These traditions demonstrate how we can be human without accepting critical

rationality, science and dominion of earth. Like those of other 'originary peoples', they show humans how to live in a dimension of the sacred and connectedness with all beings.

The last contribution on land issues in this volume is by Cathrien de Pater. She speaks of the significance of spiritual values for indigenous forest management. These indigenous capacities are increasingly recognised in the global quest for sustainable forest management. She reviews cases of highlanders in Cambodia, shamanistic environmental 'accounting' in the Colombian Amazon, and bird augury in the Kantu *swidden* agriculture in West Kalimantan. These practices show how spiritual beliefs may induce conservation and sustainable resource use. She stresses that in complex ecosystems such as tropical rainforests the relation is often only indirect. Thus relating spiritual values to indigenous forest management remains a complex but necessary challenge.

Still related to land there are two contributions on grassroots social organisations and indigenous concepts of solidarity (Dejene, Waidyasekara). These two articles deal with concrete community re-creations. They are not just relics from the past but very contemporary re-creations of age-old solidarity ties. Having been adapted to contemporary situations, Dejene argues, *Iddir* in Ethiopia offers cohesion as an alternative to individualisms of all sorts. On the basis of documentary research and field interviews he shows how *iddir* is the most widespread indigenous voluntary association in the country to tackle the problems of the anonymity of city life and lack of mutual support. People try to solve these by forming an *iddir*, which is also a source of financial support or credit in times of sickness. He tells how *iddirs* are formed and what internal norms rule them. He describes their traits and their relationship to government. He also mentions that they have become gender sensitive, evidenced by the emergence of women's *iddirs*. These are thought to be egalitarian not only in terms of economic and social standing but also in terms of gender. *Iddir*, affirms Dejene, is a nonverbal discourse directed against political hegemony, cultural alienation, national instability and environmental destruction.

Waidyasekara's article presents *baradari* as a spirituality that sustains community. This strategy of the indigenous peoples in the Punjabi region of Pakistan is harmonious with nature, rooted in a community spirit and collective wisdom. *Baradari* is a unit constituted by a group of families, not a nuclear but an extended family. The term derives from a Persian word meaning 'brotherhood', so *baradari* means getting together, a fraternal relationship. He adds that that the term applies to blood or family relationship, village, occupational, language, religious and other groupings. Members of a *baradari* assist each other in times of sorrow, sickness, death and with regard to work and marriage, so the individual is never isolated. Waidyasekara describes the internal structure of this unit, how people belong and how they interrelate. The exchange of gifts helps to establish a social rank order, reciprocity and

propagation of culture. We need, he concludes, “a methodology of development based on mutual dialogue”, as pervasive individualism is linked to contemporary values and actions that are destroying the planet.

Then comes four contributions on customary law and conflict mediation (Thoonen & Courtents, Krijtenborg, Kubai, Lyandra). In West Papua (former Irian Jaya) Courtens and Thoonen focus their ethnographic fieldwork on the analysis of a homicide. Given such a dramatic incident, they state, one can expect things to become manifest that remain latent in ordinary life. With this in mind they study – historically – a homicide that happened 46 years before their field research in 1995. They proceed to describe analytically a ritual homicide that happening during their fieldwork. Their insights reveal the links between the early influences of the colonisers and Catholic mission on indigenous beliefs and practices. Analogies can be drawn between the modern and the earlier homicide, which can be interpreted fully in indigenous cosmological terms. The reference to the past homicide in valuable ethnographic detail enables us to understand and interpret indigenous symbols, myths and rituals that support the explanation of a similar incident during the later research period. This article also elaborates on tensions between indigenous religious notions and practices (called *adat* by locals) on the one hand and Christianity (called *agama*-religion by locals) on the other. The authors adopt the indigenous point of view, which explicitly distinguishes between *adat* and *agama*, even though native religious leaders underline that the two ‘walk together’. Customary law is thus illuminated by exposing its roots in local religious beliefs. In this case study, however, the conflict resolution successfully combined both *adat* and *agama*. It illustrates that local people play significant roles in determining the course of religious and legal change without sacrificing their identity.

In her contribution Krijtenburg stresses that in many African countries a central, Western-inspired judicial system has overruled local forms of justice. Her field research was done in Kenya among the Giriama peoples, administratively called the *Tezo* location. The Kenyan legal system is based on the British one, and the Giriama understanding of what justice is about clearly does not correspond with that of the state. She presents a detailed case study of a court session and, by analysing its components, she gives a lifelike portrayal of how the two systems intersect at grassroots level. The *Tezo* grassroots court provides a judicial model in which the indigenous and the foreign system potentially complement each other to the benefit of all parties, but she warns that it is still in an early stage of development.

Researching the *Gacaca* tribunals, Kubai shows how they can contribute to Rwandan post-genocide reconstruction by tapping into indigenous spirituality. She gives a detailed historical and political contextualisation of the country and its diverse ethnic groups. Calling the *Gacaca* a re-invented indigenous justice

system, she describes and explains how, in order to address crimes of genocide, a new legal system was created that combines the traditional elements of restorative justice with Western precepts of retributive justice. Her contribution examines the role of the *Gacaca* as an indigenous spiritual resource in the justice and peace process. Truth and justice are inextricably linked, hence hearing and telling the truth (confession) are one of the most innovative aspects of the new *Gacaca*. The requirement of apology, which used to imply dishonour, is an important element of a new form of justice. She describes several other ways of inscription for this new type of justice system, which are culturally contextualised and applicable to local conditions. Some critics, however, are unable to see its advantages. She concludes that in the face of current social and political realities, *Gacaca* is Rwanda's most pragmatic alternative on the road to democracy, sustainable development and peace.

Lyandro explores the place of traditional justice in post-conflict Uganda. His research findings are based on interviews and focus group discussions with a cross-section of people. He calls his findings provisional but he advances important insights, especially when he points out that, irrespective of the validity of arguments for and against the application of traditional justice practices, the mere existence of these tensions requires recognition that international law, domestic law and traditional justice are in constant flux and accountability can take various forms depending on context. He then outlines the present situation that he researched. A crucial question is whether and how to codify the traditional justice system. He concludes his paper with a list of traditional justice principles, such as trust, voluntary process, truth, compensation/reparation and restoration. Almost without exception the respondents cited either traditional justice or Christian forgiveness as preferred alternatives to international justice. Is traditional justice one of the solutions to problems of national reconciliation and peace building in northern Uganda? The article leaves the question open.

Indigenous voices on the concepts of spirituality health and healing are reported in two contributions (Demon, Vernooij). Traditional health practices, says Demon, can be studied from many perspectives, including religious studies. They are a resource for sustainability insofar as they make use of natural herbal medicines that promote the well-being of both humans and the environment. He describes (not analytically) what he calls 'Amerindian health care' in the highlands of Ecuador in South America. He proceeds to outline its history and modern manifestations. In the second part of his paper he examines Amerindian health care in the social context of the 'Indian revival' in Ecuador. This is a powerful socio-political movement that has made significant contributions and demands for respect of their ancestral knowledge systems, including medicine. It should be noted that this movement has distinctive roots far removed from what is known as New Age. It is connected with the CAOI

(see above), which includes almost all South American countries. It is an active, self-conscious and growing indigenous movement that channels the indigenous voices that have provided the title for our book. These indigenous voices are those of the social actors themselves. Demon also elaborates on relations between traditional health and sustainable development from his own perspective.

Having lived many years in Suriname (some of them while it was still a Dutch colony), Vernooij describes the myths and rituals, beliefs and practices of the indigenous people, focusing especially on the Creole population. Indigenous spirituality, he says, is integral to the healing practices of *winti*, a Creole medico-religious complex that developed over two to three centuries and is still alive today. The term 'Creole' refers to Afro-Surinamese people born and rooted in the country. The scars of slavery are visible, but the Creoles established a balance and ongoing harmony mainly through this religious practice. On the whole Creoles are Christian. Medico-religious practices are fully integrated with everyday life and belief. *Winti* has a number of rituals and ceremonies. Vernooij describes some of them in detail, especially those pertaining to diagnostic and therapeutic procedures. He stresses the difficulty of studying this religious practice, as it is shrouded in secrecy, allowing only insiders to penetrate its deeper meanings and rituals. In determining whether indigenous knowledge systems contribute to sustainable development, in this case to health and health care, he concludes that the *winti* Afro-Surinamese medico-religious complex is beneficial, though insufficient in modern times. The present situation demands crossing boundaries. However, he warns against the new health system that can lead to greater dependence on medical expertise from abroad, medical machinery and offshore medicines, at the cost of generations of Surinamese knowledge.

The volume ends with four contributions that deal with incorporation of indigenous voices into the neo-liberal market and management model (Castillo Guerra, De Jong, Irarrazaval and Dokman). Castillo Guerra did field research among the Ngobe people of Chiriqui, Panama. His data show the limitations of any development based on a neo-liberal economic model. He reviews Ngobe spirituality, cosmology and the influences of Christianity on their way of life. Indigenous peoples see life as 'coexistence' with their environment and their community, and concern for the earth. Celebrations and rituals are pivotal in their experience and form part of a meta-economic vision. Both favour a return to the roots and reinforce the cosmic structure of the community, hence it is important to include spirituality in sustainable development policies. He argues that the policies of the Inter-American Development Bank, a power institution, do not simply make proposals, but act with as a sort of 'symbolic violence'. Concerning the IDB's department of sustainable development (Unit of Indigenous Peoples and Communitarian Development), he affirms that their

discursive practice produces social constructions and representations that affect public, social and mental spaces. He finds that the influence of the projects supported or financed by the IDB is not consistent with their proclaimed strategy of 'development with identity'. The Ngobe have a spirituality with great potential for sustainable development. However, Panamanian governments' monocultural policies have repeatedly denied these Ngobe values.

On the other side of the world De Jong presents his research findings among the peoples of Tana Toraja in Sulawesi, Indonesia. Citing a wealth of ethnographic detail, he shows how introduction to a market economy influences and sometimes distorts age-old traditions in festivals and funerary rites. Colonial missionaries and officials have condemned the 'irrational' behaviour of the Torajans, arguing against 'irresponsible' expenditure on ceremonies. De Jong carefully and rigorously spells out all the intersections between social life, values, community ties, economics and indigenous spirituality that permeate the ceremonies, especially funerals and house (*tongkonan*) consecration. The *tongkonan* represents both life and death, a person's ties with contemporaries and ancestors, and embodies the continuity of a group of people. This traditional house is perhaps the most impressive form of popular architecture in the world. All houses have the same cosmic orientation, but they are also status symbols and express bonds between people. In a sense they are a recognition of self in relation to others. De Jong analyses the context and meanings of the term *siri*. Admitting the impossibility of translating it accurately, he discusses the concept, as well as that of *sumanga* and studies their multiple meanings, interrelations with and links to an intricate complex of ceremonies and rituals among the Tana Toraja. In the Tana Toraja worldview all humans, rocks, trees, houses and artefacts contain an invisible animating energy that makes them effective and potent. Life and death may be seen as integral to a type of reciprocity in the sense of an overarching exchange between gods, ancestors and humans, on which the cosmos depends. Funeral ceremonies have become more expensive because traditional rules are no longer observed. Nowadays people are more concerned about prestige associated with money than about custom. According to indigenous spirituality, 24 is the maximum number of buffaloes to be slaughtered at a funeral ceremony. Sometimes Torajans returning from Malaysia want to show off their wealth after being influenced by excessive spending linked to prestige and to the neo-liberal values of the market economy. Some have disastrously increased the number of buffalo sacrifices. If one considers the – not exclusively economic – effects of ceremonials and house building on intra-generational solidarity, a dialectic relation between material and social/symbolic capital emerges. The priorities of the Tana Toraja are not reducible to the concept of basic needs as defined in most Western countries. The *tongkonan* social circle is expanding and is becoming trans-local and transnational.

Irrarrazaval, a Catholic priest who has lived for many years on the shores of Lake Titicaca between Peru and Bolivia, focuses on two concerns. The first is how autochthonous symbols are relevant to non-indigenous notions of sustainability. The second is how to counteract the global consumer society. Public discourse often centres on overcoming underdevelopment and poverty but pays little attention to issues like commodification and global forms of neo-colonialism. "As I walk with Andean people," he writes, "I continuously share their gentle and efficient manner of taking care of each other." The global market commodifies indigenous land, technologies of healing, art, spirituality, and the like. Tourism with its ingenious strategies has zoomed in on the environment and the exotic qualities of 'Indians'. Rituals are used in esoteric and cultural tourism. Many precious symbols of life become gimmicks for emotional gratification. But, he acknowledges, commodification is attributable not only to the global market but also to indigenous people's responses. Contemporary ecological debates on sustainable development are hopeful signs and we have new paradigms with roots in ancient cultures: a bio-social-spiritual paradigm. If we heed indigenous wisdom, sustainable bio-development includes spirituality. Daily economic and cultural activities have to go beyond market parameters. Bio-spiritual behaviour is manifested in small-scale projects that become alternative networks and thus foster globalisation from below.

The last article is on *ubuntu* management in the World Council of Churches. Dokman explains that, as a faith-based organisation, the WCC exemplifies the religious struggle between Western and non-Western people. The discourse on *ubuntu* is studied mainly in terms of the views of Samuel Kobia, former general secretary of the WCC, who wanted to transform the organisation. The premise of *ubuntu* is that a person is a person through other persons. The word derives from Zulu, a member of the Bantu language group. If an organisation is successful, it is because human beings are in harmony with one another, with spirits, ancestors and God. *Ubuntu* is the awareness that everybody in a group is related to everybody else. Dokman's question is whether this is a sustainable 'management style'. If we define sustainability in terms of intra-generational and intergenerational solidarity, *ubuntu* management may be said to promote intergenerational solidarity between Western and non-Western, and possibly also between 'old' and 'new' (charismatic and Pentecostal) WCC members. Whether it promotes inter-generational solidarity in the sense of providing an ecumenical body for generations to come is questionable, as the WCC is under permanent threat of running out of funds. Various management conflicts are described and studied.

The book reveals that there is a clash between the developmental views of modern scientific knowledge and traditional indigenous knowledge, each claiming to be better able to contribute to sustainability than the other. Some

authors put more trust in the former and others in the latter, yet others occupy a position in between without specifying exactly what and where it is. Whatever their position, all authors hold that at least in principle evidence-based research can show which cognitive representation of reality (knowledge) is preferable, with due recognition of the fact that this is easier in one context (e.g. Indian spirituality in Panama or African spirituality in Tanzania) or field (e.g. medicine or agriculture) than in others. In principle a value or practice, developed in one culture through a process of interaction and collaboration, may be embraced and finally attain universal status because it is accepted by all cultures, but in practice this will be difficult (Tarimo 2004:28-29). This is what the academic debate is about: determining which are better or the best representations of reality. This book reflects that debate in the field of studies of spirituality and development.

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Chasing God: The idea of sustainable development and its implications

Luuk Knippenberg

Introduction

Sustainable development, or just sustainability, has become one of the buzzwords of our time. Opinions differ about the exact meaning of the phrase. There are in fact several hundreds of more or less competing definitions (Dobson 1996). Sustainable development clearly is one of those multifaceted notions, nowadays much in vogue, such as democracy, governance, trust, social capital, institutions, empowerment, religion and spirituality.

A common attribute of all these concepts is that they are very hard to define in a precise, commonly accepted way. At the same time most people more or less agree about the range of possible meanings and the possible contexts, issues or problems they are supposed to address (Jacobs 1999).

A widely accepted description of sustainable development is that it concerns the requirement, if not necessity, to change the way we perceive, plan and implement development. Sustainable development expresses the idea that it is no longer acceptable to plan for the future and intervene in the world without trying to minimise the negative social, cultural, environmental and economic ramifications of these interventions – even unintended ones – here and now, in the future and elsewhere on the planet. We have to develop a far more integral, future-oriented and holistic development perspective and approach than we have hitherto done (Knippenberg 2007). All people, here and now, elsewhere and in the future, should have the possibility to live a good life.

The ideas underlying the notion of sustainable development sound almost self-evident but in fact contain several groundbreaking messages. The first is embedded in the idea that all people, here and now, elsewhere and in the future, should have the possibility to live a good life. This requires not only the will to realise that ideal, but also the availability of enough resources. Both requirements are not yet fulfilled and not that easy to fulfil.¹ Resources are the

¹ Inexhaustible resources are scarce; whereas using a resource implies that some of its potential is forever wasted – as is made clear by the second law of thermodynamics – rendering complete recycling impossible. Ultimately life on earth is only possible and sustainable because of the permanent input of solar energy.

main bugbears, certainly in the end. Sustainable development requires inexhaustible, renewable or recyclable resources, whereas contemporary societies are built on ideas and practices that encourage exactly the opposite (Knippenberg 2007). Changing that is the first revolution.

The second revolution has to do with our attitude towards the natural environment, that is ecosystems and natural species. Modern societies are built on the assumption that the nature of this relationship is, can and should be defined by humankind. Civilisation implies detachment from natural constraints; the natural environment is first and foremost a platform and resource to support humanity and its development. Nature is there to be used and controlled in a more or less instrumental way (Dijksterhuis 1998) or to be enjoyed. The relationship is one-way.

However, ecosystems have a 'logic' of their own, independent of the wishes and needs of humankind. We are far more dependent on ecosystems and other natural species than the other way around. We are only one of many natural species, and not a particularly indispensable one. We are gradually starting to understand how deeply we are embedded in nature and conditioned by (our) nature, but we still act as if nature and the other species are there just for us, as if we stand above them and can control and command them.

The third revolution expressed by the notion of sustainable development is the idea that everything is related to everything else. Sustainable development is about guaranteeing everyone, including future generations, a fair life. This is a global, all-encompassing task. Isolation and seclusion are no longer options. What happens in one part of the world has and should have an impact on other parts of the world. What happens in one sector or domain, for instance the economic domain, has an impact on the other domains, for example social, cultural, political, ecological and so forth. Our attitude towards trade-offs and all kinds of transaction costs and towards cooperation and participation have to change dramatically.

These notions and recommendations sound logical. The world as we know it and all of our actions have indeed become increasingly interconnected, and we experience every day to what extent, for instance, our economic interventions have far-reaching social and environmental implications, and vice versa (Castells 1996; Friedman 2005; 2008; Mahbubani 2008). However, there is a huge gap between reality and the interpretation and appreciation of reality,² and

2 We have known for a long time – as far back as Kant's time – that the rational categories we use to analyse and subdivide the world are only analytic, theoretical constructions not to be found in reality. The world as it is perhaps corresponds with our categorisations and our actions based on these, but this does not imply that it actually divided in the ways we think it is. In the end all facts and questions about the world are and remain fabricated and provisional. We are unable to understand the world – or reality – as it is, not even the question whether everything is connected with everything else in a holistic way.

between appreciating something and acting accordingly. There are all kinds of pragmatic reasons and explanations for this, but there is also a more fundamental rationale, deeply entrenched in the way we (in the West) have been trained to look at the world, ourselves, and our knowledge of and relationship with the world. This perspective has deep historical roots.

Inbuilt paradoxes

The basic assumption underlying the idea of sustainable development is that humankind as a whole has to adapt and can adapt its behaviour in such a way that the world as a whole becomes a better place to live in, socially, culturally, morally, economically, institutionally, and environmentally, without negative trade-offs, now or in the future (Brundtland 1987). The ultimate goal is a world that is completely in balance or, less abstractly formulated, the transformation of the world into paradise, a garden of Eden, at least for humankind.

It is a far-reaching, utopian ideal, presented as a realisable project. That is odd in itself, but even odder is the fact that this dream, this belief arises at a time when we are gradually starting to understand that our knowledge of the cosmos, matter, natural laws and the working of our brain rests on mysterious foundations. The deeper we dig, the more questions arise and the stranger the possible answers become. At the moment we have to admit that we comprehend little, and that this is probably inherent in the human condition; we start a project on the assumption that we can and have to know, understand, control and link everything.

This is a strange paradox, the more so because we do not even see the paradoxical character and strangeness of such a double-edged³ blend of belief and rationality hidden in the idea of sustainable development. What does this paradox stem from and why are we Westerners blind to the inconsistencies? We have to go far back in history to understand this, to the infancy of medieval Christianity. Looking back in time to explain our contemporary outlook has been done before, for instance to explain our (Western) vision of nature and the environment. These efforts often focused on the Bible, especially the book of Genesis (see e.g. (White 1967; Kay 1988) or ancient Greek and Roman philosophy (e.g. [neo]-Platonism and Stoicism – (Boersema 1991). Most authors also pay attention to medieval influences, but only casually, as if the Middle Ages are only a short, not particularly important intermediate period between antiquity and modern times.

³ Belief in wholeness and the possibility to disassemble and reassemble this wholeness by means of the tools of rationality.

Nature devitalised

This article takes another perspective. The period between roughly 450 and 1500 is very long and shaped our worldview more than any other era. Our starting point, therefore, is not the Bible or ancient philosophy, but the early Middle Ages, the period when Christianity was (re)introduced into rural North-Western Europe and collided with existing beliefs about the relationship between humans and the world. These beliefs and the way they collided and interacted with Christianity were crucial for the formation of Christian belief and the way the world, human nature and nature were perceived and acted upon.

The precise nature of these pre-Christian beliefs is difficult to reconstruct. Historical sources are scarce, and they often reflect the perspective of the church. These sources tell us how the church wanted things and people to be, not what they really were. Some of them, however, offer us a glimpse of the worldview of the people the church tried to 'educate'. The most important sources are the so-called Penitentials, written between about 500 and 1500 C.E. (McNeill 1933; Duby 1985). These books were written for the clergy. They contained instructions on how to correct and instruct lay people, and for that reason included extensive lists of possible misdeeds and 'superstitions'. They enable us to distil fragments of the pre-Christian worldview.

These 'pagan' perspectives have remarkably much in common with so-called spiritual worldviews still found in many parts of the world. In early medieval times humankind did not consider itself superior to or distinct from the world. Humankind was thought to be closely interrelated with everything else in a 'magical' way (Gurevitch 1985).

An ultimate unity and a reciprocal penetration of nature and mankind, organically organized with each other and interactive, are taken for granted, i.e. direct participation in the cosmos. People assume that they can have immediately magical influence on the world (Gurevitch 1985:80-83).

There is a striking resemblance between these 'attitudes' and the worldview described by José M. de Mesa (2010), talking about indigenous people nowadays living in the Philippines:

Land [for the indigenous peoples] is the source, setting (locality also of culture) and community of life. Land is where they are in touch not only with the earth, but with their God, their ancestors and with the spirits of the land as well. It symbolizes for them the whole of creation and it's the web of life.

The same is true of Mexico:

The cosmic vision of life is to be connected with the surroundings, and all the surroundings have life, so they become sacred: we encounter earth, mountains, valleys, caves, plants, animals, stones, water, air, moon, sun, stars. Spirituality is born from this perspective and conception in which all beings that exist in Mother Nature have life and are interrelated. Spirituality is linked to a sense of community in which all beings are interrelated and complementary. For indigenous peoples, then, the world is not 'out there', established outside of and apart from them. It is within them and even 'through' them. Complementarity embraces everything in nature. 'Spirituality' is born from this vision and concept according to which all beings that exist in Mother Nature are interrelated. Spirituality is linked to a communitarian sense for which all beings are interrelated and complement each other in their existence (Marcos 2010).

People living in early medieval Western Europe seem to have had a very spiritual vision of the world and their relationship with it. The keywords are interrelationship and complementarity. All surroundings have life and are interlinked. They perpetually influence each other in a 'magical' way.

This vision disturbed the leaders of the church, for instance bishop Burchard of Worms (ca 950-1025), founder of canon law and one of the principal commentators on the Penitentials. Burchard declared the existing *traditiones paganorum* to be in glaring contradiction to the church's teaching. Only divine providence was able to govern the world and define all its movements (Migne 1853; Haine 1956; Gurevitch 1985). The main task of the church and its clergy was to make sure that things were put in the right perspective, by underlining God's omnipotence and the impotence of humankind. Only God could do 'supernatural' things, directly or by means of his helpers – the saints – endowed with miraculous powers by God because they had proven that they had accepted and internalised his prescriptions. Mere mortals were no longer allowed to interfere in nature in a 'godlike', spiritual, supernatural or 'magical' way. They had lost their right to do so because of hereditary original sin, caused by the shameful behaviour of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, which resulted in their expulsion from paradise and the origin of suffering, blindness misunderstanding and violence. Humanity was no longer capable of understanding and guiding itself. It had to be guided by the church, God's representative on earth, and its saints endowed with God's grace.

The veil of God

There was only one master: God, standing above the world and reigning over it. The sign, purpose and omnipotence of God's mastery was visible in the order of nature, and the fact that God could shake up this order by working

miracles, directly or indirectly by means of his saints. Nature expressed and mirrored God's omnipotence, it told his story to humankind, to be interpreted symbolically and allegorically but not completely rationally, as God was beyond understanding, and because human senses and understanding were veiled and distorted as a result of original sin (Groh 2003).

This new teaching of the church drove a wedge between humankind and nature. They occupied different, even opposing categories, with God in between and above them. It also robbed ordinary humans of the right and the power to interact with nature in a direct spiritual way. All meaning and all spiritual power were in God and oriented to him, although he sometimes graciously granted spiritual insight and miraculous powers to a select group of very good women and men.

This version of divine providence and the premises it was based on profoundly transformed the relationship between humans and their environment. The transformation took place in early medieval times, in an era sometimes called the Augustinian period after bishop Augustine of Hippo (354-530), who formulated the theological, anthropological, psychological and philosophical premises (see e.g. *Confessiones* VII.17.23; cf. VII.20.26 and X.6.10).

The main characteristics to remember are: God is free and omnipotent. He can do as he pleases, even performing all kind of miracles. Humankind is unable to understand and control or correct itself and the world because of original sin. Humans have to be guided by the church, God's representative in this world. If an individual behaves properly, he or she may receive divine grace, (partly) understand it, and go to heaven. Nature mirrors God's will and purpose, because it is his creation. It tells his story in a symbolic way. For that reason nature is partly sacred but not animate. Magic and magical interaction with nature are forbidden. They are a delusion and a sin.

As far as we can deduce from the sources of that period this Augustinian worldview, the foundation of early medieval theology, signalled a decisive breach with older spiritual worldviews. The new vision separated nature and humans into two distinct categories, with humankind as the actor and spectator, and nature and the world as the arena to act and reflect upon in a special way. Nature became something to look at, to speculate and wonder about, a purposive narrative, the membrane through which good Christians could vaguely discern God's revelation and his message for them and the Christian world. Spirituality became passive, reflective, holistic and transcendent.

Perhaps the most revolutionary novelty was that nature had become a separate, holistic but soulless, meaningful category, a coherent narrative that told the story of a transcendent God for humanity to listen to. It is not possible to develop and uphold a holistic view of nature or the world if you are totally immersed in it, emotionally, physically, rationally, and spiritually. Holism

requires the presence and recognition of a fundamental separation; to rephrase it in terms of a Buddhist saying, “Fish do not talk about the water”.

The emergence of this fundamental ontological and cognitive dualism in the early Middle Ages indeed signalled a huge transformation, nothing less than a complete paradigm shift in Kuhn’s terms. It paved the way for an even more radical one: the rationalisation of nature and God’s interaction with the world. This transformation took place in the period 1050-1300.

God unveiled

This second revolution, often called the medieval Renaissance, was triggered by the recovery and translation into Latin of several works by the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle – works that were thought to be lost forever – followed by the integration of his ethical, physical and metaphysical ideas with Christian philosophy and theology. Reading Aristotle reversed some of the basic assumptions about the nature of the world and the capability of humans to understand themselves, nature and the relation between God and the world.

In his *Nicomedia* Aristotle argues, that the final goal (*telos*) of humankind is to achieve ‘happiness’ (*eudemonia*) in the world, to be realised in (political) interaction with other people; in other words, a completely worldly goal. He also states – in his *Physics* and *Metaphysics* – that the natural world is governed and moved by causal principles. He distinguishes between four of them: material, formal, efficient and final causes. The final cause (*telos*) is the most important one. According to him nature functions understandably and rationally, and it has a goal which is: everything seeks to actualise its potential. The implication is not only that nature can be understood but also that it should be examined, if only to discover the *telos* of everything. The rediscovered works of Aristotle became the basis of a new worldview that deeply changed existing notions about the relation between God, nature and humankind.

The culmination of this huge undertaking was the *Summa Theologica* of Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), especially his idea of *lumen naturale*, that is, the notion that human reason is capable of understanding the world by examining it; and the view that divine grace and natural insight (*lumen divine* and *lumen naturale*) only differ gradually instead of fundamentally, as Augustine believed (Aquinas 1938).

According to Thomas Aquinas human reason has *not* become untrustworthy because of original sin. It is intrinsically trustworthy because God created man after his own image. Rational thinking and the study of nature (natural revelation) are valid ways to understand God – although not enough to understand him completely – and less perfect and immediate than faith

(supernatural revelation). Nature reveals God's purpose for the world, and humankind is able to understand that rationally.

The implication of these new interpretations was far-reaching. Humankind and its reason were upgraded, whereas God's capacity to do as he pleased was downgraded. God had become less free to bend the natural order by means of miracles. Doing so would imply that he acted against his own order (truth), especially if he did it often or too radically.

The new interpretations also had major repercussions for the position and status of nature and the world. On the one hand nature acquired a position almost equal to faith, because it also disclosed the purpose of God. On the other hand it became an object to be studied and rationally understood by means of *lumen naturale*. The two transformations also put an end to any possibility of spiritual interaction and communication with nature. Yet another, even more influential consequence only emerged gradually. To clarify this we have to discuss another aspect of Aristotle's thinking, a feature that also explains why a theologian like Thomas Aquinas was so fascinated by his philosophy.

Aristotle defines nature (physics) as movement caused by a permanent force exerted on something. The basic implication is movement on the basis of causal principles. This presupposes a first cause, a first mover that is itself unmoved by anything else, something that is as it is. Aristotle called this principle the Prime Mover. He also declares that everything is moved in a certain direction towards a final goal or *telos*. If everything has a *telos*, that is the actualisation of its full potential, there also is a final goal of and for everything. Causality acquires a beginning and an end, an almost a circular character.

The prime mover and *telos*, and the way Aristotle linked them, made it possible to combine his philosophy with Christian theology. God became the Prime Mover and *Telos* of everything. Everything got a place and a specific meaning. Everything, including God, became part of a coherent, causal and rationally understandable narrative, constructed as a teleological chain.

However, defining God as the beginning and end of a causal chain not only reduced his freedom – as explained above – but also gradually undermined his role in the chain. It engendered tendencies to confine his role to that of Prime Mover and *Telos*, and to reduce his role in the actual movement (nature), especially if those 'movements' or their direct 'causes' could be understood without reference to God, or when the 'movements' seemed to contradict other highly venerated aspects of God. It gave way to tendencies to differentiate between the working and outcomes of natural processes and God's intentions, especially if these outcomes did not appear to be godlike, but without abandoning the idea that everything was interconnected in some teleological sense.

The attempt to interconnect and link God, the world and human understanding in a rational, causal way triggered an opposite ‘movement’, that is, a growing distinction between God and the world. Slowly but surely God and his intentions became detached from the world and its movements, whereas the real world became a place that had nothing to do with God and his intentions. This eventually stripped nature of its last spiritual clothes.

For the record, this process did not become immediately visible. It soon became clear that the intellectual cathedral Thomas Aquinas had tried to erect had some grave design errors, with huge implications for the future of the whole building, that is, the effort to merge faith and knowledge. Soon after Thomas finished his *Summae* the two worldviews already started to drift apart, starting with the nominalist revolution. In the ages to follow the Thomist merger between God (belief) and the world (reason), it slowly but inevitably started to break up. Nevertheless it took a long time before this was acknowledged, and even longer before it was openly admitted.

God as the servant of humankind

It took centuries before Descartes (1596-1650) wrote his famous rationalist statement, “*cogito ergo sum*”, the core of his *Discourse on method*, in which he ‘proved’ that reason alone generates certain knowledge about ourselves, the world and (the existence and nature of) God. Descartes was also the first thinker who explicitly reduced God’s role to that of a precondition for causality, order, existence and rationality.

His contemporary, Pascal (1623-1662), followed the opposite course, which in this respect is equally notable. He criticised Descartes for his rationalist view of God, and especially the fact that he made God into a ‘servant’ of humankind, necessary only to create the needed preconditions for rationality and the natural order to exist and function.⁴ In his *Pensée* 233 Pascal suggested a completely different approach, simultaneously rational, causal and non-causal. If there is a God, he is infinitely incomprehensible, since, having neither parts nor limits, he has no affinity with us. We are therefore incapable of knowing either what he is or if he is... Who, then, will blame Christians for not being able to give a reason for their belief, since they profess a religion for which they cannot give a reason? In expounding it to the world they declare that it is foolishness, *stultitiam* (Descartes 1979; Pascal 1982).

After that it took almost two centuries before Hume (1711-1776) could declare that belief consists merely in a certain feeling or sentiment (Hume 1978), and Kant (1724-1804) could write, without any irony, that we cannot

4 A notion also taken up and worked out by the so-called deists.

prove whether God exists or does not exist and are unable to understand things as they are, while upholding belief in God (thanks to our faith), understanding reality (thanks to the language of mathematics and inborn categories), and acting ethically (thanks to our logic).

We shall not discuss all the ins and outs of this process, because it would not add much to our argument. Instead, for the sake of that argument, we briefly note and partly repeat the main outcomes.

The Augustinian – early medieval – worldview underlined on the one hand the omnipotence and freedom of God and on the other the impotence of humankind, and consequently the impossibility for humans to understand God and his purpose. God determined everything, kept everything together and gave everything meaning. Everything was interconnected, but the deeper reasons could not be grasped directly by the human mind. Real understanding of God's intentions required faith and grace.

Thomas Aquinas took up this idea of the interconnectedness of everything – God, nature and humans, and the predominance and omnipotence of God but – with the help of Aristotelian philosophy – completely reversed it. He declared that God was the source and the goal of all movement, intentions and actions, and that humankind could grasp this directly because it was done rationally and understandably. According to Aquinas human reason and faith/grace were on an almost equal footing, although faith/grace worked faster and reached deeper.

Aquinas's effort to rehabilitate (human) reason and reconcile it with faith failed. Instead of long-lasting cooperation the result was growing estrangement, and in the end even a divorce, between first faith, and later also God on one side, and the world, nature, humankind and rationality on the other. Faith and God slowly but surely ended up in the realm of transcendence and the supernatural, whereas nature and humans' relationship with the world became almost completely rationalised and instrumentalised.

New idols: humans, rationality and progress

This process gained momentum during the Renaissance, accelerating in the 16th and 17th centuries, and climaxing at the end of the 18th century in the Enlightenment and proclamation of the empire of reason (and its emotional/ 'irrational' counterpart, Romanticism). In the 19th century, the power of reason to understand and control the world became so obvious and so successful that a growing number of people decisively banished God and faith to the realm of the supernatural, sometimes even the superfluous. This was truly a complete inversion of the early medieval Augustinian worldview.

One conviction, however, remained virtually unchanged. In fact, it even became stronger. That was that the world as a whole is meaningfully intercon-

nected and part of one coherent narrative with a *telos*. The main difference was that by now the *telos* was not only seen as completely understandable but also as completely achievable, in this world and in the near future, without the help of God or any supernatural power. There was a new, popular term that neatly captured this new confidence in human reason and ingenuity: the term ‘progress’ (Knippenberg and Schuurman 1994; Knippenberg and Schuurman 1996).

The paradox of all this is that belief in a teleological meta-narrative survived all David Hume’s (1711-1776) onslaughts on (the guiding hand of) God, final causes and even causality itself (Hume 1978). Why did all these rational people cling to a belief that was so overtly Christian, irrational and utopian, that is belief in the possibility of ‘rebuilding’ the garden of Eden on earth?

A probable explanation is given by Ernest Gellner (Gellner 1974; Gellner 1992). The belief in progress never had to be questioned, because there simply was no reason to do so. On the contrary, all visible evidence supported the possibility of infinite progress. Never before had humankind been so successful in understanding and controlling physical and human nature. Never before had it developed such powerful sciences, machines and complex organisations. Almost all those inventions were miraculously successful and effective. All signs indicated that there was progress, and that its end was nowhere in sight. Those developments made the need to ask metaphysical questions about the foundations of physics or the meaning of life less urgent, not to say silly.

Return of the unexplainable

However, not long after the announcement of the final victory of human rationality the first cracks became visible. At first it seemed that humans were far less rational and predictable than had been hoped and believed. Who would have thought that the civilised and rich nations of Western Europe would start killing each other on an unprecedented scale, for no rationally defensible reason whatsoever, at the onset of the second decade of the 20th century (World War I, 10 million deaths)? Who would have imagined that the whole story would repeat itself only twenty years later, on a far worse and even larger scale, culminating in the systematic and industrial extermination of a whole people, not coincidentally the people that gave Christianity its holy book⁵ (World War II, 50 million deaths)? These are only two of many bizarre

5 How rational, enlightened or progressive was it of the highly civilised German people to surrender their fate to a failed house-painter, who had vowed to get rid of all Jews in Europe; a promise he translated into a world war and an outrageous enterprise to eliminate all of them?

examples from the bizarre 20th century, often hailed as an era of progress and modernity but in many respects also an incomprehensibly irrational century.

That humankind and its collectives are ultimately not all that rational does not, however, imply that nature cannot be rationally scrutinised. Yet this dream, too, slowly started falling apart in the 20th century, notwithstanding the many and undeniably great, often spectacular successes of the natural sciences. We now know that in the deeper layers of the basic natural sciences mystery and fundamental uncertainty prevail, both at the ultimate micro-level and at the ultimate macro-level, for instance with respect to the working of our brain. We hear about vanished cosmic matter, multiple string theories, quantum science based on probability and the presence of a multitude of universes which we are supposed to live in; and about the non-rational foundation of our capacity to make decisions.

All these explanations, designed to explain the inexplicable, make at least one thing clear: the instrumental-rational meta-narrative that suggests that the world is coherent, comprehensible and predictable is no longer tenable, let alone the idea that the world is supposed to have a *telos*.⁶ What the fabric of the cosmos is, to cite a recent book, has only become a bigger riddle than it was, say, a hundred years ago (Greene 2004).

The ‘stories’ we hear only awaken some old, supposedly forever buried metaphysical questions. Examples are the question whether the (working of the) world is as reducible to one or more fundamental principles or laws as it seems; the question whether humankind is really capable of comprehending the world itself, linked to the question whether reasoning and rationality are not blocking this understanding instead of facilitating it; or even the question whether there really is a fundamental distinction between the human will and the power that ‘moves’ everything else, an idea already defended by thinkers as different as the Japanese Buddhist Dōgen Kigen (1200-1253) and the German philosopher Schopenhauer (1788-1860) (Kigen 1977; Schopenhauer 1996).

The same can be said with respect to the possibility of understanding human nature or society. We can try to manage and control humankind and its individual or collective behaviour, relations and interactions, but we can no longer assume that we really know what we are doing, or that we will be able to control it completely, or for a long period. Even so-called expert systems designed to support us in a coherent, strictly rational way now and then get out of control – such as the financial system lately – because of humans and the inbuilt instrumental rationality of the system (Giddens 1990; Giddens 1999). Complexity has a tendency to create greater complexity, break out of the expected ‘frames’ and in the end create chaos. Some people believe that chaos

⁶ The Christian belief in God, heaven and hell starts to sound a very reasonable narrative compared to the latest meta-narratives spread by contemporary fundamental natural sciences.

organises itself into a new kind of order. Perhaps there is some truth in this, but even then there will always be a need for a prior external input (a kind of prime mover). This, again, makes it more of a kind of metaphysical idea than a scientific explanation.

Perhaps the Darwinian principles of natural selection – that is, the circular principle of replication, variation, competition, and selection – still stand as one of the few remaining, fundamentally sound (pre-)scientific notions. Yet they operate only in a certain setting, and only after the ‘creation’ of that setting by something else, that is, life, (plenty of) time and energy, the availability of place and space, and preferably some kind of water, fluid and air.

The conclusion is that the rationalistic, optimistic, humanistic view that the world and its workings are rationally comprehensible to the human mind, and ultimately malleable and controllable by means of instrumental-rational tools and concepts, is falling apart. The deeper we dig, the less understandable it becomes, and the more we try to control it, the more it gets out of hand. The latest example of this process is what an author like Lovelock (2006) calls ‘the revenge of Gaia’. Nature (in the narrow sense), the climate and the planet as a whole – in short, our environment, the world that is supposed to be just an arena to work and live in and to carry, support, feed and obey us – are starting to ‘bite back’ and follow its own track (also see (Tenner 1996)).

The disturbing fact about this ‘revenge of Gaia’ is that it painfully shows the limits and pettiness of all our efforts and their underpinnings thus far. Our progress/development/growth is only made possible by denying and externalising all kinds of ‘costs’; for instance the fact that our wealth and well-being are fuelled by using energy, accumulated in the soil of the earth over hundreds of millions of years. (Nowadays we consume about the equivalent of one million years of pre-human vegetation in just one year.)

We do not comprehend, master or control the world; we only think we do. It always was a strange form of hubris. If humankind was to disappear overnight, no other species except perhaps the rat would miss us. If all the ants or bees⁷ were to disappear overnight, almost all ecosystems would collapse within weeks or months, and with them all human civilisations. So who is the master of the world? Is it really *Homo sapiens*, the perfect rational animal made after the image of God, who, from the 18th century onwards, considered itself so perfect that it could chase God out of his own paradise and replace him?

⁷ See for instance *The Spiegel Online* (22-3-2007): “A mysterious decimation of bee populations has German beekeepers worried, while a similar phenomenon in the United States is gradually assuming catastrophic proportions. The consequences for agriculture and the economy could be enormous.”

Hubris and humility

Even more disturbing than these findings is the fact that the outcome of contemporary people's increasingly uncomfortable confrontation with the limits of their meta-narratives and human rationality does not inspire them to reflect on this and act accordingly. On the contrary, we witness an even greater effort to invent yet another meta-perspective and an even stronger reliance on rationality and more especially on rational instruments to overcome the problems created by those very instruments and rationality.⁸

The idea of sustainable development⁹ expresses that clearly, as clearly as the notion of progress articulated by the rational optimism of the 19th century and the notion of development expressed it from 1949 onwards (Knippenberg and Schuurman 1996).

From the outset, as far back as 1987 when the idea of sustainable development was first introduced to reconcile environmental concerns and developmental needs, its reasoning was based on a peculiar circular argument: (a) ongoing (economic) development is disastrous for the environment; (b) the environment can only be protected by stimulating (economic) development (Brundtland 1987; Hopwood 2005).

The idea of sustainable development has a circular, teleological undertone, reminiscent of Aristotelian metaphysics (see e.g. (Bell 2005)). There are, however, some fundamental differences. The notion of sustainable development lacks the idea of and inbuilt substance, such as the Aristotelian core idea that everything in nature is about the realisation of the inbuilt potential of entities. Both sustainability and development are just process notions. Process notions derive their meaning from an external content, but the notion of sustainable development, strangely enough, is seen as a self-validating concept with far-reaching moral because of its inbuilt utopian final value (*telos*) to be strived for, namely a fair, equal, pleasant world that is in balance, environmentally, economically and socially. A strange belief indeed, all the more so, because it is presented as a – rationally and empirically – complete, well founded systemic worldview, whereas in reality it is based on a strange amalgam and reversal of supposedly refuted medieval Christian worldviews that needed God to give everything a meaningful beginning, development and end.

8 The opposite of the meaning of Albert Einstein's remark, "significant problems we face cannot be solved at the same level of thinking we were at when we created them".

9 The notion of sustainability as such – without the addition of development – is an empty concept. It just means that you have to make sure that you can sustain an action or intervention, without specifying why, how, where, when and with regard to what. As soon as you start to specify those aspects you are back in the domains of development, control and intervention.

How is it possible that a civilisation that has lost its belief in God and undermined all the foundations to uphold any belief in teleology and holism clings to ideas and practices that need excessive, godlike belief in final causality and control and the power of human rationality and imagination to define what is, what is not, what ought to be, and how that should be realised?

God, spirituality and the limits of reason

Although we have chased God away by dethroning him as the ultimate purpose, beginning and end of everything and all our strivings, we still pursue (chase after) the ideas, epistemology, power and *telos* he stood for and try hard to usurp his position. Almost 2 000 years of Christianity have undeniable left deep traces, shaped our beliefs and perceptions, and framed our moral norms; in short, our souls or, to use a more contemporary term, our *habitus* (Bourdieu 1980; Bourdieu 1984). If we are the fish, then Christianity is our water.

How do we develop a new, less paradoxical, more sustainable *habitus*? We have several options. We can really live with the consequences of the conclusion we have drawn – at least in our daily and scientific practice – that God is dead. In that case we also have to accept the underlying implication, namely that there is no ground for any universal statement, belief or striving whatsoever. Everything becomes fuzzy and context-specific.

We can also opt for the opposite direction and call back (reanimate) God and our belief in his providence. In that case, however, we cannot opt for the God of Thomas Aquinas, that is, his ideas about the similarity between *lumen divine* and *lumen naturale*. The idea that humans can understand God's purposes and the world with the help of their rationality is irrevocably discarded. That God is indeed dead.

Accepting God implies returning to an Augustinian perspective. That God is, however, not only omnipotent and transcendent but also incomprehensible, free and unpredictable, as are his purpose and creation. It also claims, moreover, that human reason is feeble and incapable of deep, real understanding. Yet the Augustinian worldview is also irreconcilable with the idea that humans can define or (rationally) understand universal principles or make universally valid statements about the world and moral questions. Accepting the Augustinian view implies, furthermore, that we accept the necessity to be guided and supervised in all fields by something like a church, an institution¹⁰ that represents God on earth – although one might ask on what grounds its pretensions could be based.

10 Not just a holy book. Humans are not able to understand it. His reason is veiled.

The advantage of the Augustinian worldview is that it underlines the possibility and even the necessity to accept that rationality is just one (fallible) way to comprehension. The disadvantage is that it offers no concrete tools to understand the world and act in it.

There is, however, another possible approach, one that includes the main insight of the Augustinian perspective: the fact that we are indeed poorly equipped to pretend that we (can) understand and control everything, based on universals we define ourselves, without accepting the pitfalls. We could follow the precept of yet another famous medieval thinker, William of Ockham¹¹ (1288-1348): his insight that the explanation of any phenomenon should be based on as few assumptions as possible. We could abandon the idea of God, the idea that we can understand everything, and the idea that reason is the only or best tool to understand what we are, who we are, how we ought to act, and how we can or should relate to our body and everybody and everything around us. We could, in other words, return to a more earthly and spiritual perspective on ourselves and everybody and everything around us.

This does not mean that we have to abandon the insight that philosophy and science have given us, nor the tools they and technology provided. We only have to admit that they address only part of our potential and that of everything around us. While accepting this precept makes the world more mysterious and less easy to control (as a whole), it creates room for perspectives and attitudes that are more realistic, less hubristic and far more down to earth. It is based on far fewer assumptions than all other perspectives, beliefs and ideologies that we have developed since the beginning of medieval Christianity.

This kind of approach, leaving space for our senses and spirituality, is in the end less irrational than the contemporary belief in rationality, and certainly the way we use it. It is also the best way to boost a real sustainable relationship with our environment and all other creatures in the world, starting here and now and immediately around us.

Real reflection based on this premise – that is, denying that we already know, and that knowing or believing is the beginning of everything – engenders an external perspective from outside the pool we are unwittingly swimming in.¹²

The first step is to question the main premises of our existing worldviews and norms, that is, rationality and the limits of our reason. Rationality mystifies as much as it explains. The world it shows is only a fragmented glimpse of the world that is. Questioning rationality implies upgrading other ways of

11 Also the one who furnished the ‘explosive’ to blow up Thomas Aquinas’s ‘intellectual cathedral’.

12 Both Descartes and Pascal were missing the point; they are in fact two sides of the same coin.

perceiving our environment and ourselves: our reason and our intuition, our cognition and our tacit knowledge, to merge the terminologies of Polanyi (1983) and Boudon (Polanyi 1983; Boudon 2001). It implies that not all non-rational ways of gathering and interpreting data, knowledge and insight are irrational. Between what we call rationality and complete nonsense is far more than we now acknowledge. It is precisely the other way around: the more we reduce our norms for truth or validity to a specific sub-category of instrumental rationality, the more absurd and irrelevant many of the answers become. The more we try to control everything, the more things get out of control; the basic premises are too narrow (Latour 1991).

Another key question we have to ask – and here spirituality comes back into the picture – is whether the impression, translated into the idea, that we stand apart from the world, or even the idea that the world is an entity or (united) system, does not block our capacity to understand our position and that of everything around us, and our interactions and relations with it. The idea that the world is, that it is an entity as well as a separate platform for our actions, a whole with a purpose (and a goal), is an idea that is, as we have seen, rather culture-specific.

If we start looking at ourselves and everything around us with eyes that are open to more than rationally valuable impressions, and if we let go of the premise that there always has to be a coherent answer or a meaning that refers directly to what we already know, we would perhaps stumble on really new insights. If we become more humble and less afraid of losing control, we would perhaps start seeing things for what they are and relating to everything as it is for the first time in literally ages. That is the first step to sustainability.

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Spirituality; perspectives from the first Indigenous Women's Summit of the Americas

Sylvia Marcos

Introduction

The basic documents, final declarations and collective proposals of the *First Indigenous Women's Summit of the Americas* and other key conferences reveal an indigenous spiritual component in contrast to the hegemonic, homogenising influences of the largely Christian, Catholic background of the women's respective countries. The principles of this indigenous spirituality also differ from more recent influences of feminist and Latin American eco-feminist liberation theologies. The participants' discourses, live presentations and addresses brought to light particular expressions of their religious background.

Drawing on several years of interaction and work with Mexico's indigenous worlds, my intention in this essay is to systematise the principles that have begun to emerge from a distinctive cosmivision and cosmology. Religious references to indigenous spirituality are inspired by ancestral traditions recreated today as the indigenous people struggle for social justice. The inspiration for this struggle often comes from these beliefs. They stem from ritual, liturgical and collective worlds of worship that, though often hidden under Catholic Christian imagery, diverge significantly from Christianity, revealing their epistemic particularity. Working, as some authors have suggested, from 'cracks of epistemic differences', I characterise the indigenous movement as undertaking a 'de-colonising' task. They are actively retrieving ancestral spiritualities in order to decolonise the religious universes they were forced to adopt during the historical colonial enterprise.

The First Indigenous Women's Summit of the Americas was a United Nations meeting in December of 2002. It was promoted and organised by a collective of indigenous leaders of international repute such as Rigoberta Menchú, Myrna Cunningham, Calixta Gabriel and other regional indigenous women from communities in the Americas. They were joined by Pauline Tiongia, an elder from a Maori community in New Zealand. The meeting consisted of about 400 indigenous women representing most countries and

many indigenous communities.¹ In attendance were women from remote and isolated places such as the Orinoco river delta in Venezuela, where there are no roads, and the Amazon river basin. Prior to the Summit, the organisers arranged a series of focus groups designed by the *Centro de Estudios e Información de la Mujer Multiétnica* (CEIMM) from the *Universidad de las Regiones autónomas de la Costa Caribe Nicaraguense* (URACCAN), Nicaragua's indigenous university. The focus groups' methodology aimed at bringing together indigenous women representatives of the whole region to discuss five main areas of interest: (1) spirituality, education, and culture; (2) gender from the perspective of indigenous women; (3) leadership, empowerment and indigenous women participation; (4) indigenous development and globalisation; (5) human rights and indigenous rights. The selected women were invited to gather and participate in several of these preliminary focus groups around the region. During group interaction they expressed their own thoughts, perspectives and experiences concerning spirituality, gender, education, empowerment, development, and their relations with international funding and cooperation agencies. The group discussions, which were transcribed and lightly edited, were the basic documents of the Summit meeting.

The importance of research led and designed by the actual subjects (objects) of research cannot be overemphasised. The asymmetrical power relations between urban women and indigenous peasant women are evident throughout the Latin American continent. It is urban woman who have access to higher education, professional positions, and economic resources. Usually it is their voices, proposals and research projects that find support. The Summit selected its participants from a pool of indigenous female political leaders: senators, regidoras, congresswomen, heads of social organisations, leaders of grassroots political groups. All these women had many years of experience exercising political and social influence and leadership. The Summit offered them a forum where they could personally recount their experiences and priorities without the mediation and interpretation of the area's elite hegemonic institutions. One of the main themes was gender from the indigenous women's perspective. This was and still is a debated issue that has sometimes created barriers between mainstream feminism and the indigenous women's movement. I had the privilege of being invited to be one of the few 'non-indigenous' women

1 There are numerous definitions of the term 'indigenous'. Here are a few examples. According to Linita Manu'atu (2000), writing on Tongan and other Pacific islands peoples, "[i]ndigenous refers to the First Peoples who settled in Aotearoa (New Zealand), United States, Canada, and so on." Other definitions that have been proposed include "Tangata Whenua, First Nations or simply the People" (Manu'atu 2000:80). According to Kay Warren (2002:112), writing on Guatemala, "indigenous ... is itself, of course, a historical product of European colonialism that masks enormous variations in history, culture, community, and relations with those who are considered non-indigenous". See also the definition UN ILO given in the introduction.

participants at the meeting and a consultant for their gender and empowerment documents. The organisers knew of my research on early Mesoamerican cosmology and activist work and expressed a desire to hear the opinion of a feminist who respects indigenous cultures.

The theme of indigenous spirituality was transversal and intersected with every other issue addressed at the Summit. It was so prominent that a study of the Summit documents, voted on by consensus, reveals the priorities of the contemporary struggles, concerns and agendas of indigenous groups in the Americas. The documents propose indigenous spirituality as an origin and a motor for the recreation of collectivities and the emergence of a new pan-indigenous, collective subject in which women's leadership is emerging and growing, defining the women as outspoken, strong and clear agents of change.

Until very recently the term 'indigenous' had no positive connotations. It had never been used by the indigenous peoples themselves to indicate a self-constituted identity. Now it refers to a collective subjectivity, a social actor created by the indigenous people themselves through their political and spiritual practices. As workshop leader and consultant to indigenous peoples' organisations from several ethnic groups of Mexico and Latin America, I witnessed their ties, their collective identity and the strength of their spiritual and cosmological references.

The modernity of ancient spirituality

The Latin American continent has long been a stronghold of Catholicism. Even today the Vatican counts Latin America as one of the regions that boasts the greatest numbers of Catholics in the world.² Among indigenous social movements claiming the right to develop and define their own spirituality is a novel attitude, yet one that is voiced with increasing intensity.³ Beyond claiming a right to food and shelter, a decent livelihood, and ownership of their territory and its resources, the indigenous people are turning inwards to their traditional culture. They are also daring to question the most ingrained sequels of Catholic colonisation, ignoring the contempt and disdain in which their spirituality, beliefs and practices are held by the Catholic majority. We will see an example of the mainstream Catholic perspective on indigenous peoples in the "Message of the bishops to the Summit" below.

2 Over the past 20 years the percentage of Catholics has decreased consistently. In Mexico today roughly 82% of the population identify themselves as Catholic, in contrast to 96.5% two decades ago. The main source of Catholic believers used to be the impoverished and dispossessed of Mexico, who include the 62 distinct indigenous peoples in the country.

3 This theme resounds around the world among other indigenous peoples. See the Maori claims of Linda Tuhiwai (2002).

Despite conflicting views among scholars and other commentators, the indigenous social movements are the most visible transformational force on the Latin American continent (Touraine 2000). Indigenous peoples no longer accept the image that was imposed on them from outside. They want to create their own identity; they refuse to be museum objects. It is not a question of reviving the past. Indigenous cultures are alive and the only way for them to survive is to reinvent themselves, recreating their identity while maintaining their differences (Le Bot 2000). The work of anthropologist Kay Warren offers insights into the genealogy of the pan-indigenous collective subject. What Warren calls the pan-Mayan collective identity was forged out of the peoples' need to survive the aggressions of the Guatemalan state. As distinct ethnic groups were threatened with cultural annihilation, their guides, philosopher-leaders, distilled a collective identity from their inherited oral, mythic and religious traditions. As Warren explains, the bearers of cultural wisdom began to propound an "assertion of a common past which has been suppressed and fragmented by European colonialism and the emergence of modern liberal states. In this view, cultural revitalisation reunites the past with the present as a political force" (Warren & Jackson 2002:11). Whatever the possible explanations for the genesis of this pan-indigenous collective social subject might be, it engenders a political collectivity, and one of its cardinal claims is often based on its self-defined indigenous spirituality.

As for indigenous women, they are claiming this ancestral wisdom, cosmivision and spirituality. Theirs is a selective process. Issues within tradition that constrain or hamper their space as women are being contested. At the same time issues that enhance the position of women in their ancestral spiritual communities are held onto dearly and their survival is supported and ensured by the community.

Addressing the Mexican Congress in March of 2002, *Comandanta* Esther, a Zapatista leader from the southern state of Chiapas, expressed indigenous women's concern thus: "I want to explain the situation of women as we live it in our communities ... as girls they think we are not valuable ... as women [we are] mistreated ... also women have to carry water, walking two to three hours holding a vessel and a child in their arms" (Marcos 2005:103). After describing her daily hardships under indigenous customary law, she added: "I am not telling you this so you pity us. We have struggled to change this and we will continue doing it" (Marcos 2005:103). She was expressing the inevitable struggle for change that indigenous women face, but she was also demanding respect for their agency. They – the ones directly affected – have to lead the process of change. There is no need for pity and still less for instructions from outsiders on how to defend their rights as women. This would be another form of imposition, however well intentioned. *Comandanta* Esther's discourse should convince intellectuals remote from the daily life of indigenous peoples

that culture is neither monolithic nor static. "We want recognition for our way of dressing, of talking, of governing, of organising, of praying, of working collectively, of respecting the earth, of understanding nature as something we are part of" (Marcos 2005:103). In concert with many indigenous women who have raised their voices in recent years, she wants both to transform and to preserve her culture. This is the background to the demands for social justice expressed by indigenous women, against which we must view the declarations and claims concerning indigenous spirituality that emerged from the First Indigenous Women's Summit of the Americas.

Among the thematic resolutions proposed and passed unanimously at the First Summit, the following are particularly emblematic:⁴

We re-evaluate spirituality as the main axis of culture. (*Memoria* 61)

Revaloramos la espiritualidad como el eje principal de la cultura. (Memoria 32)

The participants of the First Indigenous Women Summit of the Americas resolve: that spirituality is an indivisible part of the community. It is a cosmic vision of life shared by everyone and wherein all beings are interrelated and complementary in their existence. Spirituality is a search for the equilibrium and harmony within ourselves as well as the other surrounding beings. (*Memoria* 60)

Las participantes de la Primera Cumbre de Mujeres Indígenas de America consideramos: que la espiritualidad está ligada al sentido comunitario de la visión cósmica de la vida, donde los seres se interrelacionan y se complementan en su existencia. Que la espiritualidad es la búsqueda del equilibrio y la armonía con nosotros mismos y con los demás. (Memoria 31)

We demand of different churches and religions to respect the beliefs and cultures of Indigenous peoples without imposing on us any religious practice that conflicts with our spirituality. (*Memoria* 19)

Demandamos de las diferentes iglesias y religiones respetar las creencias y culturas de los Pueblos Indígenas sin imponernos ninguna practica religiosa que contravenga nuestra espiritualidad. (Memoria 19)

4 Quotations from the *Memoria*, the raw material and transcriptions from focus groups, and documents from the Summit vary in translation. Some are translated into English as part of the document, in which case the Spanish translation of a particular section has a different page number from the English. In some cases the Spanish was not translated in the documents; this applies particularly to the position statements, whereas the declarations and plans of action are often in both Spanish and English in the documents. Unless indicated otherwise, I am responsible for all translations.

What does indigenous spirituality mean?

When I first approached the Summit documents, I was surprised by the frequent use of the self-elected term ‘spirituality’. Its meaning in this context is by no means self-evident and needs to be decoded. It has little to do with what the word usually means in the Christian traditions, in which I include all denominations. When indigenous women use the word ‘spirituality’ they give it a meaning that clearly sets it apart from Catholic and other Christian traditions that arrived in the Americas at the time of the conquest and the ensuing colonisation:

We indigenous Mexican women...take our decision to practise freely our spirituality that is different from a religion., but in the same manner we respect every one else’s beliefs. (Message from Indigenous Women to the Bishops 1)

Las mujeres indígenas mexicanas...tomamos nuestras decisiones para ejercer libremente nuestra espiritualidad que es diferente a una religión y de igual manera se respeta la creencia de cada quien. (Message from Indigenous Women to the Bishop 1)

This stance is strongly influenced by an approach that espouses transnational socio-political practices. Indigenous movements are increasingly exposed to a globalising world. The presence of a Maori elder at the Summit, as well as the frequent participation of Mexican indigenous persons in indigenous peoples’ meetings around the world, have promoted new openness, understanding and coalitions beyond their own traditional cultural boundaries. Through the lens of indigenous spirituality we glimpse the cosmovision that pervades the worlds of indigenous women.

The bishops’ message to the Summit and the women’s response

Reports on the Summit’s preparatory sessions, combined with the public status of its main organiser, indigenous Nobel Peace Prize laureate Rigoberta Menchú, attracted the attention of the Mexican bishops. They apparently feared that the indigenous worlds, which they regard as part of their domain, were getting out of control. It was not only indigenous peoples, moreover, but indigenous *women* who were taking the lead and gaining a public presence. There were also rumours about so-called ‘reproductive rights’ featuring on the Summit’s agenda. Catholic authorities spoke out against indigenous agitation. They felt pressed to send a ‘message’ and a warning:

The Summit touches on indigenous peoples’ spirituality, education and culture from perspectives such as traditional knowledge, loss and re-construction of collective and

individual identities, and also from indigenous women's spirituality *from a perspective totally distant from the cultural and spiritual reality of the diverse ethnic groups that form our (sic) indigenous peoples.* (Bishop's Message 2, my emphasis)

La Cumbre aborda la espiritualidad, la educación y la cultura de los pueblos indígenas desde conceptos de conocimiento tradicional, perdida y reconstrucción de identidad individual y colectiva, así como espiritualidad de la mujer indígena, desde una perspectiva completamente alejada de la realidad cultural y espiritual de las diferentes etnias que forman nuestros (sic) pueblos indígenas. (Bishops's Mensaje 2, my emphasis)

This patronising and discriminatory message was sent to the Summit by the *Comision Episcopal de Indigenas* (Episcopal Commission for Indigenous People). The message is paternalistic throughout. Its tone is one of admonition and condescension to the indigenous 'subject'. It assumes that rationality/truth is the prerogative of bishops. They consider it their duty to lead their immature indigenous women subjects, that is, to teach them, guide them and scold them when they, *the bishops, think the indigenous women are wrong.* The reader gets the sense that, to the bishops, this collectivity of women is dangerously straying from the indigenous peoples' way as defined by the bishops.

The indigenous women's response, *Mensaje de las Mujeres Indígenas Mexicanas a los Monseñores de la Comisión Episcopal de Indígenas*, emerged from a collective meeting. In this document the 38 representatives of Mexican indigenous communities expressed their plight as follows:⁵

Now we can manifest openly our spirituality. Our ancestors were obliged to hide it... It is evident that evangelization was an imposition and that on top of our temples and ceremonial centres churches were built. (*Mensaje Mujeres Indígenas 1*)

Ciertamente hoy podemos manifestar mas plenamente nuestra espiritualidad, lo que no pudieron hacer nuestros antepasados porque lo hicieron a escondidas...Para nadie es oculto de la imposición de la evangelización y que sobre la espiritualidad y centros ceremoniales se fundaron las iglesias en nuestros Pueblos. (*Mensaje Mujeres Indígenas 1*)

We Mexican Indigenous women are adults and we take over our right to practice freely our spirituality that is different from a religion ... we feel that we have the right to our religiosity as indigenous peoples. (*Mensaje Mujeres Indígenas 1-2*)

Las mujeres indígenas mexicanas somos mayores de edad y tomamos nuestras decisiones para ejercer libremente nuestra espiritualidad que es diferente a una religion...nos sentimos con derecho a ejercer...nuestra religiosidad como pueblos indígenas. (*Mensaje Mujeres Indígenas 1-2*)

⁵ The document was produced collectively after hours of proposals and debate. It was finally ratified by a consensus vote, the only truly 'democratic' way among indigenous peoples.

We reconfirm the principles that inspire us to recover and strengthen reciprocity, complementarity, duality, to regain equilibrium. (*Mensaje Mujeres Indígenas 1*)

Reconfirmamos nuestros principios que nos inspiran a recuperar y fortalecer...la reciprocidad, complementariedad, dualidad para recuperar el equilibrio. (Mensaje Mujeres Indígenas 1)

Do not worry, we are analysing them [customary practices that could hamper human rights], because we believe that the light of reason and justice also illuminates us, and certain things should not be permitted. (*Mensaje Mujeres Indígenas 1*)

No se preocupen, las estamos analizando [los usos y costumbres que atentan contra la dignidad y los derechos humanos], porque también creemos que nos ilumina la luz de la razón y la justicia. (Mensaje Mujeres Indígenas 1)

The last sentence is a veiled reference to centuries of colonial and post-colonial oppression. First the colonisers, then the modern state – both with the church’s approval – denied the indigenous peoples the qualification of *gente de razón* (‘rational people’). Even today, in some parts of Mexico, this qualification is reserved for whites and mestizos.

As a voluntary, ‘only listening’ participant of this collectivity of 38 *Mujeres Indígenas Mexicanas*, I paid careful attention to all the discussions. These speakers of several indigenous languages groped for adequate Spanish words to convey the ideas underlying their formal response to the monolingual bishops. At one point, when I was asked directly what I thought about the use of a particular term, I ventured an opinion. After discussing it, they decided not to go with my suggestion. The significance is that my opinion was not treated as authoritative, but simply to be as worthy of consideration as any other. In their own classification I was a ‘non-indigenous’, supportive feminist. Long gone, fortunately, were the days when an urban mestizo university woman could impose an idea or even a word!

The discussions were horizontally collective. Women represented the majority of the Mexican ethnic communities. Their native languages included Nahuatl, Tzotzil, Tzeltal, Tojolabal, Chol, Zapotec, Mixe, Mazatec, Mixtec and Purepecha. The gathering reflected the new collective subject that is taking the lead in struggles for social justice. Notwithstanding traditional ethnic divides among them, all the women involved chose to emphasise their commonalities and identify themselves as Mexican indigenous women. Despite some language barriers, their discussions of ideas and words have stayed with me. They struggled with Spanish as they forged the language of their text. Editing the document took all of us into the early hours of the next day. It was finally passed by consensus, in which my ‘non-indigenous’ vote counted as any other, as it should in a consensus building process.

In addition to constraints imposed by the multiplicity of languages, they expressed the profound dilemma of having to deal with a religious institution that, in spite of its evangelical roots, has traditionally been misogynistic, as well as – for the most part – culturally and ethnically prejudiced against indigenous worlds. The women's insistence on being *adults* (“*las mujeres indígenas mexicanas somos mayores de edad*”) is a response to the assumption implicit in the bishops' message, namely that not only women but all indigenous peoples in general are minors and, as such, in need of strict guidance and reprimand. The ecclesiastic message also implies that they, the (male) bishops and archbishops, know better than the indigenous social activists themselves what it means to be ‘indigenous’ in contemporary Mexico.

Considering the cautious deference paid to Catholic authorities by most Mexicans – whether they are believers or not – the indigenous women's response is a significant expression of a newly gained spirit of autonomy and self-determination. The women's declaration, in both tone and content, also attests the erosion of the church's dominion over indigenous worlds. These poor, unschooled women have shown themselves to be braver and less submissive than some feminist negotiators at a recent United Nations meeting with Vatican representatives.⁶

Decolonising epistemology

Several authors have argued that decolonising efforts should be grounded at the epistemological level (Mignolo 2007; Tlostanova 2007; Marcos 2005). Speaking of the future of feminism, Judith Butler recommends a “privileging of epistemology” as an urgent next step in our commitments. She also reminds us that “there is no register for audibility”, referring to the difficulties of reaching out, understanding and respecting ‘other’ subaltern epistemic worlds (Butler 2004).

The following analysis of some basic characteristics of indigenous spirituality is an invitation to understand it in its own terms. It is an effort to widen the ‘register for audibility’, so the voices and positions of the indigenous may penetrate the deaf ears of philosophical ethnocentricity. This deepening of understanding will facilitate a less domineering and oppressive relationship with the indigenous peoples, not only in society and politics but also in the

6 During several UN meetings of the reproductive rights network in Mexico and in New York I consistently noticed that many feminist activists, journalists and academic researchers, though not necessarily Catholic believers, manifested a mix of fear and respectful deference when in the proximity of ecclesiastic robes and other paraphernalia of church officials, which prevented them from effectively negotiating with the Vatican representatives despite their deeply ingrained anti-religious stance.

spiritual indigenous domains. Thus an indigenous woman from *Moloj Mayib*, a political Mayan women's organisation, complained regarding her encounter with feminists:

[T]hey question us very much, they insist that we should question our culture ... what we do not accept is their imposition, that they tell us what we have to do, when we have the power to decide by ourselves. [I do not mean] ... that the feminist comes and shares tools with us and we are able to do it: that she could support me, that she can walk by my side ... but she should not impose on me. This is what many feminist women have done, be imposing. (Maria Estela Jocón, *Memoria*, 274-275)

Ellas cuestionan mucho el hecho de que tienes que cuestionar tu cultura. Lo que no nos gusta es la imposición, que te digan lo que tienes que hacer, cuando tu tienes el poder de decidir sobre ti. No es que la otra... feminista venga y me de las herramientas para hacerlo: que me puede ayudar, que puede caminar conmigo,...pero que no me imponga. Eso es lo que tal vez muchas mujeres feministas han hecho, imponer. (Maria Estela Jocón, *Memoria*, 274-275)

The opinion of this indigenous woman is confirmed by Gayatri Spivak's critique of "the international feminist tendency to matronise the Southern woman as belonging to gender oppressive second-class cultures" (Spivak 1999:407).

Decolonised thinking grounded in a different epistemological framework is required.

A world constructed by fluid dual oppositions, beyond mutually exclusive categories

To be able to comprehend contemporary indigenous spirituality it is important to review some of the tenets of Mesoamerican ancestral 'embodied thought' (Marcos 1998).

Duality is basic for a (focal in) spirituality understood as a cosmic vision of life. Duality – not dualism – is pervasive in indigenous thought and spirituality. The pervasiveness of a perception with no equivalent in Western thought could, perhaps, in itself explain the persistent failure to penetrate and comprehend indigenous worlds.

According to Mesoamerican cosmology the dual unity of feminine and masculine is fundamental to the creation of the cosmos, as well as its (re)generation and sustenance. The fusion of feminine and masculine in one bipolar principle is a recurring feature of almost every Mesoamerican community today. Divinities themselves are gendered: feminine and masculine. There is no concept of a virile god (e.g. the image of an old man with a white beard, as the Christian God has sometimes been represented) but rather a dual mother/

father protector-creator. In Nahuatl culture this dual god/goddess is called *Ometeotl*, from *ome*, 'two', and *teotl*, 'god'. Yet *Ometeotl* does not mean 'two gods' but rather 'god Two' or, better, 'divinity of Duality'. The name results from the fusion of *Omecihuatl* (*cihuatl*, 'woman' or 'lady') and *Ometecuhtli* (*tecuhтли*, 'man' or 'lord'), that is, of the Lady and the Lord of Duality.

The protecting *Ometeotl* has to be alternately placated and sustained. Like all divine beings, it was not conceived of as purely beneficial. Rather, it oscillated – like all other dualities – between opposite poles and thus could be either supportive or destructive. In addition, a multiplicity of goddesses and gods entered into diverse relations of reciprocity with the people. Elsewhere I have dealt more comprehensively with the gods and goddesses of the Mesoamerican cosmovision (Marcos 2006). Scholars recognise that the religiosity of the entire Mesoamerican region is pregnant with similar symbolic meanings, rituals and myths concerning the condition of supernatural beings and the place of humans in the cosmos. One of our most eminent ethno-historians, Alfredo Lopez Austin (2001), refers to this commonality of perceptions, conceptions and forms of action as the *núcleo duro*, the hard core of Mesoamerican cultures.

Duality, defined as a complementary duality of opposites, is the essential ordering force of the universe and is also reflected in the ordering of time. Time is marked by two calendars, one ritual-based and the other astronomical. The ritual calendar is linked to the human gestation cycle, that is, the time needed for a baby to be formed in the mother's womb. The other is an agricultural calendar that prescribes the periods for seeding, sowing and planting corn. Maize (corn) is conceived of as the earthly matter from which all beings in the universe are made (Marcos 2006.) Human gestation and agricultural cycles are understood in terms of this concept of time-duality, as are feminine and masculine, but dualities extend far beyond these spheres. For instance, life and death, above and below, light and dark, and beneficence and malevolence are considered dual aspects of the same reality. Neither pole invalidates the other. Both are in constant mutual interaction, flowing into one another. Mutually exclusive categories are not part of the epistemic background to this worldview, whose plasticity is still reflected in the way indigenous women deal with life and conflict. They seldom remain mired in a position that would deny its opposite. Their philosophical background allows them to resist impositions and at the same time to incorporate modern elements into their spirituality. Fluidity and selectivity in adopting novel attitudes and values attest the ongoing reconfiguration of their frame of reference.

The principle of fluid duality has held indigenous worlds together over the centuries. It has been both concealed and protected by its non-intelligibility to outsiders, and it has safeguarded this 'subaltern Other' against inimical incursions into their native philosophical territory. The hard core of indigenous

cultures has been a well-kept secret. Even today, among many native communities in the Americas, exposing this secret background to outsiders is considered a betrayal of the community.⁷ It is only recently that indigenous women themselves have started unveiling it. From my position as an outsider I felt pressed to seek permission from Nubia, a Tepoztlán Nahua indigenous leader, before I could interview her on her beliefs, conception of duality, and ritual in the ceremonies of her village. She consented, but did not allow me to ask my questions without her explicit previous agreement. At present some indigenous women and men are becoming vocal proponents of their religious and philosophical heritage and have agreed to articulate and share it with the outside world.

The people incarnating living indigenous traditions have played almost no part in the formation of academic theories. They were rarely consulted, but neither did they care to validate or invalidate the views of the so-called experts who officially ‘defined’ their worlds. Silence was their weapon of survival. Only recently have they learnt to use, critically and autonomously, whatever knowledge has been collected about them. The indigenous women explained that they want to “systematize the oral traditions of our peoples through the elders’ knowledge and practices” (*Memoria* 62).

Duality and gender

In the indigenous Mesoamerican world gender is constructed within the pervasive concept of duality (Marcos 1998; 2006). Gender, that is masculine/feminine duality, is the root metaphor for the whole cosmos. Everything is identified as either feminine or masculine, and this applies to natural phenomena such as rain, hail, lightning, clouds; living beings: animals, plants and humans; and even to periods of time such as days, months and years (Lopez Austin 1988). All these entities have a feminine or masculine ‘breath’ or ‘weight’. It is evident, then, that this perception of gender corresponds to a duality of complementary opposites, which in its turn is the fabric of the cosmos. Duality is the linking and ordering force that creates a coherent frame of reference for indigenous peoples, the knitting yarn that weaves together all apparent disparities (Quezada Noemí 1997; Marcos 1993).

The Summit documents foreground and help to explain the concept that duality is also a basic referent of indigenous spirituality:

⁷ Inés Talamantes, a native American professor of religious studies who studies the ethnography of her own Mescalero Apache culture, once confided to me that she was forbidden by her community to reveal the deep meanings of their ceremonies.

To speak of the gender concept presupposes the concept of duality emerging from the indigenous cosmovision ... the whole universe is ruled by duality: the sky and earth, night and day, sadness and happiness, they complement each other. The one cannot exist without the other. (*Summit Doc. Género 6*)

Everything is ruled by the concept of duality, certainly men and women. (*Memoria 231*)

Hablar del concepto de género supone remitirse al concepto de dualidad manejado desde la cosmovisión indígena...ya que todo el universo se rige en términos de dualidad: el cielo y la tierra, la noche y el día, la tristeza y la felicidad, se complementan el uno al otro. (Summit Doc. Genero 6)

Todo se rige en términos de Dualidad, indudablemente, el hombre y la mujer. (Memoria 231)

Duality is something we live through, it is there ... we learn of it within our spirituality and we live it in ceremonies, we live it when we see that in our families women and men, mother and father take the decisions. (Candida Jimenez, Mixe indigenous woman, *Summit Doc. Genero 6*)

La dualidad es algo que se vive, que se da...nos la enseñan en la espiritualidad y lo vivimos en la ceremonia, lo vivimos cuando vemos familias en las que las mujeres y los hombres, el papa y la mama deciden. (Candida Jimenez, Mixe indigenous woman, Summit Doc. Genero 6)

Yet despite the reverential espousal of the ancestral concept of gender duality and complementarity, contemporary indigenous women express some reticence and even rejection of certain aspects. Their arguments are based on how it is lived today in many indigenous communities. For example, in the Summit document dedicated to "Gender from the perspective of indigenous women" Maria Estela Jocón, a Mayan Guatemalan wise woman, remarks that duality today

is something we should question, it is a big question mark, because as theory it is present in our cosmovision and in our customary laws, as theory, but in practice you see many situations where only the man decides ... mass media, schools and many other issues have influenced this principle of Duality so it is a bit shaky now. (*Summit Doc, Genero 7*)

La Dualidad hoy en día es cuestionante, es un signo de interrogación grandísimo, porque como teoría existe en nuestra cosmovisión y en nuestras costumbres, como teoría, pero en la práctica se ven muchas situaciones donde solamente el hombre decide...los medios de comunicación, la escuela y muchos otros elementos han influido para que ese principio de la Dualidad esté un poquito tambaleant. (Summit Doc. Genero 7)

Alma Lopez, a young self-identified indigenous feminist, who is a *regidora* in her community, believes that the concept of duality of complementary opposites has been lost:

The philosophical principles that I would recover from my culture would be equity, and complementarity between women and men, women and women, and between men and men.

Today the controversial complementarity of Mayan culture does not exist. (Duarte 2002: 278)

Los principios filosóficos que yo recuperaría de mi cultura son la equidad, la complementariedad entre hombres y mujeres, entre mujeres y mujeres, entre hombres y hombres ... Actualmente esa famosa complementariedad de la cultura maya no existe. (Duarte, 2002, 178)

However, beyond reticence or even outright negation of contemporary and lived practices of inherited philosophical principles, indigenous women are still claiming them, still want to be inspired by them, and propose to reinstate them in their contemporary struggles for gender justice. They deem it necessary not only to recapture their ancestral cultural roots and beliefs, but also to see them as a potent resource in their quest for gender justice and equity.

Today there are big differences between the condition of women in relation to that of men. This does not mean that it was always like this. In this case there is the possibility of returning to our roots and recovering the space that is due to women, based on indigenous cosmovision. (*Memoria* 133)

En la actualidad existen grandes diferencias entre la situación de la mujer con relación a la del hombre, no significa que siempre fue así, en este caso existe al posibilidad de retomar las raíces y recuperar el espacio que le corresponde a la mujer basado en la cosmovisión indígena. (Memoria 133)

The Summit document dedicated to gender has the subtitle *De los aportes de las mujeres indígenas al feminismo* (Indigenous women's contributions to feminism). In this portion of the document, too, women cast off their role as recipients of a feminism imposed on them by outsiders and instead proclaim that their feminist vision has contributions to offer other feminist approaches. Among their contributions to feminism are the innovative concepts of *parity*, *duality* and *equilibrium*. The first paragraph explains that

some key aspects of indigenous movements have to be emphasised. They are the concepts of duality, equilibrium and harmony with all the implications we have mentioned already. (*Summit Doc. Genero* 31)

puntualizar algunas visiones de equilibrio, dualidad y armonía, con todas las implicaciones anteriormente citadas. (Summit Doc. Gener, 31).

It also proposes

[t]o all indigenous peoples and women's movements a revision of cultural patterns ... with the objective of propitiating gender relations based on equilibrium. (*Summit Doc. Genero* 37)

A todos los Pueblos Indígenas y movimientos de mujeres indígenas, revisión de los patrones culturales con capacidad autocrítica, con el fin de propiciar unas relaciones de género basadas en el equilibrio. (Doc. Genero 37)

Duality, equilibrium, and harmony are among the basic principles of their feminist practices. Indigenous women claim that in their spirituality and cosmology the demands for equality by the 'other' feminist movements could better be interpreted as a search for equilibrium.

Equilibrium as gender equity

Equilibrium as conceived in indigenous spirituality is not the static repose of two equal weights or masses. Rather, it is a force that constantly modifies the relation between dual or opposite pairs. Like duality itself, equilibrium or balance permeates not only relations between men and women but also relations among deities, between deities and humans, and among elements of nature. The constant search for this balance was vital for the preservation of order in every sphere, from daily life to the operation of the cosmos. Equilibrium is as fundamental as duality itself.

Duality, then, is not a binary ordering of 'static poles'. Balance in this view can best be understood as an agent that constantly modifies the terms of dualities and thereby bestows a singular quality on the complementary pairs of opposites that permeate all indigenous thought (as seen in the Summit documents and declarations). Equilibrium is constantly re-establishing its own balance. It endows duality with flexibility or plasticity that makes it flow, impeding stagnation. There is no exclusively feminine or exclusively masculine being. Rather, beings possess these forces in different degrees or combinations. The imperceptible 'loading' or 'charge' that all beings – whether rocks, animals or people – have is feminine or masculine. Frequently entities possess both feminine and masculine propensities simultaneously in different gradations that perceptibly change and shift (Lopez Austin 1988).

The gender documents were direct transcriptions of the focus group discussions. The following rich and spontaneous evaluations of equilibrium express the indigenous conception of gender equity:

We understand the practice of gender perspective to be a respectful relationship... of balance, of equilibrium – what in the Western world would be equity. (*Summit Doc. Genero 6*)

Se entiende así la práctica de enfoque de género como una relación respetuosa,...de balance, de equilibrio-lo que en occidente sería de equidad. (Summit Doc. Genero 6)

Equilibrium means taking care of life ... when community values of our environment and social community are respected, there is equilibrium. (*Memoria 132*)

El equilibrio es velar por la vida...Cuando los valores de la comunidad, de nuestro medio social y de nuestro entorno son respetados hay equilibrio. (Memoria 132)

Between one extreme and the other there is a centre. The extremes and their centre are not absolute, but depend on a multiplicity of factors ... variable and not at all exact... [Duality] is equilibrium expressed at its maximum. (*Memoria 231*)

Entre extremo y extremo se encuentra el centro. Los extremos de la escala, así como su centro, no son cualidades absolutas, sino dependen de multitud de factores...variables y en absoluto exactos... [la Dualidad] es el equilibrio, en su máxima expresión. (Memoria 231)

Indigenous women refer to equilibrium as an attainable ideal for the whole cosmos, and as the best way to express their own views of gender equity.

The spirituality of immanence

In the fluid, dual universe of indigenous spiritualities the domain of the sacred is all-pervasive. There are strong continuities between the natural and the supernatural worlds, whose sacred beings are closely interconnected with humans, who in turn perpetuate this interdependence in all their activities. Enacting this principle at the Summit, every single activity started with an embodied ritual. The women from Latin American indigenous communities woke up early in the morning. I was given a room on the second floor, directly above the room of Rigoberta Menchú. The sounds of the early morning sacred ritual were a reminder that I was hosted for those days in an indigenous universe. The processions and chants were led by a couple of Mayan ritual specialists: a woman and a man. We prayed and walked through the gardens and premises of the hotel where we stayed. A fancy four-star hotel that had never witnessed anything like this before was taken over by the indigenous world. Nothing ever started, at this United Nations protocol, without rhythmic sound and chants, offerings of *copal* (a sort of Mexican incense), fruits, flowers and coloured candles to the four points of the universe (compass). The sacred indigenous world was present among us; we could feel it. It was alive in the atmosphere and within each of the participants. It was also in the flowers, candles and fruits and the rhythmic repetition of words.

In striking contrast to indigenous spirituality, the dominant tradition in Christian theology stresses 'classical theism', defined as centring on a metaphysical concept of an ontologically transcendent God independent of the world. This God concept has met with increasing criticism, particularly from eco-feminist and process theologians (Keller 2002; Gevara 2001). In

indigenous spirituality, the relationship with the supernatural world lies elsewhere:

The cosmic vision of life is to be connected with the surroundings, and all the surroundings have life, so they become SACRED: we encounter earth, mountains, valleys, caves, plants, animals, stones, water, air, moon, sun, stars. Spirituality is born from this perspective and conception in which all beings that exist in Mother Nature have life and are interrelated. Spirituality is linked to a sense of COMMUNITY in which all beings are interrelated and complementary. (*Memoria* 128)

La visión cósmica de la vida es estar conectado con el entorno y todo lo que hay en el entorno tiene vida, por lo que adquiere un valor SAGRADO: encontramos tierra cerros, planicies, cuevas, plantas, animales, piedras, agua, aire, luna, sol, estrellas. La espiritualidad nace de esta visión y concepción en la que todos los seres que hay en la Madre Naturaleza tienen vida y se interrelacionan. La espiritualidad está ligada al sentido COMUNITARIO, donde los seres se interrelacionan y se complementan. (*Memoria* 128)

Ivone Gevara, a Brazilian eco-feminist theologian, recalls how an Aymara indigenous woman responded to Gevara's theological perspective: "With eco-feminism I am not ashamed anymore of expressing beliefs from my own culture. I do not need to emphasize that they have Christian elements for them to be considered good ... they simply are valuable" (Gevara 2001:21).

Eco-feminist theology advocates complex novel positions centring on respect for earth and reverence for nature. This is not the place to elaborate further on the implications. Many indigenous women perceive this feminist theology as easier to understand and closer to their indigenous spirituality than Catholic theism. These bridges between Christian and indigenous spiritualities become more intelligible when we reflect on the main characteristics that shape the indigenous relationship with nature: its divine dimensions, personification of deities in humans, the fluidity between immanent and transcendent, and the fusion with the supernatural that women can and should enact. There is no exclusive relationship with a transcendent being called God; there is no mistrust of the flesh and the body; there is sanctity in matter:

We recover indigenous cosmovision as our 'scientific heritage', recognising the elders as ancient carriers of wisdom. (*Memoria* 60)

Retomamos la cosmovisión indígena o ciencia de los Pueblos indígenas, reconociendo a los ancianos y ancianas como portadores de sabiduría ancestral... (*Memoria* 31)

That the indigenous women of different cultures and civilisations of Abya Yala do not forget that they are daughters of the land, of the sun, of the wind and of fire and that their continuous relation with the cosmic elements strengthens their political participation in favour of indigenous women and indigenous peoples. (*Memoria* 63)

Que las mujeres indígenas de las diferentes culturas y civilizaciones de Abya Yala no se olviden que son hijas de la tierra del sol, del viento y del fuego y que su relación continua con los elementos cosmogónicos fortalecerán su participación política a favor de las Mujeres indígenas y de los Pueblos indígenas. (Memoria 34)

The female body, a fluid and permeable corporeality, is conflated with Earth as a sacred place; women regard themselves as integrally part of this sacred Earth. The spirit is not perceived as the opposite of matter, neither is the soul the antithesis of the flesh.

Embodied religious thought

According to dominant Western epistemic traditions the very concept of body is formed in opposition to mind. The body is defined as the place of biological data, of the material, of the immanent. Since the 17th century the body has also been conceptualised as that which marks the boundaries between the interior self and the external world (Bordo & Jaggar 1989:4). In Mesoamerican spiritual traditions, on the other hand, the body has vastly different characteristics from those of the Western anatomical or biological body. In the Mesoamerican view exterior and interior are not separated by the hermetic barrier of the skin. Between outside and inside, permanent and continuous there is exchange. For a clearer understanding of how the body is conceptualised in indigenous traditions we must think of it as a vortex in whirling, spiral movement that fuses and expels, absorbs and discards, and through this motion is in permanent contact with all elements of the cosmos.

A spirituality of collectivity and the interconnectedness of all beings

For indigenous peoples, then, the world is not 'out there', established outside and separate from them. It is within them and even 'through' them. Actions and their circumstances are much more interwoven than in Western thought, in which the 'I' can be analytically abstracted from its surroundings. The body's porosity, moreover, reflects the essential porosity of the cosmos, a permeability of the entire 'material' world that defines an order of existence characterised by continuous interchange between the material and the immaterial. The cosmos literally emerges, in this conceptualisation, as the complement of a permeable corporeality. It is from this very broad perspective that indigenous women's use of the controversial term 'complementarity' should be examined. From their perspective it is not only feminine and masculine that are said to be

complementary but, as *Comandanta* Esther insisted in her address to the Mexican Congress, complementarity embraces everything in nature. She explained that earth is life, is nature, and we are all part of it. This simple phrase expresses the interconnectedness of all beings in the Mesoamerican cosmos (Lopez Austin 1988). Beings are not separable from one another. This principle engenders a very particular form of human collectivity with little tendency to individuation. This sense of connectedness has been found consistently in contemporary indigenous medical systems and also in the first historical primary sources (Lopez Austin 1988). The 'I' cannot be abstracted from its surroundings. There is ongoing traffic between inside and outside (Marcos 1998). Lenkesdorf (1999) interprets an expression in Tojolabal (a Mayan language of Chiapas): '*Lajan, lajan aytik.*' The phrase literally means '*estamos parejos*' ('we are all at the same level) but should be understood as 'we are all subjects'. Lenkesdorf maintains that this phrase conveys the intersubjectivity basic to Tojolabal culture.

"Spirituality," say the indigenous women at the Summit, is born from this vision and concept, according to which all beings that exist in Mother Nature are interrelated. Spirituality is linked to a communitarian sense that all beings are interrelated and complement each other in their existence. (Memoria 128)

Among the various examples of pervasive spiritual and cosmological references reproduced by the indigenous peoples of the Americas, this one seems to be crucial: the interconnectedness of everyone and everything in the universe: the intersubjective nature of men and women, interconnected with earth, sky, plants and planets. This is how we must understand the defence of the earth "that gives us life, that is the nature that we are", as *Comandanta* Esther explained to the legislators (2001).

"Indigenous peoples' spirituality," the Summit document declares, "revives the value of nature and humans in this century. The loss of this interrelationship has caused a disequilibrium and disorder in the world" (*Memoria* 134).

En la Espiritualidad de los pueblos indigenas se recupera el valor importante de la naturaleza y el ser humano...la perdida de esta relación ha desatado una serie de desequilibrios en el mundo. (Memoria 134)

[A] cosmic and conscious spirituality helps to re-establish equilibrium and harmony ... as women we have the strength, the energy capable of changing the course for a better communal life. (Memoria 135)

Una espiritualidad cosmica y consciente conduce al equilibrio, a la armonía...Como mujeres tenemos la fuerza, la energía capaz de cambiar rumbos hacia una mejor vida comunitaria. (Memoria 135)

Spirituality emerges from traditional wisdom, but the document also stresses that, “we have to be conscious of the richness of the worldwide cultural diversity” (*Summit Doc. Género* 31). Again we perceive a characteristic openness, a ‘transnational’ consciousness that has been influenced by women’s movements and feminist practices.

Indigenous ethnicities are not self-enclosed but rather envision themselves in active interaction with a world of differences: national, bi-national, and transnational. International indigenous movements are building bridges all over the world and gaining momentum. There is a growing transnational language of cultural rights espoused by the ‘indigenous’ worldwide. They all acknowledge the damage that diverse colonialisms have done to their worldviews and have begun to echo each other concerning the value of recovering their own spiritualities and cosmologies.⁸ In recent years indigenous peoples have intensified their struggle to break free from the chains of colonialism and its oppressive spiritual legacy. Indigenous women’s initiatives to recover their ancestral religious heritage constitute a decolonising effort. By deconstructing past captivities they recreate a horizon of ancestrally inspired spirituality. They lay claim to an ethics of recovery while rejecting the violence and subjugation suffered by their ancestors in the religious and cultural domain. “We only come to ask for justice,” the organised indigenous women have repeatedly declared. Yes, justice is their demand: material, social, and political justice. They also seek recognition of and respect for their cosmological beliefs as an integral part of their feminist vision.

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8 See Kepa 2006; Tuhiwai 1999; Siem 2005; Palomo et al. 2003; Linita Manu’tu 2000; Champagne & Abu-Saad 2005; Villebrun 2005.

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“Land is life”: cultural energies of indigenous spirituality

José M. de Mesa

Introduction

Speaking, as it were, for all the indigenous peoples of the Philippines,¹ a member of the Manobo in Mindanao articulates their overall experience of losing their land and of the erosion of their cultures in the recent history of the country as follows: “Our experience proved that development is there to displace us and exploit the rich natural resources found in our ancestral domain. Many times, this also divided us. If anything, what happened and is still happening is wide scale land grabbing displacing our people with a total disregard of our culture” (Gaspar 2000:2).² Behind this experience is a version of economic globalisation³ that basically regards land as a commodity that can be owned and traded for profit. Against the background of increasing global contact between peoples brought about in its initial stages by colonisation, the rough beginnings of such dispossession are connected partly with the presence of the Spanish colonisers but mainly with the American colonial regime. It is true that actual control rather than any outright claim by the Spaniards paved the way for depriving the IPs of their land. But it was the land policy of the American colonial government that left them practically landless by stating that untitled land was public land. That view officially rendered the IPs landless squatters on land they had been occupying from time immemorial.⁴

1 There are 42 indigenous groups in the Philippines; they constitute about 10% of the national population (cf. Tauli-Corpuz & Alcantara 2004:45). The term ‘indigenous peoples’ (IPs) in this paper refers to the ethno-linguistic groups in the Philippines who were not Christianised or Islamised. Collectively they are also known as *katutubo* (Tagalog term), *lumad* (Visayan Mindanaon term), cultural communities, ethnic minorities and tribal Filipinos. Basic similarities in their view of land warrant the assumption that they have a common concept of it. See generalised statements in Gaspar (2000:12-15, 104-107, 110-113, 117-118) and Andres (2000:69-70).

2 The Philippine bishops testify to this situation. See Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines (1988).

3 See “Globalization” in *Wikipedia* at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Globalization> (accessed 23 June 2008).

4 A fuller discussion of this development is found in Gaspar (2000:16-20, 94).

Underlying all this, however, was a shift from the IPs' understanding of land as life to one that saw it as "a commodity which could be traded by the exchange of a piece of paper" (Gaspar 2000:115). The latter is driven by "an economic model – industrial, consumer-oriented, and growth dependent – which is intrinsically destructive of the natural world" (Hadsell 1997:115). Progressive deprivation of their ancestral domains since then has led to relentless exploitation of natural resources through logging,⁵ mining,⁶ energy infrastructure projects (including geothermal and hydro-electric plants and dams),⁷ agri-businesses,⁸ commercial tree planting⁹ and tourism projects like resorts and golf courses (Gaspar 2000:31-55).¹⁰ But what exactly is this 'land' that the IPs are losing? What does it mean to them?

The meaning of land for the indigenous peoples

Land is a cardinal reality for IPs, far more than just soil or turf. It is undeniably a geographical space they occupy and a source of sustenance, but it is more than that. Indigenous belief about land, as our discussion will show, entails an inseparable interplay between its literal meaning as earth, soil, physical turf, and its symbolic meaning in their culture.¹¹ The former grounds the latter, while

5 For example, the forest cover of Mindanao, the biggest island in the south, was only 18% in 1993. Timber was being cut down then at a rate of 18 000 hectares a year (cf. Gaspar 2000:34). It was expected that by mid-1990 all virgin forest on the island of Luzon would have been logged off (cf. Tauli-Corpuz & Alcantara 2004).

6 The Philippine government passed the Philippine Mining Act in 1995, opening mining rights in areas inhabited by the IPs to foreign investors (Gaspar 2000:47-50).

7 The construction of a geothermal plant in the Mount Apo area in Mindanao by the Philippines National Oil Company (PNOC) in 1992, despite widespread opposition by the *datus* of nine indigenous tribes, their lowland supporters in Congress and the media, was pushed through and it has since become operational (cf. Gaspar 2000:45-46). Gaspar (2000:125-127) cites other development projects that have displaced IPs from their ancestral land.

8 An example would be the acquisition of 5 569 hectares and control of more than 10 000 hectares of the ancestral land of the *B'laans* by Dole Philippines since 1963 (cf. Gaspar 2000:40-41).

9 In 1990 the Department of Energy and Natural Resources (DENR) initiated the so-called Industrial Forest Management Agreement (IFMA) to allow local timber industries to plant trees for commercial purposes in the ancestral domains of IPs. This scheme has left little or no room for the subsistence activities of the affected IPs (cf. Gaspar 2000:37-40).

10 "The situation today has become enormously problematic for the indigenous peoples since there are less and less unoccupied forests and highlands. Unless they can hold on to their ancestral domains, they will not be able to survive the current, and by far the most vicious, outside encroachment into their lives and cultures" (Gaspar 2000:5-6).

11 The sacramental attitude, so characteristic of Catholicism, challenges the rationalist scientific mindset which reduces matter to just an objective reality which can be dissected and analysed. This sense of sacramentality is part of contemporary reflection on indigenous spirituality. Lourie

the latter expresses the communal meanings attached to the former. The term, used in this sense, will “continually move back and forth between literal and symbolic intentions” (Brueggemann 1977:2), between where people literally live and how they exist culturally. Perhaps a synthesis of IPs’ views of land will be helpful. Below we spell out of the various elements constituting the key cultural belief of IPs that ‘land is life’ (Gaspar 2000:107).¹²

Land as source, setting and community of life

Firstly, land is life because it is the source of life. The living arose from the land and will return to it when they die.¹³ Human beings are earth creatures. Cultivation of the land also enables them to grow and develop. The earth is precious and sacred to indigenous people for “in the land and the forest, [they] have God’s breast which provides [them with] all that [they] need ... like an infant given milk, the perfect food” (Ligo & Fabella 1995:10). Land is life, secondly, because it is the setting of life. Understood as an ancestral domain, it means their primary habitat that includes everything to be found on it: the forest and its trees, plains and fields, rivers, creeks and streams, and the variety of plants, animals and minerals. As a whole, land is where IPs live their lives and where they till, plant, harvest and hunt (Andres 2000:59). It is both their physical environment and territorial base. As someone put it, it is their ‘eco-niche’ (Gaspar 2000:122). It is also from this material base that a distinct culture, which defines their relationship with the land, evolved. Lourie Victor (2008) elaborates: “The deep reverence for life and the source of all Life combined with an embrace of the mystery and sacredness of creation as concretised by the ancestral domain gave birth to many of our rites, rituals, beliefs, practices, our laws, even our sensitivities and learning patterns as a people.” Land is life, thirdly, because it grounds and represents the community of life. The particular way of living, feeling and thinking that is their culture

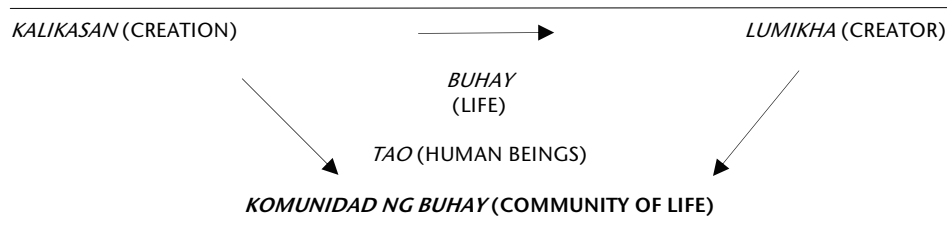
Victor (2008) says that it is the “sacramental bond with the land that has moved us [indigenous people] time and again to defend it, making it our most enduring struggle through the centuries”. To a ‘sacramental’ way of thinking the ideas of land as life and land as livelihood may, perhaps, be integrated without loss to the different perspectives. ‘Land is life’ is concretised in land as livelihood, and land as livelihood suggests a broader reality than is actually seen and felt in the day to day effort to make a living. It would be reductive to identify the former with the latter.

¹² The beliefs expressed here regarding land as a synthesis of different indigenous groups in the Philippines are corroborated by a more recent study of a specific group, the *Banwaons* (Andres 2000:54-61).

¹³ Some exegetes suggest that *ha adam* would be better translated as ‘earth creature’ (*ha adam*) rather than ‘human’ to emphasise its origin is from the earth (*ha adama*). Cf. Clifford & Murphy 1990:12.

embodies a conviction about the interconnectedness of life.¹⁴ Land is where they are in touch not only with the earth,¹⁵ but with their God, their ancestors¹⁶ and with the spirits of the land¹⁷ as well. It symbolises for them the whole of creation and is the web of life.¹⁸ So land as life is land as interconnected life, a life of relationships. Given all the above elements incorporated into the sentiment of land as life, one can also say that to IPs land is ‘home’.¹⁹

The Mangyans, an indigenous group in the central Philippines, schematically presented their understanding of such interrelationships as a ‘community of life’:



According to the Mangyans life is maintained because of these relationships. They call the web of interwoven relationships the *kanlungan ng buhay* (sanctuary of life). Life finds a refuge or protection in relationships. Moreover, “because of the strong relationships that constitute the sanctuary of life, we may regard this totality as the ‘*komunidad ng buhay*’ (the community of life)” (PAMANA KA 2004:9)²⁰ It is in this context that they understand culture. The dynamics of the community of life creates culture, so it is a community process. Once created, culture in its turn promotes the relationships.

14 Longchar (2006) writes that we need a vision of “interrelatedness of all realities ... in a world shaped by globalization, rationalization, mechanization, objectification and fragmentation”.

15 “Until now, we *lumads* do not wear shoes since the land is connected to us,” remarks a *datu* of the *Banwaon* tribe (cf. Andres 2000:3).

16 There is also a perception of land as ancestors. Interview with Lourie Victor (19 January 2008).

17 For an example of relationship with spirits, see Manuel (2000:250). The importance IPs attach to spirits and of relating to them may suggest talking about land as ‘inspired’.

18 Land is seen as a resource shared reciprocally by the IPs, their gods, ancestors, kindred and future descendants (Gaspar 2000:14; also see 1996:201).

19 The official pledge of allegiance recited by students in the Philippines appears to embody the various aspects of land as understood by IPs. Translated from Filipino it says: “I love the Philippines. It is the land of my birth. It is the home of my people. It cares for me and helps me to be strong, happy and useful.” The Filipino text can be found at <http://www.geocities.com/Heartland/Ranch/6279/PILIPINO.html> (accessed 2 July 2008).

20 PAMANA KA stands for *Paaralang Mangyan Na Angkop sa Kulturang Aalagaan*, in English: ‘Mangyan school appropriate to the culture to be cared for’.

Given such a view of land, it is no surprise that Macliing Dulag, one of the acclaimed slain heroes of the IPs’ struggle²¹ against the unjust usurpation of their land by the powers that be, could declare, “*Apu Kabunian*, Lord of us all, gave us life and placed us in the world to live human lives. And where shall we obtain life? From the land. To work the land is an obligation, not merely a right. In tilling the land, you possess it. And so land is a grace that must be nurtured ... Land is sacred. Land is beloved” (Gaspar 2000:105).

Land is a gift

For IPs land that provides a habitat, nourishment and interconnected relationships is regarded as a gift from the creator, not an entitlement of human beings. “Land,” says Datu Manbalanio of Tabon-Tabon, “is a gift from *Magbabaya* (supreme being). It is sacred for it is where our life begins and here our life will end and where we will be buried. Our lives are interwoven with the land. It is like a mother to us. If land will be taken from us, our race will die. For life is not possible if there is no land” (Andres 2000:59).

Because their life and their land are of one piece, the expression that land is a gift is tantamount to saying that life and what gives life are gifts. The gift quality of the land surely includes their source of sustenance. So land is likened to “a mother at whose breast [they] suck for nourishment”, from whom they get food as well as medicine (Andres 2000:54).²²

But it is not merely physical nourishment that comes from the land. From its womb springs their culture: their knowledge, practices, rituals and traditions. Land also symbolises culture and identity (Andres 2000 59).²³ Their story and the meaning of their lives are both rooted in land. Their ‘space’ is narrative; their ‘human story’ is terrenely situated. The conviction that land is a gift from the creator evokes gratitude that incorporates a sense of responsibility both to the giver and to the gift.²⁴

21 Macliing Dulag was killed by government forces in 1980 for opposing the proposed Chico river dam project.

22 One indigenous person details the importance of land as nourishment by saying that “there one can get everything. It is where we get our betel nuts and if somebody is sick we get our medicines from the forest. If we have nothing to eat, we get food from the forest as well. All things that the *lumads* need can be found in the land” (Andres 2000:54).

23 To Macliing Dulag “[l]and is a grace ... From its womb springs our Kalinga life” (cf. Victor 2008).

24 We are reminded of Joshua’s declaration of fidelity to Yahweh. Confronting Israel with what Yahweh had done for Israel for generations, all the people responded by declaring, “God forbid that we should forsake the Lord to serve other gods!” As far as they were concerned, they too “shall serve the Lord” for it is he who brought them and their forefathers up from Egypt, who guarded them in their wanderings, and who drove out their enemies from the land (cf. Josh 24:1-18).

Land belongs to the community

The belief that land is a gift incorporates a communal understanding of ownership as well as a collective sense of responsibility for the land. Land cannot be owned, bought or sold, since it is both father and mother to humans, providing them with everything they need. It is regarded as a treasure that will outlast both the present generation and the money that could be gained if it were sold (Andres 2000:60). The fruits of the land may be divided by people, but not the land itself. It is owned by the creator, but human beings have the right to develop it and to live from it (Horfilla 1996:2001). Land is to be shared and cared for.

As Andres noted in her study of the *Banwaons*, “the whole tribe²⁵ owns the ancestral domain. It belongs not only to the present generation who are now enjoying the fruits of the land, but also to their ancestors who are buried in the land and to the future generations who will live their culture and identity in the land. As co-owners, all are guardians and stewards of the land and its resources” (Andres 2000:59). In the words of one young indigenous mother, “The land was entrusted to us by our parents and ancestors for us to protect and defend the forest, mountains and rivers for our livelihood. Land is the source of our lives and culture. We need to protect and care for it for future generations” (Andres 2000:60).²⁶

When IPs say that land is life, we cannot deny that for them existence, nourishment, community, identity and continuity are interwoven with land. As one commentator on the *Banwaon* tribe puts it, to them land is “the wellspring of life, the cradle of consciousness, the soil from which history grows, the arena for social and cultural practice, the basis for their political system; in short, it is the foundation for Banwaon identity. To be *Banwaon* is to be bound to the land” (Andres 2000:61).²⁷

To deepen our understanding of what land means to the IPs of the Philippines, a comparison with the biblical view of land may be helpful (Andres 2000:69-70). This does not suggest a one-to-one correspondence

25 “A *tribe*, viewed historically or developmentally, consists of a social group existing before the development of, or outside of, states, though some modern theorists hold that *contemporary* tribes can only be understood in terms of their relationship to states. The term is often loosely used to refer to any non-Western or indigenous society. Many anthropologists use the term to refer to societies organized largely on the basis of kinship, especially corporate descent groups (see clan and lineage).” Cf. “Tribe”, *Wikipedia* (accessed 4 June 2008). While not intended in this paper, in popular parlance the term ‘tribe’ sometimes connotes that which is inferior, parochial in outlook or backward.

26 Gaspar (2000:105-113) cites views of particular indigenous groups in the Philippines that show how they have maintained the foregoing view of land right up to the present.

27 It is interesting to note that even the sea-oriented indigenous group called the *Bajaos*, who find their ultimate refuge from threatening forces in the sea, value their link to the village and island where their huts are located (cf. Bottignolo 1995:11-15).

because of the different historical, cultural and religious contexts, but it does reveal broad and even major parallels between indigenous spirituality and the Judaeo-Christian tradition. In terms of theological significance, the situation of the IPs today as well as their existential interpretation of land calls forth certain riches of the Tradition for living and understanding the Christian life. This applies particularly to the significance of land.

Basis of comparison	Biblical land concept	Indigenous land concept
Worldview/ perspective	Land is a gift from YHWH. Land is sacred; the source of life; the basis of economic sustenance; symbol of identity and dignity, equality and freedom; protection against exploitation; physical object of the covenant.	Land is a gift from Magbabaya. Land is sacred; the foundation of life; source of knowledge and wisdom; physical basis of economic survival; arena of social and cultural values; foundation of spirituality and political autonomy; cradle of consciousness.
Land ownership	YHWH is the divine owner of the land; Israelites are the stewards, thus land cannot be sold or bartered. Principle of inalienability.	The whole tribe (past, present and future generations) owns the land. The present generation is the steward and trustee. Land cannot be owned by individuals, sold or bartered. Principle of inalienability.
Right to land	Each family/tribe received a portion of the inheritance and has the right to enjoy the bounty of the earth.	Each family has a right to a portion of the land, where they can build their house and which they can till. They have a right to enjoy the resources of the land.
Relationship with the land	There is a special relationship between YHWH, Israel and the land. Israel does not relate to the land except via YHWH. In their relationship with YHWH they have to care for the land and practise justice.	IPs share an intimate relationship with the land and all that is on it and with the spirits that inhabit the material world of humans.
Demands of the land	Israel is called to live as a model egalitarian community according to the statutes and laws of the covenant that demand respect for the land, protection from exploitation and greed.	IPs are models of egalitarian communities called to protect, nurture and defend the land for present and future generations.
Conflict/tension regarding the land	Conflict with the monarchial concept of land as a commodity that can be sold and traded and with the monarch’s right to acquire and possess land.	Conflict with the non-indigenous concept of land ownership and private property based on a legal document as opposed to the indigenous concept of actual presence and work done on the land as basis of ownership.

Land in contestation

When land is seen in this value-laden manner, it is no exaggeration to say that the ‘battleground’ on which an invasive, predatory type of globalisation and the indigenous Philippine peoples are in contestation is unquestionably land.²⁸ Its importance stems from being “joined to [their] life”; it is “the spring of life, and [they] live by means of the land” (Andres 2000:54). This sense of connectedness to land is crucial. “When our bodies are pinched, we hurt,” so goes their simple analogy. Thus “when the land is ravaged, it hurts even more. When the land is abused, all of us *lumads* [non-Muslim indigenous people] are abused with her” (Ligo & Fabella 1995:10).

But to the IPs land and culture are inextricably bound together. To them land is a living cultural symbol. As such it is “physical dirt freighted with social meanings derived from historical experience” (Brueggemann 1977:2). If we take into account the history of the IPs, their cultural processes and products (indigenous knowledge systems and practices), their inheritance and handing down of their cultural heritage, then it makes sense to spell out the significance of land as space “which has historical meanings, where some things have happened which are now remembered and which provide continuity and identity across generations. Place is space in which important words have been spoken which have established identity, defined vocation, and envisioned destiny. Place is space in which vows have been exchanged, promises have been made, and demands have been issued” (Brueggemann 1977:4-5).

In this sense land ‘speaks’. It speaks of their historical experience and their accumulated wisdom and knowledge. It speaks of their *world-feel*,²⁹ the spontaneous or intuitive total and integrated grasp of what land means existentially, for they see land, in the words of John Henry Newman, *per modum unius*. To quote the Kalinga leader, Macliing Dulag once more: “If land could speak, it would speak for us. It would speak of the bond that ties us

28 Cf. the last item in the table above. The extent of displacement the IPs are experiencing can be gleaned from a report of the *Kalipunan ng mga Katutubong Mamamayan ng Pilipinas* (KAMP) given at the *Asia workshop on globalisation and security: its impact on IPs* in Kuching, Sarawak (September 2003): 4.2 million hectares of IP land are open for agro-forest related businesses; 5 235 hectares have been given to big ranchers by pasture-lease agreement; 255 438 hectares to logging concessions; 1.4 million hectares for bio-diversity conservation projects; 434 388.44 hectares for timber plantations; 1.6 million hectares are subject to mining applications; and the government has promised to give 643 687 hectares by title deed to some preferred communities out of the 12 million IPs in the Philippines (see Andres 2000:76-77).

29 I use the term ‘world-feel’ for intuitive understanding of reality and ‘worldview’ for more reflexive comprehension of it.

together, forged by years and years of working and yielding ... If land could speak, it would speak for us, for the land is us.”³⁰

Land is contested on two levels: the literal and the symbolic. On the first level there is the tussle between the literal, perpetual retention of the physical land (or its recovery) by the IPs and continuing dispossession of it by powerful groups and individuals. Although it is of utmost importance and urgency, this paper cannot address that level of conflict. It can only advocate what is required if we wish “to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with [our] God” (Micah 6:8).

The second level of contestation, which Christian spirituality ought to deal with, is that of overall perception of reality and concomitant values. Will the belief that land is life that stands over against the outlook on land as a commodity or mere source of livelihood prevail, or will it succumb to the seduction of wealth and power? Here one witnesses a clash of worldviews, a contestation which may be of deeper and broader significance, because worldviews underpin policies, structures, modes of action and relationships. At odds are the land-inspired world-feel of the IPs and the land-alienated worldview of globalisation derived from the rationalism of the Enlightenment.

The land- inspired world-feel of the indigenous peoples

The way indigenous people understand the statement, ‘land is life’, is manifestly relational. Following this cue and reading it in the light of the Judeo-Christian tradition yields the following relationships:

- 1 The relationship with land (creation) emanates from the realisation that land represents a community of life. We are earthlings (*adam*) from the earth (*adama*), living creatures among other living creatures as Genesis 1:20, 24 suggests when it uses the same term for human beings and animals (Suggs 1992). Thus it is to be expected that when creation praises the Lord, human beings stand side by side, as it were, with all other creatures – angels, sun and moon, stars, the heavens, waters, sea monsters, fire and hail, snow and ice, wind, mountains and hills, fruit trees and cedars, wild animals and cattle, creeping creatures and winged birds (cf. Ps 148). Indeed, “we are earthlings, embedded in creation, and in relationship with the natural world” (Thompson 2002:64).
- 2 The relationship with the creator (God) arises from land seen as a gift and not an entitlement. For “where were [human beings] when [Yahweh] laid the foundations of the earth?” (cf. Job 38:4). What life gives by way of habitat and sources of nourishment and healing are regarded as specific or

30 As quoted by Lourie Victor in a National IP Situationer for the SFIC sisters’ retreat, “New wine in new wineskins: a journey to the periphery”, 5 April 2006, Little Flower Retreat House, Baguio City.

tangible manifestations of the gift of land. Catholicism cannot but affirm this 'sacramental' attitude of the indigenous people (cf. Boff 1987).

The sense that life is a gift engenders responsibility. Made in the image of God who creates and tends his 'garden', human beings are also expected to nurture the life they have been given. Today we hear many voices calling for a reinterpretation of humans' relationship with the earth as one of stewardship rather than domination.³¹ The Philippine bishops have called for the development of "a comprehensive theology of stewardship ... in view of making everyone a true steward of God's creation" (Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines 2008). The AGAPE document of the World Council of Churches, to cite another example, underscores the task of ensuring sustainable use of land and natural resources "in solidarity with indigenous peoples who seek to protect their land, water and communities."³² Valid though this is, it may not be enough. Perhaps what is ultimately called for is a sense of people's relatedness to the earth arising from relatedness to God. In this regard Filipino theologian Prisco Cajés mentions the importance of *koinonia*, the dimension of interrelationship and communion. He believes that the spirit of service (*diakonia*) or stewardship of creation ought to be realised in the context of genuine relationships (Cajés 2002:141-142).

- 3 Relations with fellow human beings originate from the foregoing two relationships. Consideration of others arises from a sense of responsibility for the gift of land. Land is meant to be shared, ensuring that all live from it. In this sense indigenous communities provide a model of egalitarian communal living that protects, nurtures and defends the land for present and future generations.

The land-alienated worldview of globalisation

It is common knowledge that a destructive potential which is both detrimental to humans and culturally erosive was unleashed by the processes of rationalisation, industrialisation and modernisation (cf. Hoffmann 1999:28-29). It is underpinned by the change of worldview in the West in the 18th century, starting with the assumption of non-relationality: an 'I' existing independently and trumpeting the primacy of reason. Because reason can solve all problems, even if only in principle, progress is presupposed. The autonomous 'I' looks at

31 Echlin (2003) thinks that the anthropocentrism inherent in the attitude of domination should rather be called 'anthroposolic' (human alone).

32 See the full text of "Alternative globalization addressing people and earth (AGAPE)" at www.oikoumene.org/.../alternative-globalization-addressing-people-and-earth-agape.htm (accessed 23 June 2008).

reality as non-self, as subject to object, suggesting that relationality (values) only gets in the way of objective knowledge (facts).³³

From this perspective IPs’ notion of land as a symbol of interrelationships clashes head-on with that of land seen in a detached, instrumental manner.³⁴ Land is deemed a thing, a commodity that can be traded, and is there for individual human use and benefit.³⁵ Thus investors take it for granted that objective economic facts take precedence over values of cultural identity and integrity which indigenous people cherish. Land is neither a gift of grace, nor is it sacred. Now enlightened by reason, people should no longer fear nature which they can scrutinise, comprehend and control through science and technology (Bosch 1991).³⁶

Although unspoken, such a mindset can be said to be ultimately responsible for prodding the Philippine government to promote, at the expense of the IPs, extractive industries (logging, ranching, mining) and launch industrial forest programmes, power-generating infrastructure and tourism projects that exploit the resources of the interior to the hilt (Gaspar 2000:79).³⁷ It makes one realise that the land-alienated worldview of the Enlightenment, which foments and legitimises such activities, is actually far more insidious, albeit less visibly deleterious, than the dispossession of the IPs of their land and destruction of the ecosystem.

33 For the different elements constituting the Enlightenment paradigm and its effect on the Christian faith, see Bosch 1991:264-273.

34 An example of this mindset’s inroads on Christian thought can be found in a paper read at the 1966 Church and Society conference in Geneva, which declares: “We are the first ... to have enough of that power actually at hand to create new possibilities almost at will. By massive physical changes deliberately induced, we can literally pry new alternatives from nature. The ancient tyranny of matter has been broken, and we know it ... We can change it [the physical world] and shape it to suit our purposes ... By creating new possibilities, we give ourselves more choices. With more choices, we have more opportunities. With more opportunities, we can have more freedom, and with more freedom we can be more human” (quoted in Bosch 1991:264-265).

35 A UN Special Rapporteur on Indigenous People reports: “Many indigenous people have expressed to me their conviction that the business interests of private or corporate enterprises, which over the years have continuously encroached upon their ancestral domains, are more protected than their own rights based on land use and occupation from time immemorial” (cited in Tauli-Corpuz & Alcantara 2004:191).

36 “Nature,” says Bosch (1991:264), “ceased to be ‘creation’ and was no longer people’s teacher, but the object of their analysis.”

37 Worth remembering in this connection is the warning issued by the Mayan Rigoberta Menchú, 1992 recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize: “If we do not make peace with our Mother Earth, we will not live very long; for humans do not rule Nature, but rather Nature governs the life of humanity” (quoted by Gorostiaga 1999:98).

The book of Genesis (2:25-3:19), however, also depicts the beginnings of sin and evil in relational terms, more specifically broken relationships.³⁸ Clearly regarded as a free human decision, humanity (*adam*) breaks its relationship with Yahweh (eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil in defiance of the Lord), breaks a relationship with a fellow human being (blaming the woman, in ironic contrast to the description of her as “bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh”),³⁹ and breaks its relationship with the land (land is cursed on account of *adam*, making tilling and tending it laborious). Subordination and obedience to Yahweh were withheld; transparency towards and trust in each other were betrayed; and the land given by Yahweh was lost.

Contestation mirrored in the Bible

What is happening today in the context of the IPs losing their land and the erosion of their cultures through globalisation has parallels in the Bible. The Old Testament in particular witnesses to two modes of perceiving and managing land: “sabbath land” and “royal land” (cf. Medaille n.d.). The former is covenant based, while the latter is based on wealth and power. Land seen through the lens of the sabbath has to be managed to ensure the well-being of the entire community, in which the well-being of each is intimately tied up with that of others. Underlying it is Yahweh’s command to honour right relations expressed in the doing of justice.

Land perceived in a royal perspective means that it serves to guarantee wealth and security for some at the expense of the poor and the weak. Accumulation of wealth and power becomes the primary concern. If it is necessary to marginalise, exclude or even eliminate people, then the royal handling of land will do so, as exemplified by the murder and dispossession of Naboth by Ahab and Jezebel (cf. 1 Kings 21). The sense of relationship, if it is still a consideration, is practically nil.

Strength from land

If one were to use an image for the way globalisation is affecting IPs and their spirituality, which is rooted in land and all it stands for, the myth of Herakles (Hercules) wrestling with Antaios, a son of Gaia (Earth), would be apt and instructive. As long as Antaios maintained contact with Gaia, he was

38 See “Sin” in Léon-Dufour (1988:550-551). Brueggemann (1977:15) argues that the history in Genesis regarding Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Noah and his family, and the people at Babel is about “people fully rooted in land living toward expulsion and loss of land”.

39 Subjection of woman in Israelite society is seen as part of the broken relationship between human beings and was not intended by God (see Clifford & Murphy 1990:12).

invincible. But Herakles, on the advice of Athena, lifted him up. Disconnected from Earth, he grew weak, was defeated and killed.⁴⁰

So ‘lifting them up’ from the land (i.e. dispossessing them of it), as Herakles did to Antaios, would mean their death. So-called global forces, both local and foreign, are driving IPs out and depriving them of their ancestral lands. In this way the Hercules that is globalisation is ‘lifting up’ the entire collective body of IPs from their contact with the land, paving the way for their ultimate defeat.⁴¹ Sadly, this is more and more the reality.⁴² It also strongly indicates that continued rootedness in land is their ‘salvation’ (what gives life).

The picture, however, is not simple. The impact of globalisation, that is neo-liberal capitalism, on IPs’ situation is perceived as not entirely negative. It comes with its offer of jobs in the companies and organisations it sets up, opportunities through roads it builds, educational benefits like scholarships it extends, and the increase in actual material wealth it promises in a consumer society.⁴³ Moreover, as noted by sympathetic yet thoughtful observers, the IPs themselves do not have a united stance regarding intrusion on their ancestral domains. Take the example of tribal groups living around the peaks of Mount Apo in Mindanao, who stood to lose land because of a government geothermal project. While they had every right to claim Mount Apo as their ancestral domain, there were those who did not object to such an intrusion and were even open to selling their rights of ancestral ownership. There were also difficulties arising from discrepancies between what was posited as the official position and what was in fact being implemented (Alejo 2000:25). That said, the general picture still indicates that more and more IPs are losing their land and are experiencing a weakening world-feel. It is this that leads to the actual erosion of their traditional cultures. Yet, on a more hopeful note, that is not the whole story.

40 “Antaios” in <http://theoi.com/Gigante/GiganteAntaios.html> (accessed 23 March 2008). The myth has also been applied to nutrition. Remarks a nutritionist: “Isn’t this what has happened to modern man? The pull of civilization has caused man to be separated from Mother Earth and this has resulted in his becoming weak and under-nourished, with loss of energy and vibrant health” (cf. Jensen n.d., 8).

41 An interesting parallel from scripture: “What is basic for man’s existence is his relation to the fertile soil (*‘adamah’*)” (cited in Brueggemann 1977:15). This is how G. von Rad summarises the tragedy and pathos of the Genesis narratives concerning land loss in Genesis.

42 For specific examples of the increasing destruction of IPs’ land, see Tauli-Corpuz & Alcantara (2004:54). “Over the past 25 years, resource extraction in ancestral domains in the Philippines grew exponentially. Presidential Decrees in the 1970s and Post-Marcos legislative acts legitimised the plunder of the peoples’ mines, forests and rivers.”

43 Interview with Br Karl Gaspar, C.Ss.R. author of *The lumads and globalization*, 28 May 2008. I asked him what has changed since he wrote the book in 1997. His general view was that the IPs’ situation has worsened, as they are increasingly being dispossessed of their land and, in consequence, experiencing continuous weakening of their cultural identity.

Responding to the crisis: from reaction to pro-action

If anything, the experience of dispossession has made the IPs' felt but largely implicit recognition of the importance of land into a conscious and reflexive knowledge of what it means.⁴⁴ Loss of it would be tantamount to ethnocide:⁴⁵

[The indigenous peoples'] displacement means the deprivation of the base of our identity as indigenous people, of our ethnicity, of our culture. If we allow this to continue further, this just might lay the groundwork of cultural extinction, *ethnocide* [my italics], a form of genocide which although not [involving] the physical extinction of an indigenous people, is the denial and deprivation of their identity as a people, nevertheless. This has undoubtedly been the fate of several indigenous communities who have not been able to defend their ancestral lands, and have already therefore been assimilated into modernisation, albeit with minority status.

The elders among the IPs, reading the signs of the times, are worried about the escalating negative impact of the modernising trend on many of the young: alienation from their culture; indifference towards the indigenous belief system, languages and cultural traditions; and assimilation into the lowlanders' culture (Gaspar 2000:55). If succeeding generations do not accept their historical and cultural legacy, what will happen to their ancestral domains?

Different means have been tried to, at least, stop this negative trend and, at most, reverse it. Not excluded was violent confrontation. This happened in the north when the conflict between the IPs of the Cordillera and government forces ended in the death of the distinguished Kalinga leader, Macliing Dulag. *B'laans* in South Cotabato battled to prevent agri-business plantations from taking over their land. *Ata-Manobos*, opposing the government scheme of allowing private companies to use their ancestral land commercially, waged several *pangayaw* (tribal vendettas), which led to casualties on both sides (Gaspar 2000:132-134).⁴⁶

Peaceful efforts have not been wanting. A number of these were aimed at uniting various indigenous groups in organisations (IPOs), while others, undertaken by either concerned individuals or non-governmental organisations (NGOs) on behalf of the IPs, helped through advocacy and lobbying. The

44 According to Peter Geremia PIME, a Catholic Italian missionary who has been working with the *Bilaan* tribe for many years, articulation of the centrality of land among the indigenous people started because they were being dispossessed of it by powerful groups. They began to express the meaning of land as an ancestral domain (interview with Peter Geremia, 13 April 2008).

45 An indigenous woman working for the Episcopal Commission on IPs (ECIP) in a conversation pointed out to me that the primary issue regarding land is not possession but their survival as a people (interview with Ms Lourie Victor of ECIP, 19 January 2008).

46 The trend towards violent resistance appears to be growing, according to Gaspar when I interviewed him last in May 2008.

church,⁴⁷ through the Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines (CBCP), which as early as 1972 had started the Episcopal Commission on Indigenous Peoples (ECIP) specifically in response to the needs of IPs, has embarked on an Indigenous Peoples’ Education Programme. In conjunction with this a church affiliated NGO, the Tribal Filipino Programme for Community Development Inc. (TFPCDI), has contributed to the cause of indigenous Filipinos through an integrated development programme which includes community organising, education, and training in primary health care and adult literacy. On the part of government, various IP-related bills were tabled in Congress. However, only one, the Indigenous Peoples’ Rights Act (IPRA), eventually became law in 1997, and it still needs to be implemented as intended (Gaspar 2000:135).

There are also instances when both peaceful and violent means were embraced. These include the experience of an indigenous woman, Vilma, who started out as a peaceful activist, but ended up taking up arms. Originally she founded the NGO *Tebtebba*, the Indigenous Peoples’ International Centre for Policy Research and Education, “to help build the capacity of indigenous peoples to assert their rights, especially in the light of the way globalisation is affecting the different indigenous peoples”. Eventually she joined the underground movement to “help strengthen the capacity of people to fight for what is due them” (Danenberg et al. 2007:232-233).⁴⁸

Worth noting among the various NGOs, in view of the intimate connection between land and culture among the IPs, is the part played by the Kaliwat Theatre Collective Inc. It undertook research among the Arakan Manobos to give this indigenous group a voice by documenting their history and socio-economic profile. Because the members were artists, they conducted cultural action workshops in the communities, which enabled them and the Manobos to interact and tell each other’s stories through song, dance, music, dramatic sketches and group discussions.⁴⁹ Kaliwat explained the rationale behind the project thus:

“Indigenous people’s culture is one of the strongest examples of a culture where art is integrated with life.” However, we also see in the indigenous communities ... the devastation that occurs when a culture is disrupted. Yet, “their survival can be directly related to the

47 The concept of church has influenced indigenous people like the *Bilaan*, who have formed their own church (*simbahan*), but have basically retained their own beliefs, rituals and practices. The underlying intention in forming such a *simbahan* is to unite the tribe in defence of their land against ‘globalising’ forces (interview with Peter Geremia, 13 April 2008).

48 In regard to the influence of human rights discourse on her decision to go underground, one can distinguish between two perspectives on land among IPs today: one that is rights based, the other heritage based.

49 The organisation, “recognizing the truth that the land issue is essentially a cultural issue and vice-versa,” seeks “to protect the land as cultural sanctuaries” (see Horfilla 1996:xxii, 228).

strength of their culture and their ability to rise above the attempts to destroy it" (Horfilla 1996:231).⁵⁰

This sentiment regarding the importance of culture has been echoed by the Indigenous Peoples' Apostolates (IPA). After noting how development and empowerment discourses since the 1950s treated culture as a mere afterthought, it stated: "For indigenous peoples, culture is not the afterthought that it is seen today, but the very wellspring of identity and life itself. From an indigenous people perspective, culture encompasses the political, the economic, the spiritual, the social, including identity, and for a sector that is discriminated against based on identity (not because of economic indicators like in the case of the urban and rural poor), culture, therefore, is an arena of struggle" (Episcopal Commission on Indigenous Peoples 2007). Similarly, in a dialogue between Christians and *lumads* sponsored by the Episcopal Commission for Inter-religious Dialogue, the latter resolved "to resurrect and return the lumad culture in their society which has become alienated" as well as "to prepare their own societies with regard to taking on the responsibility of lumad renewal" (Mercado 1998:38).

This cultural arena of struggle for the IPs, from a Judaeo-Christian perspective, is a soteriological issue. If we interpret salvation as wholeness, then even on the historical level all spheres of human life are intimately connected with soteriology.⁵¹ An indispensable dimension of life is cultural identity and integrity, a conviction which Vatican II shares. In *Gaudium et Spes* (art. 53) it states that "it is a fact bearing on the very person of [human beings] that [they] can come to authentic and full humanity *only through culture...* [my italics]" (Abbott 1966:259).

50 So indispensable is cultural identity, remarks a commentator, that even with globalisation forces militating against it, "worldwide, people go back to their roots and ethnicity". The faceless 'culture' based on capital and trade that globalisation had engendered has not relegated the issue of ethnic identity to the background (cf. Mercado 2008). The author, who claims that "identity matters", cites the resistance of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland to absorption into a UK identity, and the emergence of Catalan and "Ethnic Republics" when the Soviet Union collapsed. In a related comment Joseph Nye, dean of the John F. Kennedy School of Government of Harvard University, points out that countries can 'globalise' economically without homogenising. Cultural change is bound to happen because of modernisation and countries that modernise do not turn out the same. He cites Japan as an example. See "Globalization and its discontents", *Asia Society*, 10 July 2001 at <http://www.asiasociety.org/speeches/nye.html> (accessed 4 June 2008). Albeit in the context of colonisation, the same idea is expressed by Frans Wijsen (1999:123, 130-131), who says that "we tend to forget that in many cases [victims of history] played an active and creative role".

51 Schillebeeckx (1983:734-743) offers a scheme of seven anthropological constants. These are areas of our humanity in which salvation is to be made concrete.

Holding on to land through cultural affirmation

The IPs’ oneness with the land has enabled them to create and recreate ways of life (culture) that have given them the energy to cope with the challenges of life and its environment. Their cultures have provided them with a sense of identity, community and continuity. Because land is “the source of [their] lives and culture” (Andres 2000:60),⁵² defence of the land is also defence of their culture. One surmises that with decreasing contact with their physical land (loss of ancestral domains) there is increased reliance on their cultures to sustain their existence as IPs.⁵³ After all, for them their culture represents what is rooted in and what they have drawn from the land.⁵⁴

Just as land is sacred, culture is precious, because it shares the life-giving character of land. The capacity of people to create, modify and refashion culture to enhance human well-being speaks of verve and is seen as one of the creator’s provisions for human well-being. And because the creator’s dynamism is discernible in the inventiveness behind cultural expressions, it has been suggested that this creativity be considered “the signature of God in the human species” (interview with Lourie Victor). A sense of awe and wonder tends to accompany this recognition of human creativity, also expressed by Vatican II when it refers to cultures as “treasures which a bountiful God has distributed among the nations of the earth” (*Ad Gentes*, art. 11) (Abbott 1966:598).

This healthy dependence on their cultures inspires IPs to tap into latent cultural energies. They do so by affirming their cultural identity through enacting tradition and education. By actualising their traditions in ritual acts, both public and private, they seek verbally, visually, and dramatically to maintain a relationship with the land, draw from its power and foster their collective well-being in the present-day context – a different task from that of their ancestors and one that calls for recreation of their cultural identity. Through education they come to grips with the reality of social change and recreate their cultural identity, but this time reflexively.

52 In another instance, a Mangyan described being deprived of land as “life has been cut” (*parang pinutulan ng buhay*) (cf. PAMANA KA 2005:10).

53 Without denying the validity and value of a human rights based approach to land, my discussion takes its cue from one that is heritage based. For an example of a rights based approach, see Tauli-Corpuz & Alcantara (2004).

54 The importance of affirming one’s cultural or ethnic identity that is “rooted in bonds of shared past and perceived shared interests” vis-à-vis globalisation had been noted locally. Such a “primal source of identity” was likened to the North Star providing direction in the journey of life (cf. Mercado 2008).

Tapping into cultural energies by enacting tradition

Against the background of economic and cultural globalisation that foreign and local businesses and the Philippine government are so enthusiastic about, the question of cultural identity and integrity seems to be at best an irrelevant issue foisted on the Filipino people, and at worst a useless one, which only academics, who have all the time to discuss and dissect concepts as their primary preoccupation, can appreciate. To advocates of such globalisation ‘nationalism’ is something you cannot feed to a hungry and malnourished population. Or, they would argue, the identity issue will resolve itself as the economic one is addressed adequately. The real shame that Filipinos should be concerned about is the shame of being poor (Mendoza 2000:129).⁵⁵

Serving as a parable in response to this outlook is a study of the *Tuddok* (Pillars), cultural regeneration movement among the Obo Manobo tribe (cf. Alejo 2000:80-121; Mendoza 2000:129-134). It pinpoints key concerns that preoccupy indigenous people: land, cultural identity and integrity, and ancestry. The tribe lives in an area that was threatened by a 250 megawatt geothermal power plant to be erected by the Philippine National Oil Corporation at Mount Apo, Mindanao in the southernmost part of the Philippines. The mountain, rich in terms of biodiversity, has become a recognized heritage site in Southeast Asia. It is also home to several thousand people who consider it sacred.⁵⁶ But conflicting vested interests have also made Mount Apo a politically explosive site. Apart from being a hideout for armed insurgents, there were deleterious intrusions by business, the military and government in the area. Interventions by church groups and NGOs on behalf of the tribe were of little avail. The conflicting interests and actions left the Manobos apathetic to what was going on. In the midst of all this the most unfortunate and, perhaps, most fundamental affliction was a lack of will to survive and consequent indifference to permanent loss of their land due to the establishment of the power plant.

This dispirited outlook was articulated by the Manobos themselves when they told an anthropologist who wanted to study their situation, “Why do you still want to study us? We have no more culture here” (Alejo 2000:81).⁵⁷ The

55 Poverty is a major problem among the IPs. One indigenous group expressed their experience of poverty as “We are always hungry” (see Horfilla 1996:181).

56 One *datu* expressed this sentiment by saying, “In Manila I asked Cardinal Sin, ‘How would you feel if somebody bores a hole on the dome of your cathedral?’ We feel the same thing about the transgressions of Mount Apo” (Mercado 1998:28).

57 “The struggle of the indigenous peoples ... is more than just a struggle of an aggrupation of individuals for political, economic, and social rights; the struggle is for the *tribe as a living entity* and central to this is culture as an arena of struggle, the assertion for what is called today as cultural integrity” (Alejo 2000:81). The Episcopal Commission on Indigenous Peoples (2007:3) speaks of “elucidating the foundations of cultural integrity of indigenous peoples’ communities”. In terms of the anthropological constants outlined by Schillebeeckx (1983:738-739), cultural identity and integrity are soteriological issues from a theological perspective.

response seems to imply a number of things: a feeling of inferiority, embarrassment of hunters unable to catch their prey in their disturbed forest, awkwardness at having to borrow old gongs in order to dance, pain of being fired from jobs because they lack the necessary technical skills, shame at being scolded by nurses in municipal clinics and at being accused of having sold their souls to the ‘development aggressor’ (Mendoza 2000:130).

Perhaps out of a combined sense of desperation and a pining for the familiar, the Manobos thought it best to work for what is called cultural regeneration (Alejo 2000: 240). This implied a whole cluster of missed interrelated things: traditional values like family closeness and resource sharing; old rituals and epic songs, as well as relishing the interaction when singing such songs; their traditional dances wearing bright red costumes with ornamental sequins and beads during self-chosen tribal festivals; restoring the *datu*’s status as the village strong and wise man and acknowledging his capacity to settle disputes; ancient ways of healing through the use of herbs and bark according to the instructions of spirits communicated in dreams; a renewed desire to learn and speak their own language and possibly produce literature in it. No doubt the unspoken wish was to regain their collective self-confidence and self-determination (Alejo 2000:237-238).⁵⁸

From this deep desire for cultural regeneration was born a very specific plan of action: holding a family reunion that would last three days and three nights. This was surprising, given the chaotic, turbulent conditions the tribe was experiencing. But it was their idea, not one imposed on them from outside, and it would not only address their situation the way they saw it, but would also touch on land as it was closely bound up with their culture and future. When considering the time needed to raise funds for the big event and the arrangements to be made, the tribe calculated that it would take two years of preparation.

As the Manobos mobilised for the event, they became so enthused by the whole plan that resources and contributions flooded in. As a result the projected two years’ preparation was cut down to three months. An immediate and fortunate consequence of the project was that old people became important again. Families, inquiring after their ancestry, turned to the elderly for answers. For the dancing, which was essential to the reunion, musical instruments had to be borrowed from another tribe. Theirs had been sold earlier to pay bills and to deal with other necessities.

The celebration was held as planned. In this coming together ties were strengthened, cultural traditions were revived, and the tribe’s spirit was

58 Here is an instance where agency, that is taking initiative and acting rather than just reacting, replaces resistance, which is a largely passive opposition to an extraneous will (Alejo 2000:31; also see Mendoza 2000:130-131).

emboldened. The concerns of the community began to get organised attention. Finally, the tribe faced the crucial issue of ancestral domain claims. The cultural rejuvenation, which included critical assessment of what was sustainable and what was not, released energies to tackle economic and political issues confronting the community. It was as if the Manobos were asking, “How can we continue to dance⁵⁹ if we are not secure on our land?”

Thus a seemingly harmless cultural celebration proved to be a powerful source of determination to continue as a people and became the preparatory step to legally filing their ancestral domain claim. At the end of the said study the Obo Manobos had organised themselves to credibly prove their rights to their ancestral domain and, as a result, were readying themselves to receive back at least 20 000 hectares of the land occupied by the Philippine National Oil Corporation (Alejo 2000:94).⁶⁰ What was originally a purely cultural activity of “a-political dancing” turned into engagement with political forces (Alejo 2000:241). Culture was energy!

Tapping into cultural energies via education

Education is highly valued by Filipinos in general. The indigenous people, for reasons of their own,⁶¹ share this sentiment. But their experience of education has not been entirely positive, especially in the beginning. To take a specific example, when the IPA, under the umbrella of the ECIP, conceptualised their education programme in the 1970s, the main goal was to give them the competencies necessary for assimilation into mainstream society. In this system they were discriminated against at school, were labelled slow learners, their way of life and knowledge were regarded as backward and inferior, and their culture was trivialised.⁶²

Indeed, cultural traditions can sever their ties with the cultural processes that gave birth to them and become merely ‘cultural products’ for purposes like tourist entertainment and consumption. Such phenomena represent cultural elements that have lost their soul.⁶³ Clear instances are festivals organised and

59 “Dance can generate feelings and emotions leading to the creation of ideas for action ... [it] can create a climate leading to community action because it helps to generate feelings of strength and can disseminate a collective awareness” (quoted in Alejo 2000:98).

60 Also discussed by Mendoza (2000:132-134).

61 One priority of the IPs identified by the ECIP has always been education. To IPs going to school meant being educated and education promises liberation from poverty. Their requests for educational interventions were mostly practical: to understand marketplace calculations; to read signs, newspapers, documents, instructions; to access to other livelihood options by gaining skills necessary for employment; and to access health services (see Victor 2007:2).

62 I am basing this discussion on an interview with and unpublished materials provided by Maria Lourie Victor.

63 Interview with Victor (19 January 2008). She points out the distinction between cultural processes and cultural products. The more important aspect of ‘culture as process’ is “how the

held as a draw card for local and foreign tourists (Tomada 2008a:4). An example close to the actual experience of the IPs is the so-called Dinagyang Festival (from the local word ‘*dagyang*’, ‘to make merry’) in Iloilo City in Western Visayas, touted by its mayor as “a world-class and award-winning tourism event”. This festive welcoming of the child Jesus consists mainly in “engaging dances and chants of Kalibo’s famous Ati-Atihan, which was anchored in the traditional way the Aetas – aborigines of Panay Island – would pay homage to their gods”.⁶⁴

The overall impact of trying to mainstream IPs educationally was “the alienation of IP youth from their own communities, heritage, culture and history” (Victor 2007:5). As one elder sees it, the young no longer possess the spirit of the tribe which binds and moves them as one, which is the wellspring of their culture, and which has guided them as a people to live in dignity (Victor 2007:6).

Negative feedback from IPs first led to modifications of the various mainstreaming education programmes. Eventually these had to be completely rethought on account of more vocal complaints in the early 1990s. Thanks to some visionary initiatives, which experimented with more culturally sensitive system of education from the 1980s onwards, advances were made in formulating education programmes which were rooted in and expressive of IPs’ cultures.

Illustrative of such efforts was the experience of the *PAMANA KA*, an alternative school programme for the Mangyans of Occidental Mindoro.⁶⁵ Significant in the training sessions was the importance given to their indigenous culture: education in hands-on culture, dynamics of culture, culture-based alternative schooling, and the effect of Christianisation on the culture of the IPs.⁶⁶ This was highlighted in one of the sessions when the Mangyans

cultural products came about, why they are changing, discussions on the impact of cultural change on communities and identity, the maintenance of intergenerational ties ... It is the understanding of cultural processes that will help IP youth to better understand why their community is what it is today and how to concretely maintain their community and culture as a living entity” (also see Victor 20007:8).

64 The event began in 1968 as a parish welcomed the replica of the image of the child Jesus brought by a cleric from Cebu as gift to the parish priest of San Jose church. Apparently the glamour and the offer of cash prizes by the city government are what attract even IPs, like the Ivatans from far north, to participate in a warrior dance competition (Tomada 2008b:8).

65 The experience is described in IP teachers’ training sessions for IP education in the vicariate of San Jose in Mindoro. Information was culled from the interview with Lourie Victor, as well as from records of the 2003, 2004 and 2005 orientation sessions and a sample of the activity design of the *PAMANA KA* training.

66 In their discussions of the effect of Christianisation on their people the Mangyan teachers mentioned the following: indifference to their own culture, intergenerational division, loss of

involved in the programme finally grasped why the usual modern educational processes did not work for them. They had been wondering what was wrong with them, since they found it difficult to integrate indigenous knowledge in school curricula. Then it dawned on them that they were not the problem. It was because they have their very own cultural process as indigenous people and it needs to be recognised and accepted as well as to work with. Concomitant with this realisation was a felt ‘burden’ of having to justify their existence and way of life to outsiders. Could they not just be accepted as they were?⁶⁷ And if, in the present-day context, they are unable for the moment to articulate who they are, could non-IPs not just keep quiet about them?

From experiences similar to the one narrated above, the 2nd National IP Education Convention organised by ECIP in 2007 gathered insights, synthesised what was learnt and outlined an educational system appropriate to IP communities. The underlying rationale of the proposed system was expressive of the sentiments of elders among the various IP communities in the country: “The life of their tribe and community can only continue if their youth are rooted in their culture, IKSPs [Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Practices]⁶⁸ and the ancestral domain, grow up with a clear sense of identity, are committed to meeting the challenges and issues that face the tribe, can assert their self-determination, and are conscious of being inheritors of a heritage and elders for the coming generations” (Victor 2007:6).

The indigenous spirituality of ‘land is life’

If spirituality is what fundamentally animates people as human beings in their totality, what gives them direction and energy to live life humanly, then one way of characterising the core of indigenous spirituality is to describe it in the very words used by the indigenous people themselves: *land is life*. The phrase embodies and expresses the IPs’ deep and pervasive appreciation of the whole of life. “Central to our culture is our spirituality which permeates our day to

respect for one’s own faith, embracing another culture, and relationship with nature ruined (see PAMANA KA 2004:7). Talk about transcending their tribal culture, including their religiosity, by Christians can be offensive to IPs due to the assumed superiority of the Christian religion. ‘Tribal’ is not a stage to be ‘transcended’, but a stable, dynamic condition (with its own stages through space and time) (interview with Lourie Victor, 19 January 2008).

67 Interview with Lourie Victor (19 January 2008).

68 Term used to refer to “the system of knowledge generation, storage, transmission, and evaluation being kept alive by indigenous communities in different parts of the world. This knowledge and ways of knowing are nurtured and acquired through centuries of living with the ancestral domain” (see Victor 2007:10-11).

day living,” says an indigenous person, “and our spirituality is deeply woven with our relationship with the land” (Victor 2008). As we have repeatedly seen in our discussion of the IPs’ view of land, land is not seen just as earth. Much less can it be said that land is a separate reality which they can handle as an object, a non-self. IPs relate and are one with the land itself. Through it they relate not only to the creator who gave them this gift, but also to the spirits that dwell in the land and their ancestors who bequeathed the land to the present generation and generations to come, as well as to the whole present community.⁶⁹ One might say that the epiphany of transcendence in its many forms happens in and through land. It might be more appropriate to speak of a ‘diaphany’ in the sense not merely of manifestations that break the surface, but of presences that penetrate it (De Chardin 1957:131). It is relationships that animate the land⁷⁰ and give meaning to it, yet without the land the relationships are not even possible, or at any rate remain abstract. So the concept of indigenous spirituality that land is life immediately evokes the further qualification: *and life is relationships*.

But spirituality, like any theological reflection, is contextual. It takes its cue from actual concerns, questions or issues of people located in a given place and time. It takes into account, furthermore, historical and cultural presuppositions operative in the situation people are in. In its articulation, spirituality works with the existing thought patterns of the time and place and utilises the vocabulary available both to comprehend and to communicate its religious experience.⁷¹

The spirituality of the indigenous people is no exception; it is rooted in a specific context, one that I would describe as ‘terra-cultural’. The most obvious reality the indigenous people are in contact with, and from which life and death issues arise, is land, ‘terra’ as in terra firma. In present-day Christian theology and spirituality emphasis on the importance of history as the setting of God’s revelation can surely be regarded as an improvement on the statement that God is to be found primarily in the sphere of the supernatural. But this focus has also obscured the significance of land for biblical faith. Somehow emphasis on the covenantal relationship between God and Israel has led to the neglect of land as the historical place where the covenant occurred (Brueggemann 1977:6). Perhaps we can also say that too much attention was given to the relationship between God and people and too little to the actual location or

69 It has been suggested that in its broadest sense “spirituality is the human response to [a] transcendent reality” (Bowe 2003:11).

70 In this sense, might we not consider land to be ‘alive’ and reinterpret the IPs as ‘animists’? In classic animism conscious life is attributed to natural objects or phenomena (cf. “Animism” in Stevens 2000).

71 Cf. Declaration *Mysterium Ecclesiae* of the S. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (11 May 1973) in Neuner & Dupuis 1996:64.

place in which that relationship was played out (Hadsell 1997:116). After all, God does not relate to human beings in random space. Divine action happens in the particular history of a particular people in a particular place (land) (Davies n.d.).

It may be worth asking whether land ought to be conceived of as more than a storied place where God is encountered, or whether land itself, symbolising creation, ought to be seen as a concrete offer of life (salvation). “Land is life,” declare the IPs. Indeed it is in its many facets. In a creation-centred approach to spirituality creation is salvation. As the beginning of what God offers humankind, it is definitely life-giving in more than one sense. Land, which is the concrete matrix of creation as far as human beings are concerned, is a gift from the creator. As salvation that is earthly and cultural (Schillebeeckx 1982:106-111),⁷² it can readily serve as a sacrament with historical and eschatological dimensions: land as our earth representing the initial offer of salvation, and land as the ‘new earth’ (Rev 21:1), which is the final realisation of that offer.

We have noted that for IPs culture is an arena of struggle. Land to the IP cultural world-feel, however, connotes far more than just soil, place of habitation or nourishment/subsistence. It also represents the whole complex web of meanings known as culture. Their culture embodies what they presuppose about relationships – with their god, their ancestors, the land itself, the spirits that dwell in the land and the human community, particularly their own tribes. Given such a view of land, their relational way of thinking is expressed through the narration of present-day experiences, traditional stories, rituals, dances and celebrations, as well as in educational efforts to preserve their heritage, albeit critically.

In the framework of our discussion of globalisation indigenous spirituality sheds light on the darkness of *land as death-dealing broken relationships*. The clash has brought destruction and confusion mainly to IPs, but to many others as well. Yet this very collision between the *land inspired* spirituality of the IPs and the *land alienated* worldview of globalisation as experienced by the IPs somehow aligns them. The consequence is, as it were, a chiaroscuro effect. Only when the night gets dark enough do the stars begin to shine!

The dark side of globalisation is exposed not only in its actual impact, but also in its deeper and more fundamental influence as a mindset that deadens our humanity by denying relationships or marginalising them. After stating that “sin damages our relationships with God and with one another, the relationships between social groups, and that between humanity and the earth”, the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales (n.d.) points out how such

⁷² Given the IPs’ sense of responsibility for the land, the theme of God’s trust in humanity as part of creation can also be developed in this connection.

broken relationships are reflected in the earth’s suffering: “The earth dries up and withers; the world languishes and withers; the heavens languish together with the earth. The earth lies polluted under its inhabitants; for they have transgressed laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant’ (Is 24:4-5). ‘Therefore the land mourns, and all who live in it languish; together with the wild animals and the birds of the air, even the fish of the sea are perishing’ (Hos 4:2-3).” It is telling us that, deep down, we abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we start to see land as a community to which we belong, perhaps we may begin to relate to it respectfully and reverently. We need to be reminded, as our religious tradition reminds us, that we belong to this community as earthlings, earth creatures or living creatures (cf. Ps 148, Job 38:4, Rev 4:6-8) (Echlin 2003:1). After all, “creation has its own relationship with God, in some measure independently of humankind and beyond human understanding; it glorifies and worships God in continuous praise (Psalm 96:12; Isaiah 55:12)”, according to the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales (n.d.).

Through their particular manner of living and believing the IPs’ spirituality of ‘land is life’ can be likened to the symbolic acts of the prophets which communicated Yahweh’s word. Hosea’s marriage (Hos 1-3), Isaiah’s nakedness (Is 20:1-6), the name Shear-jashub that he gave his son (Is 7:3), Jeremiah’s celibacy (Jer 16:1-4), and his purchase of Hanamel’s field (Jer 32:6ff.) were all symbolic acts. The significance of this point is underscored when we take into account that in the Bible symbolic acts are not merely signs of some other reality but realities in their own right. They are prophetic words made visible (Vawter 1990:199).

Choose life! Choose land as life!

If the IPs’ existence and way of life as a whole constitute a symbolic act in the prophetic sense,⁷³ then their spirituality as expressed in culture is an invitation to what is life-giving (salvation), especially considering how for generations their experience of land has contrasted starkly with the way globalisation has experienced it and wants to experience it. By dispossessing IPs of their land, ignoring their hopes and aspirations, suppressing their languages and customs, overlooking their wisdom and knowledge and dismissing their sustainable ways of developing natural resources we have seriously compromised our ecosystem and diminished our humanity. Through their spirituality of ‘land is life’ “the indigenous cultures invite us to treasure and learn from what they still

73 Could the mention of tribes in the context of “a new heaven and a new earth” as envisioned by Rev 7:9-10 suggest the enduring significance of their way of life?

preserve, before it is too late” (Molloy n.d.).⁷⁴ But so far we have been courting death.

Our Judaeo-Christian tradition reminds us that land is truly a matter of life and death. As Israel enters the promised land, a warning is issued. It is to remember that the land is the Lord’s and deal with it and live on it on Yahweh’s terms, not Israel’s. When Israel was about to enter into the promised land it was forewarned. If fidelity to the covenant is seen as managing land according to Yahweh’s rules (sabbath land), then what happened to Sodom and Gomorrah – a picture of what we today would call ecological devastation (“all its soil being nothing but sulphur and salt, a burnt-out waste, unsown and unfruitful, without a blade of grass”, Deut 29:22) – can perhaps be construed as an image of what happens when land is managed from a perspective of wealth and power (royal land).

The Philippine bishops have issued a reminder that the ecological issue is a matter of life and death.⁷⁵ It is surely reminiscent of the choice Israel faced in the past. Together with the IPs of the country, who are losing their lands and their cultures, we are asked to make a decision. Shall we embrace their cultural attitude that land is life, or shall we persist with the land alienated worldview that justifies the way globalisation has proceeded? The way land is dealt with and, therefore, experienced appears to be a matter of choice between life and death, blessings and curses: “I put before you today life and death, blessing and curse” (Deut 30:19). Their spirituality exhorts us loudly and clearly: “Choose life so that you and your descendants may live!”

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74 Molloy notes that the resurgence of interest in indigenous spiritualities can be attributed to lost diversity on the one hand, and connectedness to culture and landscape on the other.

75 The bishops believe that “our country is in peril. All the living systems on land and in the seas around us are being ruthlessly exploited. The damage to date is extensive and, sad to say, it is often irreversible” (see Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines 1988).

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Interviews

Lourie Victor (*Kankanaey* person, IP Education Program Staff, Episcopal Commission on IPs), 19 January & 1 July 2008.

Peter Geremia, PIME (missionary to the *Bilaan* tribe in Mindanao), 13 April 2008.

Karl Gaspar, C.Ss.R. (missionary to the *Manobo* tribe in Mindanao), 28 May 2008.

Land rights and land rights violation among the Haal-Pulaar

Amadou Sow

Introduction

Talking about Africa's indigenous or original peoples is a risky business. Virtually all of them have lived on this continent for as long as they can remember. Yet in this part of West Africa there are scores of different peoples that could be considered indigenous. The best known nomadic indigenous peoples in the region are the Woodaabe,¹ the Tuareg, the Toubou and the Nemadi. The Imareguans, the Dogon and the Ogoni are examples of sedentary indigenous peoples. Because they differ from the dominant inhabitants of their countries and their environment, they are victims of discrimination. Usually they have their own religion and perform rituals unlike those of the dominant groups. They have other distinctive features that are used against them. They are reliant on the land and its natural resources.

Indigenous groups are often on the margins of society and, in some instances, are banned from social intercourse. They do not have access to ordinary services.² Citizens who defend their rights are victimised by government and branded rebels or criminals. They are put under house arrest or banished and disappear into prison cells without trial. Some of them are killed to seal their lips for good. Indigenous peoples are described as archaic, barbarous and without any culture. Confiscation and expropriation of agricultural land³ and natural resources are the cardinal reasons for their poor economic situation.⁴ People that are ousted everywhere are obliged to live in remote, dangerous or unhealthy areas, resulting in a rapid decline in national health. The authorities expect them to assimilate.⁵ This phenomenon is evident in the prohibition of using their own languages and cultural resources. At worst the national authorities fail to acknowledge their existence. They refuse to

1 A sub-clan of the Haal-Pulaar.

2 Sometimes they are openly rejected.

3 Interview with Amar Binta Boobo.

4 Interview with Jiibi Borgo Cimmbo.

5 Interview with Amar Binta Boobo.

implement policies to improve the living conditions and development of indigenous population groups.

The Haal-Pulaar is one of the indigenous peoples of West Africa. They live on both sides of Senegal river, separating southern Mauritania and Northern Senegal. This article focuses on the Haal-Pulaar of Mauritania and comprises four sections. First I describe the Haal-Pulaar as an instance of a West African indigenous people. Then I deal with their spirituality. Next I examine their land rights and violations of these rights. Finally I look at the implications for sustainable development. The article ends with some conclusions.

The Haal-Pulaar as an indigenous West African people

In this first section I first explain the concept of *Fuuta*. Then I describe the history and current situation of the Haal-Pulaar and their division into sub-clans.

Nobody today can tell us the exact origin of the designation *Fuuta*. It refers to the area where most of the FulBe come from. It is a region where the Haal-Pulaar dominate culturally and politically, and where their language is the lingua franca. According to Oumar Kane⁶ and Maurice Delafosse⁷ the Bible refers to the FulBe in the table of the origin of nations. Both authors cite Genesis 10:6, 1 Chronicles 1:8, Isaiah 66:19, Ezekiel 27:10; 30:5 and 38:5, and Nahum 3:9. Other scholars maintain that the term derives from the Arabic and Berber word *Afut*. The Arabs and Berbers themselves say that before their arrival in the area the mountains were called *Fuut-Fuut*. This suggests that the name of the area already existed prior to the arrival of the Berbers and the Arabs.

Amadou Hampaté Bah distinguishes between three geographic zones called *Fuuta*: *Fuuta Kiindi*, *Fuuta Keyri* and *Fuuta Jula*. According to him *Fuuta Kiindi* is the area on both banks of the Senegal river and bordering on Fuuta Sahel. This subregion comprises Malinese and Mauritanian Hodh, Awker, Termes, Tagant, Bakunu, Regeeyba and the Malinese region known as *Nyooro du Sahel*. *Fuuta Kiindi* was the first area to be politically organised. *Fuuta Keyri* is regarded as the 'New Fuuta' because of the establishment of new political entities after 1725. That is to say, the *Fuuta Keyri* people comprise migrant groups from *Fuuta Tooro*, who decided to settle permanently in Fuuta Jallon, Maasina, the kingdom of Sokoto and the various Lamidats of northern Nigeria and northern Cameroon (Kane 1986:2). *Fuuta Jula* refers to FulBe

6 Oumar Kane (1986:1) says that it refers to the Phut, Put and Punt people.

7 Delafosse (1912:200) claims that the prophet Isaiah was the first to write about the Put people.

diasporas that happened here and there after the fall of the Islamic empire of Elhaaji Umar Taal. The advent of the colonisers and the eruption of diverse wars in the area compelled the population to migrate in search of safer habitats. This culminated in the establishment of Haal-Pularian settlements all over Central, East and West Africa. Thus Haal-Pularian groups on their way to or returning from Mecca decided to settle permanently in Sudan, Uganda or Chad.

In the mid-16th and 17th centuries the original *Fuuta Tooro* comprised the kingdoms of Wagadu, Lamtuna, Jolof, Waalo, Ngalam and the land of the Jakanke. At that time *Fuuta* bordered on Hayre Ngal in the north and the northeast.⁸ In fact *Fuuta* covers the area from Assaba to Aleg (Kane 1973:614-615). *Jeeri Fuuta* is confined to the sandy territory east of Assaba, including Regeeyba. In the south *Fuuta* takes up the land around the Senegal river to Ferlo province in Senegal.

Various popular migrations

The people dwelling on both sides of the Senegal river claim to have come from the East. Some inhabitants of the area say that they derive from the Middle East – commonly mentioned countries are Egypt, Sudan, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Palestine and Israel. Members of this population say that the migration was a long and arduous process. Present-day Mauritania is mentioned as a halfway house.⁹ A minority espouses the notion that their forebears came from the south and southwest of the continent, that is from Guinea, Guinea Bissau and Gambia. All these sections of the population believe that their ancestors were subjects of one or another of the great kingdoms like Ghana, Tekror, Jolof, Jah Ogo, Manna, Tonjon, Laam-Termes, Laam-Taaga, Laam-Tooro, the DeeniyankooBe dynasty, the YirbaaBe-HebbiyaaBe confederation and the Almaami theocracy.

The less known historical period starts with the departure from the Nile valley in about 2500-2000 C.E.¹⁰ and ends with the arrival in West Africa round about the 3rd century C.E. and the establishment of the first West African empires. This period is described as one of incessant warfare in which today's victors were tomorrow's losers. The people constantly suffered the consequences of the interminable upheavals.

There are various theories about the origin of the Haal-Pulaar. Some maintain that they came from Egypt and Sudan.

There are striking similarities between the peoples of the Nile region and the Senegal river. Names of pharaohs like 'Ba' and 'Ka' are Haal-Pularian family

8 Assaba and the south of Mauritanian Tagant.

9 Interview with Elhajji Saydu Bah.

10 Ibid.

names.¹¹ Some totem names of the Nuer people are identical with those in these two parts of Africa.¹² In what are known as the Sudanese and British zones of Sudan tribes called Nyooro and Tooro are found in the Nubian mountains. The same names occur in the West African regions. Finally there is an Abyssinian tribe called Tekrori, which is the name of one of the earliest, most influential empires, located partly in Mauritania and partly in Senegal.

Regarding the emigration of the Haal-Pulaar from Egypt-Sudan to West Africa, Cheikh Anta Diop says that they moved out from the 6th century B.C.E. onwards.¹³ Aboubacry Lam (1972:166) dates it to between the 2nd and 7th centuries C.E.. According to these scholars the Haal-Pulaar occupied most of present-day Mauritania from the 7th century onwards. This century corresponds with a North African migration to the banks of Senegal river. *Fuuta Tooro* was conquered in the late 8th and early 9th centuries. The area was inhabited by other black ethnic groups, who were either driven out or assimilated. After a prolonged stay in the *Fuuta* valley part of the population left the region and moved in the direction of Maasina, Gummbu, KiiDndi and Faleme. In the 11th century various groups were driven out as a result of internal conflicts. They settled in the Jomboko, Kasso, Bunndu and Ferlo regions and in the land of the Jallonke. In the 15th century part of the population returned to Maasina, which was occupied by groups of Haal-Pulaar who had migrated there earlier from Tichit, Walata and Awuker.¹⁴ Between the 17th and 18th century parts of the population left Maasina for Litaako, Tooroodi, northern Nigeria, northern Cameroon, Bornoe and Bagirmi (Moussa 1993:20).

The second major historical period covers the arrival in West Africa and the establishment of kingdoms. This coincided with the golden age of West African history and continued to the end of the 13th century (Vansina 1964:28-31).

Arab conquests

West Africa suffered greatly under Arab conquerors. Joseph Ki-Zerbo studied the conquest of the Maghreb and part of West Africa. This conquest is seen as evidence of the Arabic origins of a large part of the African population. Ki-Zerbo dates the conquest of the region to 642 C.E. when Arabs came from Egypt to occupy the Maghreb. At that time they built the city of Kayruwan.

11 Interview with Ayse Sammba Kanel.

12 Kan, Wan, Ci, Lith and Kao (Ka).

13 Diop (1981: 234-235) points out that his view needs to be substantiated by archaeological evidence.

14 Southern and southeastern Mauritania.

Five years later they crushed the power of Byzantium, which put an end to Byzantine hegemony in the Maghreb.

Later, under their commander Okba ibn Nafi, the Arabs and their black African allies embarked on a series of military operations to conquer Spain and the adjacent northwestern parts of Africa. By 683 they had occupied Kwar and Fezzan. In 711, under Tarik's command, the Arabs, Berbers and fanatics from Tekror destroyed the Spanish army. Andalusia became a multicultural Muslim region. After this period innumerable kingdoms emerged in the area. They continued growing until the end of the 18th century, when European countries started intervening, culminating in French colonisation.

Structure of Haal-Pularian society

Haal-Pularian society and their major traditions grew along the Senegal river.¹⁵ Black Africans living along the Senegal were subdivided into ethnic groups: Soninke, Wolof, Bambara and Haal-Pulaar. Each group in its turn was divided into castes. Among the Haal-Pulaar, for instance, these were the scholars (*Toorobe*) and the warriors (*Cebe*), as well as the nobility and slaves. The castes were subdivided into professional groups – smiths, wood painters and shoemakers.

Apart from the aforementioned four ethnic groups there was a hybrid group of Arab-speaking black Africans, the Haratines. While this population group observed the same customs as other black Africans, they had adapted to the Moors to the extent that they spoke Hassania, a Berber Arabic dialect, as their vernacular.¹⁶

Spirituality of the Haal-Pulaar

There is a clear perception and philosophy of life and behaviour that individuals have to observe for society to remain intact and harmonious (Van der Wal 2002:10; Van Binsbergen 2003).

To most Africans it is not only earthly human beings who have souls. They share this quality with everything in nature around them. Stones, trees, air, grass, for example, are no less animate than people, who are just a small component of the cosmos. They have to utilise the things that nature has put at their disposal. This use is associated with rituals that are essential for human survival and for other beings on whom humans are dependent (Henning 2000:210-215). Africans, regardless of their faith, believe that humans are involved with everything that happens around them and in the rest of the

15 Interview with Soh Jiibi Aali.

16 Ibid.

cosmos. The cosmos is divided into a visible and an invisible world that are constantly putting pressure on each other but remain symbiotic. Flaws and deviations from this order are the cause of all disasters in the world.

The *visible* world comprises our daily lives and the things associated with it. It includes the people around us, animals and the parts of their bodies, fish, water, wind, trees, rocks, the stars, the moon, the sun, thunder, birds and different soils. Humans and natural elements influence each other. Nature gives humans all they need for survival provided they respect its intrinsic rules. That means that we can only avail ourselves of what is strictly necessary so as to give nature a chance to recover. Breaking the rules evokes a reaction in the form of disruption of the person's entire life. That implies that we should at all times be grateful, marvelling, considerate and respectful towards nature. We have to know how to deal with its kindly elements. It is important to know which things we need, and when and where we can touch, pick and use them to handle problems and ailments better and more effectively, because these amenities are animate and there are measures and rituals to be observed when using them. Thus one should know how to approach a plant or a stone respectfully in order to achieve the desired effect.

The *invisible* world (Henning 2000:108-109) is that of demons, Satan, spirits, the creator(s) and the ancestors. The spirits are the souls of deceased humans, animals and other natural elements like water, stones and plants (Henning 2000:130-133). They detach themselves from the bodies they once occupied and go their own way.¹⁷

There are two distinct kinds of spirits – good and evil ones – each with its own attributes. Good spirits are able to change people's lives for the better, whereas evil spirits radiate a negative influence. Both can make things happen if people do something that prompts them to intervene. Human actions and intervention can have the same effect, as in the case of holy people, traditional healers and experts in magic (Henning 2000). They have the necessary knowledge to activate a spirit, whereupon the condition of the life of a person, animal, plant or natural phenomenon changes (Henning 2000; Allien 2006:148-154). Thus some traditional healers (Henning 2000:206), by communicating with a spirit, are able to heal a broken arm or leg or to drive a person crazy.¹⁸

Traditional experts do not agree about the reason why a person's spirit becomes malevolent or benevolent. In some families a spirit can be both good and evil, depending on the circumstances and time of manifestation. It is generally accepted, however, that the spirits of loving, kind, just, respectful people change into good, benevolent spirits, whereas those of villains, egotists, liars and swindlers enter the world as evil spirits. The latter could include the

17 Interview with Amar Binta Boobo.

18 Interview with Amar Binta Boobo.

spirits of victims of some form of discrimination, murder victims or people who were killed by the improper use of evil spirits.

Most spirits hover over places where people and other beings live, but some spirits can journey all over the world. All spirits can be called up by people who know their names and how to connect with them. To the Haal-Pulaar there are other beings who are by and large invisible. They can exert either a good or a harmful influence on humans. Satan was unknown in the region, at any rate by that name. Islam and Christianity introduced the concept as part of their religion. The invocation of Satan is always malevolent (interview with Aamadu Njool Jah; Rosseels 2000; Oglangörmez 2000; Verbraeken 2000; Oosterbos 2000). Demons come in two categories. There are those that influence a person's life positively and those who are called up to accomplish purely evil things.

In Africa the ancestors play a crucial role in day-to-day life (Henning 2000:108-109). The assumption is that they are not really dead but have simply moved to another world. They remain in contact with the living and their interventions can be far-reaching (Henning 2000:108-109). They can have both positive and harmful effects on the lives of the living. Their intervention is always associated with the deeds or behaviour of a person. There are rituals and taboos that stimulate them to act.¹⁹

Interaction between the two worlds

Haal-Pulaar believe that holy men and traditional healers, clairvoyants and experts in magic are able to use their knowledge to establish contact with ancestors, spirits, Satan and demons. They can influence these, with drastic effects on a person's life. Thus if they wish, they can heal sick people, make somebody ill or, even worse, kill a person. To this end they develop magic spells and natural powers derived from objects that we encounter in nature every day without realising what help they can offer us. To learn this they have to study for many years under experts, who, if satisfied with their pupil, will impart some of their knowledge.

Haal-Pulaar believe that all knowledge is potentially attainable. By ensuring that we live symbiotically with nature we can not only have a healthy, serene life – both physical and mental – but also keep nature happy, so we may have a longer and healthier life, for everything we need to make life agreeable is obtainable from nature. It is ready for use and costs nothing. By honouring this wisdom we can safeguard future generations.

When our world is out of balance with the unseen world, as when we abuse nature's providence, disasters happen – individual, group-wise or global. We live in the same world, even if we are not always aware of our dependence on

¹⁹ Interview with Aamadu Njool Jah.

nature. To survive humans must regularly perform rituals that are essential for their survival Henning (2000:210-215). Because Haal-Pulaar assume that there is no divide between spiritual and everyday life, they feel that they should perform rituals that are necessary to keep them on friendly terms with nature.

Indigenous rules regarding land rights

Two adages symbolise the relationship between the people, their environment generally and their agricultural land in particular. The first is: 'Agricultural land is the fruit of our ancestors' sweat.' The second is: 'The ancestors risked their lives to secure the land, so we can never give it up.' The two expressions have far-reaching implications. They confront citizens with hard facts. You should never give this land to people who are not your kin. Even if you are the sole family heir, you should know that you are descended from a generation who secured the right to the land by inheritance, which means that you in your turn should leave it to the next generation.²⁰ If you violate the traditional inheritance, you violate the ancestors' honour and are answerable to those who live in the hereafter. In this life you are damned for the rest of your days. Breaking the taboo at once galvanises the spirits into action. Until your death all your undertakings will come to nothing. There are instances where people sold their family land or a portion of it to prevent one of their children from inheriting it. Shortly after the sale they fell ill and died. The only exception to this rule that is permitted and conceivable is selling land during years of famine. Even then one should only sell as much land as is strictly necessary to survive. And after the disaster the person must do everything in his power to get the land back, even at an exorbitant price.

It seems meaningful to examine the acquisition and use of agricultural land. To this end I enumerate the general rules in this regard (Leservoisier 1993:99-101). Agricultural land is left to male relatives, from one generation to the next. This may be regarded as the most respected customary law in the region. It is a measure that prevents conflict between agriculturists. It concerns collective agricultural land.²¹ In principle the eldest son of the family is entitled to all available collective agricultural land (Henning 2000:22-27). Every year he has to give part of this land to his male kinsmen, so his relatives will have some land at their disposal to cultivate and live from. Because tradition has it that those who abuse their rights and duties will be severely punished hereafter, the division of land is fairly problem-free. The patriarch is sometimes prepared to give up his own share for the sake of peace in the family (Henning 2000:22-

²⁰ Interview with Ayse Sammba Kanel.

²¹ *Joowre* in the Pulaar language.

27), although he is entitled to a tenth of the annual yield of a field cultivated by a kinsman.²²

Initially there were six ways of obtaining agricultural land in *Fuuta Tooro*. This was at the time when the Haal-Pulaar occupied the area. There are few rules regarding the allocation of land to women (Gaden 1935:407-408). Most rules are against the acquisition of land by a female relative. It is feared that a woman may pass a piece of land on to her children who, according to prevailing rules of inheritance in the area, are not blood relatives and that relationship is decisive for inheriting land (León 2003:36). That does not mean that a woman cannot own land. Of course she may buy it. But in this region a woman only inherits a piece of land if neither the mother nor the father has a male heir.²³ This rule was established to prevent a piece of land from becoming part of the royal domain (Kane 1935:449-461). In this situation the only rights a woman can invoke are presents that she can expect from her parents and brothers during regular visits to her parental home. During these visits she is given food, money and clothing that she takes back to her own home. Islam, at any rate in its local form, has done nothing to prohibit this discriminatory rule, although that faith vouchsafes women a fixed portion of the estate of their parents, children and husbands.

Acquisition of agricultural land

There are certain fundamental rights associated with the acquisition of land that are acknowledged by all inhabitants of the region. The ways of acquiring land are almost literally and figuratively binding on them. Those who have no land and are therefore wholly dependent on the landowners are poor. Land rights are deeply ingrained in Haal-Pularian culture, so nobody will countenance the loss of agricultural land. It is defended and protected with might and main at all times, even against the government.

Other customary ways of obtaining agricultural land

Apart from land that king Buubu Beeli gave to his supporters, there are six ways of obtaining land in terms of customary law.²⁴ These options for acquiring land are regarded as demonstrable rights that a person may invoke in the event of disputes with other farmers.

Acquisition *through the 'axe'* (Guèye 1957:30) was the most common way of obtaining a piece of land. To the people the axe symbolises human endeavour and all the concomitant risks. What follows clarifies the process. Haal-Pulaar regard work as something that is mandatory in every sphere of life.

²² Interview with Soh Jiibi Aali.

²³ Interview with Ayse Sammba Kanel.

²⁴ Interview with Aamadu Njool.

They acknowledge that every individual has a personal story, yet some duties apply to everybody. In the process of living work is essential for human development and satisfaction. To demonstrate this the Haal-Pulaar advance the following arguments. From the cradle to the grave the world is not static. First you are nourished to grow physically and mentally. Then you have to be educated to be able to work and protect yourself against wild animals, snakes and spirits that live in the bush. Only then can you look for an uncontested piece of land to cultivate. Those who can prove that they or their ancestors managed to acquire a piece of land are regarded as its sole legal owners. Acquiring land by ancestral right was almost universally practised, because there was enough agricultural land that belonged to nobody. Once the owner of a piece of land, one could give it away, lease it for years, or allocate it annually to someone who could farm it, dividing the crop into thirds or halves by agreement.

Acquisition *through purchase*²⁵ happened mainly in the early years. Because there were few people living in the area, those who had several fields were allowed to sell some of them. Because land was inexpensive, those who could afford it could exchange some of their livestock for land. Land that had been cultivated by a tenant for some years could be sold to that person after five years. For a long time now this has been unthinkable. Some families have too much land, but there is never any question of selling it.

Acquisition of land *by force of arms*²⁶ happened mainly at the time of the conquest of the area and neighbouring territory and during the religious wars. Two historical periods are cited. One was the arrival of the present population from the east between 1490 and 1513. Fugitives from war zones landed in the region and drove the autochthons, or some of them, away. Later, between 1779 and 1891, there were religious upheavals. The Almaami conquest of the Satigi dates back to this period. The animistic Satigi were the rulers at that time. The Almaami were the leaders of a group of Qur'anic scholars. Those who refused to convert to Islam were killed or driven off their land, which was reallocated. The same applied to the land of those who fought in a holy war and died without leaving progeny.

*Acquisition through the pen*²⁷ was also customary in *Fuuta Tooro*. In this region many farmlands were obtained simply through the knowledge and expertise of the beneficiary. The expression 'something in return' is used to explain this tradition. It should be noted that the pen does not symbolise only written information but any knowledge that is used to heal people. Traditional healers, practitioners of magic and religious leaders all profited by this form of

25 *Coggu* comes from the verb *sooDde*, 'to buy'.

26 *Jettude fetel mum*.

27 *Ganndal* (knowledge); interview with Elhajji Saydu Bah.

acquisition. Many families cite this land right to explain how their ancestors came to own scarce agricultural land.

Various farmlands were acquired by expropriation and conversion into *bayti el-maal*. The latter entailed the following. The land was originally owned by the king. By forming a coalition and expelling the king it was freed and divided among the warrior and princely families. In addition land was expropriated because its owners were at loggerheads with the entire community, which evicted them from the area. At the time of the Almaami land was expropriated simply because the owner refused to join Islam.²⁸ Finally, some farmland ended up in this category because families became extinct.²⁹

Thus no *Fuutanke*³⁰ will accept expropriation by whatever means of agricultural land that was acquired by any of the methods described above.

Violation of the Haal-Pulaar land rights

The Mauritanian population is quite diverse. There are black Africans belonging to four ethnic groups, including the Haratines who, although black, speak an Arabic dialect, which they share with so-called 'white Arabs' or Beydans. The latter are the ones who wield power. Opinions differ about the proportion of Arabs and blacks. Blacks believe that they constitute 70 percent of the population, while the ruling group is still refusing to publish the statistics of the 1977 and 1988 censuses. They claim that the white Arabs and Haratines together represent the majority of the total population of the country, that is over 78 percent of all inhabitants. They wield real power in the political, economic and military areas and pass innumerable acts that they consider necessary to secure the fertile farmland in the south.

The lives of black Africans living cheek by jowl with Arabs have always been problematic in this part of the continent. Ever since the 15th century there have been regular conflicts. The Arabs blame the Haal-Pularian people in particular, since they are the largest black population group. The problem of Haal-Pularian land rights is tied up with national and international factors that broaden and exacerbate the divide between Arabs and blacks. The general political situation in Mauritania since independence, power relations and the division between the various ethnic groups are sources of conflict. Measures to promote economic development amongst Arabs only, supported by influence from abroad, cause continuous conflicts, as they go against the will of the black population who want to retain their land rights at any cost.

28 Interview with Aamadu Njool .

29 Interview with Amar Binta Boobo.

30 Inhabitant of *Fuuta*.

Preponderance of Arabs over black Africans and division of power

Because the Arabs own two thirds of the country – mainly desert – they assume they are entitled to two thirds of the power. This ratio is the premise of all political appointments. To make it worse, the territory inhabited by blacks is always ruled by an Arab. In conflicts between black and Arab citizens the Arab authorities side with their peers. Although the Mauritanian state was founded on the basis of a compromise between the Arabo-Berbers and the black Africans, the envisaged balance of power gradually tilted in favour of the Arabo-Berbers. The ex-coloniser made sure that the Arabs got the power. In a country like Mauritania that lies on the dividing line between the Arab and the traditional African world balancing the two population groups is vital. In this West African country factors can be identified, arising from its complicated location between two different worlds, that have made it impossible to maintain that balance in the long run. The Arab leaders emphasise the bond with the Arab world and want to make Mauritania an Arab state. This creates a divide between them and the African culture of the country. Over time it has led to increasing oppression and discrimination against black Africans in the political, economic, social and cultural spheres.

In practical terms inequality before the law prevails. The police and judiciary are predominantly in the hands of the Arabo-Berber population group. After a coup in October 1987 1 500 black soldiers were fired and demobilised. By the end of 1988 between 5 000 and 7 000 blacks – mainly from the upper ranks – had been dismissed or pensioned off from the army, the police, the gendarmerie and the national guard. Blacks are no longer called up for police or military service. When a black African and an Arab engage in litigation about a mutual dispute, the judgment is usually in favour of the Arab regardless of facts of the case.

Since 9 April 1989 a militia comprising Haratines under the command of Arabs or Iraqis has been operating in southern Mauritania. Officially it was created to defend the territory in border conflicts with Senegal. In practice, however, the militia is used against the black population for deportations, allocation of uncultivated land to Arabs, intimidation and other oppressive measures, including torture, extra-judicial executions, billeting troops on black villages and the like.

Racial inequality in several domains

The *administrative machinery* is racially segregated as well. A few ministries are formally headed by black African ministers, but they are under receivership through the appointment of Arabic secretaries of state that have the right to veto any decision. Besides, the presidential system allows the ministers little scope. Ultimately the Arab president takes all decisions himself. The ministries are allocated to the two population groups in a fixed ratio. The key ministries

always go to Arabs, for instance the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, the Ministry of Economic Affairs, the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Home Affairs. This leads to the formation of politico-administrative and politico-military castes, all under Arab control. Since the coup on 10 July 1978 up to 2005 the country was ruled by decree, putting the legislative power in the hands of military rulers. The constitution was replaced by a *Charte Constitutionnelle*, which in practice does not determine the framework of legislation. As a result decrees are arbitrary and are not subject to parliamentary control. This gives the rulers a free hand. On 11 March 2007 a president was elected. He promptly abolished discriminatory laws and regulations, but on 6 August 2008 he was deposed by the military and is in detention along with his prime minister. Ever since then the political situation has been volatile.

In the *judiciary* all key positions are held by Arabs: the advocate general, attorneys, officers of justice, senior and junior judges and even the majority of advocates are recruited from this group. There is no independent judiciary. The judicial machinery is directly controlled by the ministers and many legal decisions are dictated by the ministries of Justice and Home Affairs.

In Mauritania one is regularly stopped at *checkpoints* and asked by the police, gendarmes and the national guard to produce proof of identity. Only black Africans are checked. Often these checks end up in endless quibbling, in the course of which people are searched, detained and blackmailed, only being released after paying a bribe. Those who cannot produce their papers are first detained for a short or a longer period³¹ and then deported to the neighbouring countries, Mali and Senegal.

In *education* disadvantage of black Africans is promoted by a policy that constantly releases funds for the improvement of schools in Arab residential areas,³² while schools in black African residential areas are neglected. The examination system is such that few blacks complete their schooling successfully. In 1979³³ only eighteen percent of black African pupils passed their final examination – and they are often pupils whose families collaborate with the regime. Examination questions are leaked to regime-friendly pupils. For the rest the requirements are so stiff that it is simply not possible to pass.

The allocation of *broadcasting* time on the media is quite disproportionate. Since 1989 black African communities have only thirty minutes' daily transmission time to broadcast officially approved reports in the vernacular. For the rest radio and television programmes are directed to the Arabo-Berber

31 Ranging from a few weeks to a few months.

32 Northern and central Mauritania.

33 One year after a strike by black students and pupils in the south of the country.

community. On the whole they consist of pre-1970 Egyptian films and Iraqi and Syrian programmes. Free use of the ether is not permitted. There is only one officially sanctioned daily paper, *Chaab*,³⁴ which prints only the views of the regime in Arabic and French. Senegalese television can be accessed in southern and southwestern Mauritania, but any black African caught watching these programmes runs the risk of deportation to Senegal.

The official Muslim *religion* is confined mainly to Arabs. Most black Africans (99% of all Mauritians are Muslim) practise folk forms of Islam. In the capital Nouakchott, where nearly half the Mauritanian population lives, all but two imams are of Arab stock. In religious disputes³⁵ black Africans are often put in the wrong, thus forcing them to conform.

Finally, *sports* like football, basketball, volleyball and wrestling are extremely popular among black Africans. The standard of performance among black Africans is higher than among their compatriots, but for international sports events the best sportspeople are not chosen to represent Mauritania lest people abroad get the impression that the population is totally black. Thus black African sportspeople are prevented from performing at their proper level. In Mauritania *one can see* at once who is Arab and who is black. All the big businesses are owned by Arabs, who always employ Haratines to do the work. They live in opulent houses, are beautifully dressed and drive fine cars. Their children attend the best schools in the country. Their wives don't have to work. They can rely on their slaves to do the heavy work.

Effects on agricultural land

Black Africans have no faith in the rulers. They know that they have to rely entirely on their farmland for survival. This land is considered sacred. Accordingly these Africans refuse to let even the most minute piece of land fall into Arab hands. Agricultural projects launched by Arabs in the Senegal river area are spurned from the outset by the local inhabitants. They find themselves discriminated against by national and local authorities. They have no rights, only duties. Hence they refuse to share their agricultural land with Arabs.

Since 1973 Mauritania has been in the grip of a desertification process that is making life in the north increasingly difficult. There is little water and pasture for the Arabs' herds. Being the rulers, they are moving south in droves in search of better living conditions. With the help of local authorities they soon managed to get hold of the land of the black Africans by violating their customary land rights. They expropriated it and built their homes. They let their livestock graze in the area. The animals ruin the Africans' farmland, but they

34 'The People'.

35 E.g. about feast days.

cannot appeal to the local authorities. They are often warned that they will suffer severe penalties if they injure the animals.

Hence, agricultural land, more especially its acquisition, is basic to the conflict between the Arabs from the desert areas and the black owners of the fertile farmland of Mauritania. Successive Arab governments did everything in their power to force the black population to abandon their land or to let them obtain parts of it. Because there is manifest collusion between the rulers in their struggle against the southerners, the rights of those living on the banks of the Senegal are constantly violated without any chance of redress: their rights are simply denied.

To achieve their goals the rulers passed a decree in 1983, which the blacks call the 'expropriation act'. The act proceeds on the premise that agricultural land belongs to the republic and that henceforth the act would stipulate who becomes the owner of a piece of land (article 1). Government offers guarantees to private owners. They must ensure that their farmland is cultivated in the public interest (article 2). The act nullified the customary law regulations that apply to agricultural land (article 3). Collective rights are no longer recognised as the rule for obtaining land; instead individual land ownership takes priority (articles 6 and 7). Uncultivated land is declared state property (article 9). Land that no longer has owners passes legally into government hands (article 10). In cases of disagreement about land ownership the parties have to take their dispute to court (articles 13 and 16).

The act has enormous implications. In the first place it is known that it only affects the land of the black population. After all, the Arabs do not have such fertile land. Secondly, the authorities in Nouakchott know that most of the inhabitants in the region are illiterate and are in any case scared of government, hence they either dare not or cannot have their land registered. When problems arise they don't stand the slightest chance against the new owners, who register everything in sight. Thirdly, government knows that the black population knows nothing about modern legislation and its implementation. They do not have the money to afford advocates and legal proceedings. Consequently the southerners decided to do all they could to prevent expropriation. They enclosed parts of the farmland with gates, large stones and trees to indicate that they owned the land.

After promulgating the act the Arabs moved to the Senegal river area in large numbers. Some were provided with land by government. Others encamped in the fields and claimed that these were the property of their ancestors. Some used customary law rules against the black population. Thus they went to live in nearby villages and registered as residents, whereupon they proceeded to claim the agricultural land.

The coup of October 1987 and the 'conflict' of 1989

In October 1987 government claimed to have exposed an attempt at a coup d'état. Three Haal-Pularian officers were condemned to death and executed. Since then black intellectuals and military people, mainly of Haal-Pularian descent, have been rounded up, detained, dismissed or killed. The rest of the black population is robbed of their possessions and banished from the country in large numbers. Innumerable villages are burnt down.

What triggered the 'conflict' between Senegal and Mauritania was a dispute between a Senegalese stock farmer and a Mauritanian agriculturist.³⁶ Such conflicts occur almost daily between nationals themselves and with inhabitants of Senegal. Local leaders always resolve the problems peaceably through dialogue and traditional mediation. This particular conflict, however, escalated because the Mauritanian radio broadcasted a false report, suggesting that all Mauritanian Arabs living in Senegal had been massacred by Senegalese citizens. Even after Mauritanian government officials had found out that the report could not be verified, they continued to allow the slaughter of both Senegalese civilians and black Mauritians. The Mauritanian government, headed by members of the Ba'ath party, claimed that all the deportees were either Senegalese or people who had obtained Mauritanian identity documents fraudulently.

The conflict was thus manifestly an alibi for the Mauritanian authorities to attack Senegal and then deport or kill their own subjects. The Senegalese government reacted to the attack. Initially everybody thought that it concerned the interests of citizens, but they soon discovered that the government was not only targeting the Senegalese but black Mauritians as well. Once the Senegalese had been driven off or killed, the Haratines turned on the local Africans. Government units joined the fray. It led to deportations between 1989 and 1991. First the 'freed' land, livestock and homes were taken over by Arabs, while another part was put to agricultural use by Haratines. Mauritians from Senegal settled in the area and numerous slaves belonging to the Arabs had to move from the north to the vicinity of the Senegal river. The villages were given Arabic names. Then followed a spate of violence, executions, torture and rape of the black population by members of the national guard, the police, state police, military and a special unit called the *Berets Rouges*. In this period uniformed non-Mauritians were also seen in the area. Some were Iraqis, others were Palestinians and Syrians. They joined in the massacre of black population groups. In addition militia were installed in 'sensitive areas' with a clear mandate to kill anyone who said anything about the actions.

More than 100 000 black Africans were banished to Senegal or Mali, where most of them had to live in refugee camps for twenty years or more.

36 Often conflicts in Africa start with land disputes between pastoralists and agriculturalists.

International factors

In recent years Mauritania has resigned from many regional organisations and treaties between African countries and has joined parallel organisations in the Arab world. This continually underscores its rulers' orientation to the Arab world and their disregard of black Africans' political, economic and cultural interests in the context of Africanism.

Mauritania has a total of four embassies and five consulates in Africa's 64 countries. In North Africa, comprising five Arab countries, Mauritania has an embassy in each country and two consulates to deal with international relations. In the twelve Arabic countries in the Middle East it has six embassies and a consulate, while in the three non-Arab countries there³⁷ it has only one embassy. In the sixteen Asian countries it has only one embassy and no consulates. It has no diplomatic relations with the twenty South American states, and on the American continent it has embassies only in the United States and Canada, with a single consulate for both countries. In 36 European countries it is represented by only six embassies and four consulates. These statistics reflect the priority given to relations with the Arab world. The statistics for Africa are particularly shocking. Of the embassy staff only 25 percent are of black African descent. The ambassadors all belong to the Arab population group.

As for population politics, immigration of Palestinians, Syrians, Iraqis, Touaregs³⁸ and Saharouis³⁹ is propagated on a large scale and these immigrants have no difficulty obtaining Mauritanian nationality. They are deployed in the oppression of black Africans. Land confiscated by government in traditional black areas is distributed among the newcomers. Thus black Africans are driven from their own country and Mauritania becomes ever more Arabised.

Internationalised Arabic political movements are particularly active in Mauritania. The Nasserists and members of the Ba'ath party have established branches in the country to propagate their ideology. *Les Nasseriens*, the Nasserists, adhere to the political ideology of Gamel Abdel Nasser, a former president of Egypt,⁴⁰ expounded in his book entitled *Philosophy of the revolution*. In this book Nasser advocates the emancipation of the Arab world and the African continent and proposes an alliance of unaligned countries, which he proceeded to establish in 1955 in conjunction with Tito⁴¹ and Nehru.⁴² Egypt under Nasser gave massive support to African liberation movements such as the FLN, then engaged in a struggle against French colonialism in

37 Israel, Turkey and Iran.

38 From Mali.

39 From the western Sahara.

40 1952-1970.

41 President of Yugoslavia.

42 President of India.

Algeria. In relations between independent African states Nasser championed the Organisation of African Unity and worked for peaceful solutions to inter-state conflicts, notably border conflicts. An Arab nationalist and charismatic leader, Nasser acted as a catalyst for nationalism in the Middle East and North Africa.

In Mauritania only Arabs belonged to this movement. The Nasserists were based in the academic, intellectual world. After Nasser's death in 1970 they turned to the Libyan leader, colonel M. Khaddafi, who seized power in a coup in 1969 and became the most militant champion of Arab nationalism. That is why the Nasserists are also known as Khaddafists. In the Arab world the Nasserists are a movement with branches in every Arab country. Their Mauritanian branch is characterised by total disregard of the existence of black Africans in the country. Africans are under pressure to Arabise, as happened to the Kabylis in Algeria and the Berbers in Morocco.

The Ba'ath party was founded in Syria in 1940 by Michel Aflak. Its aim is to establish an Arab nation on socialist principles. Its conception of Arabism is not based solely on Islam. Christians and Jews of Arab descent are also considered Arabs. The Ba'ath party strives for a renaissance of Arab culture, which has been splintered for centuries. In Mauritania the party is part of the broad movement throughout the Arab world and was aligned with Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq. It is based in the military and the police, which enables it to exercise power in the country. Unity, socialism, freedom and cultural renaissance were the official premises of Saddam Hussein's regime, but in reality Arab interests are all that matter to the Ba'ath party. In Mauritania, where it has been in power since 1984, it pursued the oppression of black Africans on the grounds that all Mauritians are Arabs, thus denying the country's African background and making its position in the Arab world its sole political focus. The aim is to expel black Africans from the country and confiscate their possessions.

Since the 1960s, after independence, the choice of economic partners has changed drastically. Arab countries like Iraq, Egypt, Kuwait and Libya gave the Mauritanian government massive financial aid. Government turned its back on France and in 1973 Mauritania joined the Arab League. In 1974 it nationalised the country's major iron industry, Miferma, which was controlled by the French and blacks, who were more francophone than their Arab compatriots.

Mauritanian banks received capital from the Arab countries.⁴³ Loans were granted only to members of the Arab population group. As a result black Africans had little opportunity to invest capital in agricultural development, so

43 Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iraq, Libya, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Morocco, Algeria and others.

large tracts of land remained uncultivated. Government proceeded to confiscate this land and make it available to the Arab population group.

Sustainable Haal-Pularian development

As was explained in the introduction to this book, the principal aim of sustainable development is balanced development, with due regard to the economic, social, ecological, technological and cultural interests of both present and future occupants of our planet. Hence it has to meet human needs without jeopardising the ecosystem. To realise this goal measures have to be taken to put a stop to environmental depletion and pollution.

Sustainable development entails, firstly, individual, group and national endeavour. It emanates from national and international rules that govern the right to develop, as articulated in national legislation and international agreements and declarations. Not only should national laws be safeguarded, but, even more importantly, all inhabitants of the planet should be allowed to enjoy its natural resources and products without any form of discrimination.

In practical terms the right to sustainable development amounts to the following. Governments must promote improvement and progress in economic, social, cultural and political conditions. The implications of embracing this concept are enormous. Sustainable development requires far-reaching changes in various areas. It seeks to meet the social, economic and cultural needs of every individual and every nation. This strikes me as impracticable as long as there are people who are exposed to oppression, starvation, homelessness, and inadequate health care and education.⁴⁴ It also cannot happen until they have a voice in the management of their agricultural land and the right to choose their own managers or send them packing.

Sustainable way of life

In the Senegal river area one encounters innumerable ingenious environmental rules implemented in the social, economic, cultural and environmental hygiene areas. They were made and are aimed at preserving, restoring, improving, re-zoning and reorganising villages and the adjacent land, as well as the rest of the communal land. Thus there are strict rules for the protection of certain plants, trees, rocks and a particular type of clay, because they are used for other, more specifically healing, purposes. The general rule is that every village is responsible for everything necessary for the survival and expansion of its community.

44 Interview with Elhajji Saydu Bah.

Leaving fields to lie fallow is one of the most widely used and widespread sustaining measures in the region. Farmland is not cultivated for years to give it a chance to recover; crop rotation is practised for the same reason. (Of course, this conflicts with article 9 of the expropriation act, which stipulates that uncultivated land is declared state property, as discussed above. Here human rights activists face a dilemma, to which there is no solution yet: How can one allow some not to cultivate land, whereas others have no land at all?)

For the sake of survival certain measures are taken in an area to protect and conserve certain amenities. These include lakes, paths, rivers, marketplaces, schools, prayer houses, hospitals, and forests with everything to be found in them. Each village makes its own rules that are necessary for survival. For instance, swimming in certain rivers, lakes and streams is forbidden. Clothes and cooking utensils may not be washed in these forbidden places. Where necessary the active population of a village or all neighbouring villages gets together to broaden or deepen canals so as to irrigate the surrounding farmland more effectively. It is also forbidden to make some paths narrower. Wells are cleaned regularly. People caught throwing things into wells are heavily penalised. The market hall and marketplace are well maintained. If necessary the village sees to repairs. The hospital, schools and prayer houses are cleaned regularly. For some years now villagers have been planting trees in remote forests to allow them to recover from the desertification that has been under way since the 1970s.

Sustainability is also manifested when villages provide sites for inhabitants to start a new family. They are free to build a home and live on the site, thus preventing unnecessary friction. When the parental home becomes overcrowded, young couples need somewhere to live. Owners of land on the periphery of villages are obliged by customary law to donate it in the interest of the community as a whole. (Of course, this is not always compatible with traditional land rights.) The same customary law rule stipulates that homes take precedence over farmland, although the owners are entitled to compensation. But on the whole there are few claims for compensation, since everybody knows that sooner or later their own relatives will be in need of a home. The village decides where paths or roads are to be built. Failure to observe these decisions incurs a fine. Sometimes a house that is built in the wrong place is demolished.

The community determines where different types of rubbish may be dumped. Every village accepts a refuse disposal ordinance specifying the different types of refuse and where each may be taken, dumped, burnt or buried. Work teams are formed to perform these tasks. To prevent littering the environment some team members are appointed to oversee the village and its surroundings. If they can prove that one or more villagers have damaged the environment, the team

will impose a cash fine. An agency of active people sees to the collection and efficient transport of refuse.

This active part of the community also protects the location against flooding by the Senegal river or one of its canals by constructing, reinforcing or shifting a primary dike. In disaster situations every active person has to help repair the amenities unless she or he is ill. In the course of or after a disaster cash fines are imposed on anyone that transgresses the rules. The amount of the fine depends on the magnitude of the disaster and the seriousness of the suspect's negligence. In the immediate vicinity of villages special ecological measures may be taken to protect residents' private lives. Thus a village may prohibit the felling of trees and removal of shrubs within a radius of two kilometres, since the majority of villagers in the area use latrines. The village can also compel people to take their sewage to a distant spot and contraventions are punished by the village elders. Physical demarcation of farmland is both an administrative measure and an ecological strategy.⁴⁵ By means of strict demarcation lines farmers of these fields avoid friction with other inhabitants. Rocks, trees and shrubs in this area must be left untouched. Disputes about land demarcation are settled by the village headman and sages in the community with reference to actual demarcation features.⁴⁶

Some rules of criminal law are clearly aimed at sustainable development. Those who start bush fires, for example, have to pay a cash fine, the amount being dependent on the seriousness of the damage they caused. In the case of farmland newly sowed before the fire or where the harvest is still pending the penalty is increased proportionally to compensate for the damage caused.

In the Senegal river area various rules are applied in the interest of sustainable development. Some are aimed at environmental conservation, others at preventing the depletion of agricultural land or combating pollution, yet others at restoring rivulets, lakes, canals and streamlets. Punitive measures have been instituted to curb environmental damage. To conserve the ecology it is prohibited to fell certain trees and vegetation of a given age and height in the area. Inhabitants are encouraged in diverse ways to plant certain varieties of trees at their homes. These are known to be fast growing trees, so they will curb desertification. In the case of some trees and plants it is prohibited to destroy or use them unnecessarily. They are reserved for the use of expert traditional healers, who know how to remove parts of the plant without damaging the rest of it. Certain wild herbs are only picked at a special time – that is after their flowering season – so that they can propagate themselves the next year. Plants that became extinct and have since reappeared are given

45 Interview with Biiri Aali.

46 Ibid.

special treatment. Locals tell each other where they are to be found and what treatment is needed to protect them so they can reinstate themselves quickly.

Finally, the tax system allows for ecology as well.⁴⁷ Stock farmers with large herds are particularly highly taxed. Every stock farmer who owns more than the regulation number of animals has to pay this retribution, simply because the vast majority of the population know the effect of animals on the environment. In the past a special dignitary, the *Jaagaraf*, was appointed to monitor and count cattle. He was given a percentage of the tax collected on the animals. For the past century rivers and public lakes have been carefully supervised by certain families, whose task is to impose a tax in kind on fish merchants. Part of the tax the families could keep, but the lion's share went to government after the local rulers had claimed their share.

Human rights

This outline of customary law permits the conclusion that the Haal-Pulaar have a whole range of rules to promote sustainable development. However, it is illusory to think that such sustainable development can be achieved in the immediately foreseeable future. This is because there are numerous obstacles that cannot simply be removed. National governments and the international community have the mechanisms to implement the existing agreements, declarations and laws, but in many instances they delay sustainable development or ignore the rules.

The basic human rights involved can be divided into three categories: civil/political, socio-economic/cultural and collective rights. Civil and political rights are known as *classical human rights*. The rights to life, freedom⁴⁸ and security or personal integrity fall in this category.⁴⁹ The list is not complete, for it should include the right not to be tortured or exposed to inhumane treatment and not to be enslaved.⁵⁰ In addition to the basic rights there are economic, social and cultural rights, also called *second generation human rights*. Here the accent is on social justice, as expounded in articles 20 to 29 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the first and second sections of the International Pact on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. They include the right of every person and his or her family to have a good life, sufficient food and clothing, as well as the right to work, the right to safe working conditions and the right to strike, to name but a few examples. The last category is known as *third generation or solidarity rights*. They are collective rights closely linked

47 Interview with Serif Bah.

48 Articles 3 to 29 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as well as articles 7 to 10 of the International Pact on Civil and Political Rights.

49 Article 2 of the Declaration.

50 Article 5 of the Declaration.

with the foregoing two generations of human rights. They became popular in the Third World during the decolonisation period. During this period the majority of African and Asian countries demanded the right to self-determination, to dispose over their own raw materials and to a fair share of the world's riches.

Considering that the West allows individual rights to prevail over collective rights, and considering the lethargy of Third World governments, few people of this generation will see the realisation of all the rules that protect these universal rights. To the Haal-Pulaar and many other indigenous peoples this problematic situation means that their national government and the international community have an obligation to do everything in their power to put an end to the poverty and unemployment of a large part of the world population.⁵¹ In my view fair distribution of income is a step towards sustainable development. If we focus on the local level, the Haal-Pulaar should continue to enjoy the right to land inherited from their ancestors so that they and their livestock can have a better life without irreversible damage to the environment. Being totally dependent on the land, this population group realises that they have to move into action to lend mother nature a hand so that she will be able to restore herself. (In response to desertification, for example, they plant trees.)

In 1992 Arab citizens expropriated a piece of land with the aid of the national army, the state police and the national guard. Despite the local outcry the Arabs wanted to farm on the land. The owners made it quite clear that they did not accept the expropriation,⁵² but they were not taken seriously. When the time came to cultivate the land fighting broke out between the locals and the Arabs, with fatal consequences: five casualties – three farmers and two police officers. Since then the locals have been left to farm the land. The Arabs never returned. (I presume that third generation rights would legitimise such fighting?)

Conclusion

This study of Haal-Pulaar land rights and land rights violation shows that various steps have to be taken to bring about sustainable development. This is not feasible when the main actors are not taken seriously. In the struggle to preserve their cultural heritage and ecology they must be made aware of their rights and duties. The threat to sustainable development in this area stems

51 An example of a people in this situation is the Ogoni of Nigeria, whose customary rights were violated by multinational corporations in collaboration with the national government.

52 Interview with Amar Binta Boobo.

largely from the fact that some actors – the indigenous peoples – are treated as second-class citizens even though they maintain a special relationship with nature.⁵³ We have also seen how national and international actors collude in the violation of land rights. Thus the problem is not that there are no rules and regulations that promote sustainable development, but that those rules and regulations are violated again and again. To uphold land rights and serve sustainable development, indigenous and international law must be harmonised. A good starting point would be the third generation human rights, provided they are observed by the national governments and monitored by the international community.

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African indigenous spirituality as a paradigm for environmental conservation

Laurenti Magesa

Introduction

Research questions and aim

The earth and our environment are in peril. All evidence from every conceivable angle shows this beyond any shadow of a doubt. The only question appears to be how fast the slide towards environmental destruction and the eventual abyss is happening. For certain political, economic and social reasons, however, some individuals and societies may, and do, seek to downplay the magnitude of the problem.¹ They attempt in every way they can to understate the effects of those human activities and attitudes that are the source of the danger to planet Earth and question the urgency and the means to correct them. Nevertheless few people today will deny the ill effects of certain human activities on the global environment and the earth itself.

Among other crises, the more alarming because easily noticeable and measurable, are global warming, acid rain, deforestation, desertification, and pollution of the air and water bodies. The consequences on human, animal, insect, microbe and plant health and survival are apparent in disquieting negative changes to the basic structure of the earth's ecosystems. What we may be facing is what Elizabeth A. Johnson (1993:5-9) calls a crisis of 'ecocide'.

The slide into destruction of the environment, the source of life's survival on planet Earth and that of the planet itself is happening on at least two major levels. Less radically and in the short run, it is predicted that some forms of flora and fauna are threatened and many are fast becoming extinct. In the long run, and more drastically, there is increasing evidence that even the earth's own ability to sustain any form of life at all may be irreparably damaged. And, once again, the danger lies in human agency in multiple ways.

¹ Leading the opposition against major cuts in greenhouse gas emissions so far has been the United States under the George W. Bush administration (although it seems that this opposition will be reviewed under the new Obama administration), followed by Canada and Japan, and for different (mainly political and retaliatory) reasons, India and China in the rapidly industrialising world. The latter are supported by other countries of the economic, non-industrialised South.

An example is industrial pollution. It is causing precipitation in the form of acid rain that is killing many of the world's forests and their animal and insect inhabitants. Together with industrial pollutants, emissions from automobiles and other modern means of transportation using fossil fuel are said to be the chief cause of the greenhouse effect. This damages the ozone layer of the atmosphere, allowing ultraviolet rays from the sun, harmful to humans and other forms of life, to penetrate. Higher temperatures as a result of this greenhouse situation have far-reaching consequences. The earth's ice caps are melting at an unprecedented rate, causing ocean levels to rise rapidly and posing a real danger to island nations and continental lowlands around the globe.

Human encroachment on the world's forests and jungles, such as the Amazon valley in Brazil and in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and on animal reserves such as the Serengeti in Tanzania, causes disastrous environmental change. They take the form of deforestation, drought and consequent desertification, besides loss of flora and fauna unique to each of these ecosystems. In addition they have been shown to induce new and unforeseen destructive habits in creatures other than humans. Mary Colwell, a natural historian, records an observation by Prof. Craig Packer, researcher into lions in Tanzania, which illustrates this. The decimation of their natural prey through increasing human population, residences and hunting has forced the lion population in Tanzania, which usually did not kill humans for food, to do so at a rate increasing by on average 3 percent per annum. Incidents increased from about 30 cases per year in the early 1990s to over 100 cases a year in the early 2000s. This in its turn has forced the human population to retaliate in a way that threatens the lions' very existence (see Colwell 2005:9). It is becoming a vicious circle.

Writing as far back as 1990, environmentalist Freda Rajotte details the extent of the problem worldwide. Urbanisation and desertification together were claiming 600 million hectares per annum globally. In just 70 years, from 1882 to 1952, arable land in the world had been reduced by 50 percent, while deserts are growing at about 60 000 square kilometres per year. "Tropical rainforests are disappearing on the average at over 50 acres per minute, or 76,000 acres per day ...," Rajotte continues, "– and with them disappear unknown and unrecorded species. ... Millions of years of evolutionary history are being erased from the face of the earth" (see Scharper & Cunningham 1993:91-92; also Wright & Kill 1993:15-30).

More accurate and up-to-date statistics are available from global organisations engaged in this watch and research. In March 2009 the International Conference on Climate Change meeting in Copenhagen heard some of them from reputable scientists. But that is not really pertinent to our topic, since any new data and information will merely indicate the extent and depth, not the

nature of the damage. The general trend of the destruction will not differ greatly from what people like Rajotte point out: it will only be more rapid and more devastating (see also Oruka 1994). As the Swiss-based Worldwide Fund for Nature has noted, we “are destroying ... rainforests 40 hectares a minute. ... Every day, in the midst of this carnage, five plants silently become extinct.” Could some of these have provided medicine “against cancer, heart disease, AIDS or afflictions yet to come”, the Fund wonders? (See Scharper & Cunningham 1993:38; also Johnson 1993:5-9; Merchant 1992:17-40; Toolan 2001:92-103.)² This may be a hypothetical question, but it remains a crucially important one for the human race in the future.

People of faith, precisely because of their faith in a creator God, have a particular responsibility for proposing ways to face up to and slow down or, where possible, halt environmental destruction. The aim of the present reflection is to propose how and why African traditional or indigenous spirituality – based on some specific case studies – may contribute to a new (or renewed) vision of humans’ relationship with the earth, and what this new vision entails.

Sources and methods of research

In order to answer the questions and achieve the aim I studied primary material in the field, focusing on the question whether African indigenous spirituality has something to offer the reflection on ecological conservation today. I approached the question by studying a specific African religious/spiritual tradition that observes a time-honoured custom of totally proscribing common, day-to-day human activities in certain spaces so as to conserve them. I take this as a paradigm for respect for nature and the imperative of listening to it for the sake of harmonious relationships between humanity and the rest of creation. I proceeded by investigating this custom among several related clans in the Mara Region of Tanzania, notably the Wakuria ethnic group (see below). Some Wakuria clans still reserve certain geographical locations for this purpose. Their traditions set aside certain hills and rivers where no one is allowed to cut trees, draw water or even visit without a specific religious purpose. Such spaces are considered sacred or haunted. In either case, they are taken strictly as ‘belonging to the divinities’.

Three major groupings of people make up the population of Mara region in northwestern Tanzania, our research area. The region is divided into two major

2 At a summit of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in Bali in December 2007, the countries of the world had before them the fourth assessment report of the scientists of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which warned that fully a third of the living species on earth could be wiped out by a two degree Celsius rise in world temperature. There have been several other reports from various groups since.

parts by the Mara river, which runs from Kenya into Lake Victoria in Tanzania. These are North and South Mara. The river gives the two parts of the region their names. There are two administrative districts in North Mara (Tarime and Rorya), and three in South Mara (Musoma, the capital of the whole region, Bunda and Serengeti). The population of Mara region is made up of three main groups: the Wakuria, Wajita and Wajaluo.³ The vast majority of people in each group are rural subsistence farmers and pastoralists.

The Wakuria and Wajita speak Bantu languages, whereas the Wajaluo are a Nilotic people. I did not research the latter group but focused on 'environmental spirituality' among the Wakuria clans. Combined, they are by far the largest part of the population of the region. In Tanzania it includes the Wairege (also called Wailege or Wairegi), Wakabwa, Wasimbiti and Wakenye clans. Other peoples in this group, whose beliefs in this regard I did not directly examine but who share the customs of the aforementioned four clans, are the Wazanaki, Wanata, Wangoreme, Waikoma, Waisenye, Waikizu, Wasweta, Wasuba and Wakine.

The specific places my two assistant researchers visited for the purposes of this paper were Masurura to the south of the river, among the Wairegi who are very close neighbours of the Wakabwa, and Ruhu in Komuge to the north, among the Wasimbiti. The researchers also visited Kiongera, Kubiterere, Gwitiryo and Keisangora, among the Wanchari, Wakira, Watimbaru and Wanyabasi. These are subgroups or Wakuria clans to the north of the Mara river.

In all about 33 people were interviewed in both South and North Mara, using the same questionnaire. The questionnaire was administered orally by the researchers, who either wrote down the answers or tape-recorded them. In the latter case, the researchers transcribed the responses. The interviews took up over 30 research hours and were conducted intermittently over two years (2006-2007). Interviewees were selected randomly, the only criterion being readiness to openly answer the questionnaire. They ranged in age from 38 to 80 years. Curiously, there was only one woman among them who was ready to volunteer information about these beliefs. This could be because, among these peoples, the responsibility of sacrificing to God and the ancestors, usually the

³ The prefix 'Wa-' preceding the root word, as in 'Wa-kuria', denotes the name of the group in Tanzania's national language, Kiswahili. In many local Bantu languages it would be rendered by the prefix 'Ba-' or 'Aba-', thus 'Bakuria' or 'Abakuria'. Their locations would be prefixed by 'U-' and 'Bu-' in Kiswahili and the indigenous languages respectively, thus 'Ukuria' and 'Bukuria'. The languages are prefixed by 'Ki-' in both the local languages and Kiswahili, thus 'Kikuria'. In English phonography the prefixes are usually dropped altogether, thus 'Kuria' for land, people and language alike. In this paper I have opted for the Kiswahili usage most familiar to readers in this region.

main activity in sacred places, is a male prerogative. Our male dominated sample therefore reflects the reality of the Wakuria socio-religious world.

The research methodology consisted of three steps. First, it was phenomenological in order to find out what realities in nature the people isolate as sacred. Secondly, the content of the belief was established by inquiring into the reason for its existence. Thirdly, the answers were interpreted by cross-referencing the responses to find out the implications of the beliefs for behaviour. The overall procedure consisted in listening to people's own stories, their own beliefs about the prohibitions under consideration. My research assistants did this work (the first and second steps). Both were teachers. Before the research process started I had a two-hour session with them on how to approach the topic and handle the questionnaire with the interviewees. I personally closely studied the research data to look for common elements in the beliefs and practices (third step). From this scrutiny I made certain theological inferences about the relevance of environmental spirituality today.

The research

“Tradition says, ‘This hill is sacred/haunted’” – the story of Bomaswa hill

Bomaswa (also known as Bhomaswa) is a large hill in Masurura village, very close to the road from Musoma to Mugumu. This latter town is the administrative centre of Serengeti district in South Mara. From Musoma the road passes, via Makutano Nyankanga through the small trading centres of Kiagata and Sirori Simba, on to Mugumu. The Masurura villagers belong to the Wairege clan of the Wakuria people. Masurura neighbours Ryamisanga village and Kiagata trading centre in Musoma district.

Driving, cycling or walking on the road that passes nearby, you cannot fail to notice that Bomaswa hill is lusher and greener than most surrounding areas. Many big trees tower above the bush. It is clear that the trees have not been felled indiscriminately for firewood or other uses, and that vegetation has not been disturbed as much as in the surrounding areas at the foot of and away from the hill. This is odd, given the fact that Bomaswa is right in the middle of Masurura village, and that the main fuels for domestic use in the village and whole region are wood and charcoal. Trees are also used for building houses. If many other areas have been stripped of trees for these purposes, why not Bomaswa?

There is a reason behind it. Briefly, the story is that no one is allowed to climb, fell trees, even fetch water from or otherwise drastically disturb the hill. This despite the belief that there is a well of clean water that never runs dry at the top. When my researcher inquired into the reason for this prohibition, the answer invariably was: “Tradition says, ‘This hill [Bomaswa] is sacred and

haunted.” It is sacred because the Wairege residents of the area believe that their first ancestors lived there, and that therefore their spirits are still there. So that’s where they perform sacrifices and pray in serious crises. Because the belief is that especially the spirit of the founding ancestor still lives there and manifests itself occasionally in the form of a he-goat, huge snake, or harmless leopard, anyone who disturbs the peace of the hill must suffer ill consequences for the transgression.

The tribal legend is that by the 1800s people already occupied the area around Bomaswa. The first inhabitants were members of the Monyamange clan of the Wairege people under the leadership of one Maswe, after whom Bomaswa hill is named. Somehow the Wairege and other surrounding peoples (the Wakabwa) considered the hill important. The story goes that to protect it from intruders, the Wairege people selected ten families – of strictly Wairege parentage on both sides – to build their homes on top of the hill. These families in turn, for security reasons, built a fortress around their homes from stones collected on the hill. It is said that the remnants of this fortress are still on the hilltop today.

According to legend there is a well of clean water at the very top of Bomaswa hill, which provided water for these families. It never runs dry. More significantly, a certain spirit lives on the hill, said to be the founding ancestor of the clan. In days gone by when the hill was still inhabited, the legend goes on, whenever people misbehaved, this spirit would disturb the well so that people could not use the water. As time went by and generations came and went, people forgot about the spirit’s anger and continued to misbehave in ever worse ways. At first the offenders were separated from the others and ordered to go and live at the bottom of the hill, never to be allowed up again, because they had failed to observe tradition by obeying the rules for living on the hill. Eventually no one was worthy of remaining except the spirit of the founding parent.

After that Bomaswa hill remained exclusively a place for offering sacrifices to the ancestors. No one is allowed to go up the hill apart from the elders on special ritual occasions. Furthermore, no one is allowed to fell trees there for any purpose, or to collect firewood or fetch water from there at the risk of incurring dire consequences, including possible death. At any rate, if one of these prohibitions is broken and the ancestral spirits do not seem to mete out punishment, the community must nevertheless intervene to appease them to avoid possible ill consequences for the entire village. The elders invariably order the transgressor to pay a fine in the form of a goat to be used for placation rituals. Grazing cattle at the foot of the hill, however, is permitted nowadays.

Apparitions of the spirit of the founding ancestor

There is one consistent element in the story about Bomaswa hill. All interviewees claimed that the spirit living at the top of Bomaswa hill appears occasionally in the form of a white he-goat, particularly to shepherds who bring their flocks to graze at the foot of the hill. The appearances are typically summed up by Chacha Maswe (68), who reported:

I must count myself among the lucky ones. I saw that spirit in the shape of a he-goat. I was watching my father's goats graze one day when I saw a goat coming down the hill and mixing in and grazing with the goats I was herding. I didn't pay the incident any mind until it was time to bring the goats home. That's when I did not see it [the white he-goat] among the other goats anymore. ... I can never allow anybody to tamper with that hill.

The basic elements of this experience were corroborated by Maseke Mancheye (82). However, many interviewees confessed that they themselves had never seen this spirit in this particular or any other form, but they all affirmed that they had heard stories about it somewhere or knew someone who had had the experience. Among all of them, whatever their age, the belief in the spirit's existence was firm. In their minds it seemed unquestionable. The he-goat was identified by many as the spirit of the first ancestor, although no one seemed to be quite clear which 'first' ancestor was being referred to: that of the Wairege clan as a whole or of the ten families that once lived on the hilltop? But the question seemed unimportant and the uncertainty didn't appear to bother the informants at all. They all accepted the belief in the authority of tradition.

To some of the few who had defied tradition and broken the taboo against cutting wood at the top of Bomaswa or just loitering there, the spirit had appeared in the form of a huge snake or a leopard. Waryuba Geoge (50) tells the story of what happened to him when he cut down a tree from the hill to build himself a house:

I had cut down trees on this hill before, when I was younger, for fixing the enclosure for my cattle without encountering any problem. In fact, I had cut wood to use for other purposes also. As was my habit, therefore, on this particular day I took my sharpened axe and machete and started up the hill. I had my mind fixed on two trees at the top of the hill, because the trees at the foot of the hill I found unsuitable for my needs. Then suddenly something strange happened, so strange I have never seen the likes of it ever since I started cutting trees on this hill. As I cast my eyes just ahead of me, I saw a huge snake, so huge I have never seen one like it before. I started running downhill – I mean, I ran like I had never run before. I didn't even know – or care, I might add – where I left my tools. I don't mind saying that since then I have had no desire at all even to look up at that hill again, for when I do, all I recall is that terrible experience. That is a terrible hill.

The essence of this information was corroborated by Mwita Magori (72) and Edward Waryuba (80) as being the experience of many transgressors of the prohibition of trespassing on Bomaswa hill..

Foreigners and Bomaswa Hill

There are two other stories or well-known beliefs in Masurura about Bomaswa hill and the activities around it. Both illustrate the ancestral spirits' desire not to be disturbed. One anecdote is about European prospectors who arrived in Masurura around 1944 or 1945 looking for gold. According to John Mwita (52) he heard from some elders that the Europeans believed there was a gold reef running from Nyamongo area, through Majimoto and Sirori Simba centres and Ring'wani village in Ngoreme, onto Bomaswa hill and Buhemba village.⁴ For some reason – people attribute it to the displeasure of the ancestral spirit on Bomaswa – the Europeans in question did not find gold. Edward Waryuba (80) says that they had to cover up the shafts they had dug and leave the area for good. Afterwards, according to the second story, white missionaries came intending to build a church at Masurura, but one Mwita Makanda, a powerful and influential elder, no doubt acting on behalf of the ancestors, would have none of it. The missionaries then moved on to establish their mission station at Kiagata. “Had it not been for Mwita Makanda,” avers Waryuba, “the centre at Kiagata would have been established right here at Masurura.”

Very recent ‘transgressors’ are not completely exempt from problems caused by the ancestral spirits either. A few years ago the village government proposed building a kindergarten school at the foot of the hill. But so far the idea has not materialised, proof for some that the ancestors are not happy with it. Catholics, whose main church is at Kiagata, also planned to build an outstation there. The people say that the missionaries started laying the foundations and baked many bricks, but to date nothing further has been done. For many of the older residents of Masurura this proves the same point: the ancestors are displeased by any attempt to disturb their peace by erecting buildings around the hill.

Current attitudes

Many interviewees acknowledged that today many people do not observe all the taboos concerning Bomaswa hill, at least not as strictly as tradition demands. Some trees are felled at the foot of the hill for building houses or for

4 These are locations not very far from one another with the same geological features of rocky hills and valleys. There are gold mines currently operating at Nyamongo and Buhemba, leased by the national government to foreign companies. The mines at Ngoreme (Majimoto) are defunct except for locals that occasionally dig there by hand in the hope of finding gold. There is a ready market for gold among private buyers at any mining location in the region and the country as a whole.

commercial purposes (mainly to make charcoal). Mwita Magori is not sure whether the ancestral spirit (Omokhoru) that people speak of still lives on Bomaswa hill or not, because he now sees people climbing up the hill and felling trees there without suffering any consequences:

If he [the spirit] were still there [I am sure] he would not have tolerated people cutting trees there. He would have chased them away in different ways, those who had evil intentions like cutting trees on the hill. It might also be because sacrifices are seldom offered on the hill anymore, that's why people now go there without any problem. Unlike in my time, today people think nothing of climbing up the hill and cutting the trees. They are not afraid of the hill any more. That's what I remember [or know].

Nevertheless, quite recent incidents are cited to show that, as far as the Masurura population is concerned, there is still something mysterious and awe-inspiring about Bomaswa hill. The people believe that stones from the hill are not supposed to be collected for building purposes. Everyone interviewed remembers that government engineers building the bridge across nearby Nyamako river on the main road to Mugumu from Musoma ignored the people's warnings and collected stones from around the hill to build the bridge. After a short time the bridge collapsed, so that it became very difficult to cross the river on the way to Mugumu. Afterwards a different group of engineers was sent, who heeded the advice not to use stones from Bomaswa. "The bridge they built [this time] still stands today," is the people's verdict. It proves to them that because this second group of engineers showed due respect to the ancestral spirit of Bomaswa, they did not provoke its wrath.

The village authorities see Bomaswa as an attraction for visitors, so it has selected part of the hill for planting trees in addition to the indigenous varieties growing there, but that plan is yet to be implemented. It may be that people are silently protesting and resisting the idea; probably for them this would likewise be a transgression. No one, however, came out and said so openly. Was it perhaps out of fear of the village authorities?

The sacred trees, groves and forests of North Mara

Apart from Bomaswa in Masurura, there are several other Wakuria clans in Tarime district to the north of the Mara river, whom the researchers also visited for comparative purposes. Among the clans visited were the Wanchari, Wakira, Wairege, and Watimbaru. Related to the Wakuria but a distinct group, there are also the Wasimbiti. The research showed that all these groups have a taboo on felling certain kinds of trees or putting them to human use in any way. There are also certain areas – hills and groves around certain rivers and other water sources – where no trees of whatever kind may be felled for any reason. In other words, there are groves and forests traditionally proscribed for human use because of the belief that they are ancestral dwelling places or for some related

reason. The stories surrounding the sites are similar to the story of Bomaswa hill. It is generally claimed, just as among the Wairege with reference to Bomaswa hill, that anyone who breaks this taboo angers the ancestors by destroying their habitat. Such persons are liable to incur grave consequences for themselves or the entire community.

There are four main taboo categories: specific trees, certain hills, certain forests, and important water sources. For each group of people researched in North Mara the investigation disclosed several of these categories of restricted things and places. In Bunchari, for instance, the hills restricted from human activity include Mwema, Kiongera and Susuni. In the same area no one may cut trees from a small 'forest' in Kikomori. Among the Wasimbiti the interviewees pointed out sacred places and hills in Ruhu, Kyamwame, Kirumi, Kuruya, Isango and Nyamaguku. Sacred groves or water sources were found among the Wakira at Keryoba and Nyabitocho. Different clans of the Wakuria forbid human use of different types of trees – one tree specifically mentioned is the *muturu*, found mostly in densely wooded places. A tall, practically branchless tree, it must not be used for building houses. No reason was given except to say, characteristically, 'that it is the tradition' (Kiswahili: *ni mila*).

There are no elaborate logical reasons for these prohibitions apart from the belief that the locations in question should be respected because they are the homes of ancestors and other spirits, and that bad things happen to anyone who breaks the taboos in question. Indeed, the people concerned appear to make no direct, conscious connection between these foundational stories (or myths) and the well-being of the environment. The myths seem to be purely religious, and the accompanying beliefs might even strike one as superstitious, particularly those regarding the consequences of breaking the rules against violation of the proscribed spaces.

Nevertheless, as with every important myth, there is a deeper meaning to them – one which the contemporary mind, accustomed as it is to strictly logical reasoning and empirical verification, can easily miss. The populations involved are not necessarily consciously aware of this meaning apart from its popular significance. Symbols and myths need to be interpreted to get to their inner meaning. It is essential that 'experts' (in this case scholars of religion and theologians) deconstruct and reconstruct the religious, theological and ethical significance of the myths and beliefs in question for humanity's relationship to, and with, the environment today. After closely studying and comparing the contents of the responses to the interview questions, this is what I attempt to do in the next section of this reflection.

Theoretical and practical implications

Tradition and culture

Tradition plays a decisive part in the life of the [indigenous] people. The rituals that emerge from it are based on a sense of prohibitions and limits. Animals and plants are sacred. People and nature are bound together by mutual limits and prohibitions. The interaction of humans, animals, and plants has ritual meaning, but surprisingly an intimate and personal meaning as well, since indigenous people hear “voices” [and see “visions”] in the other sacred beings around them that guide them in living together for mutual benefit (Wright & Kill 1993:33).

This is the spirituality implicit in the story of Bomaswa hill, as well as those of the groves and wooded places in North Mara. Despite modernisation and globalisation this spirituality has not completely succumbed to other world-views that impinge on it. It is subject, of course, to pressures and influences, but fundamentally the spirituality of the Wairege has been resilient, as evidenced by the stories and beliefs cited above. That such hills and groves exist at all at present-day Masurura and in North Mara, after so many generations of colonialism and missionary zeal militating against them, is in itself remarkable. It underscores the resilience of their inherent meaning for the people. Even more remarkable is the fact that successive post-independence administrations in Tanzania, under great pressure from modern economic and spiritual influences, have not succeeded in eradicating them in the name of development.

For economic reasons alone these locations should have been eliminated. For example, Masurura is one of the poorest villages in Musoma district. The soil is infertile and weather conditions are generally bad. It tends to be dry for most of the year, so apart from cassava (or tapioca), whose tubers are the staple food of the people, there are few other food or cash crops. For a cash income people resort to selling firewood and charcoal by the roadside. Sometimes young people transport these goods on bicycles to Musoma town, where they fetch a better price. Hence it says something profound about Wairege indigenous spirituality that, given these harsh conditions, the trees on Bomaswa hill are still more or less conserved on ‘spiritual’ grounds. It is equally remarkable that the ‘failures’ of recent projects around the hill (which to the modern mind can be attributed to different reasons) are interpreted by the majority of Masurura’s people in the same spiritual terms.

The underlying conditions in the case of the hills and groves in North Mara are slightly different, but they lead to the same conclusion. In most cases, unlike in the south, the land is fertile. People in the areas of North Mara discussed are better able to meet their survival needs through agriculture than is generally the case in the south. In a good year maize is plentiful, and much of it is exported to neighbouring Kenya. Bananas are also a food crop. Cash crops

are coffee, vegetables and, in some places, tobacco. Tea farming, too, is gradually taking off. So one wonders why, except for the resilience of indigenous spirituality, these locations have not been taken over for agricultural use.

The human spirit seeks reasons for its major decisions. It seeks to justify important events and situations that affect human life. Over time these reasons become obscure and turn into 'traditions'. The traditions of Masurura and North Mara show the people's recognition of the autonomy of nature and invisible creation. Latent in these traditions is an awareness that humanity does not have a complete prerogative over creation; human beings are responsible for how they use creation and are accountable to higher powers for it. Wakuria myths and beliefs as expressed in the story of Bomaswa hill and the groves and forests of North Mara preserve this meaning in a way that it can be retrieved by and for every generation in their own particular circumstances. They can be interpreted to provide ever fresh insight and energy as humanity faces new challenges, for instance to help people in modern times to face the challenge of a deteriorating environment.

Wakuria (African) spirituality as a paradigm for environmental conservation

In this context, African spirituality, as expressed by the Wairege and Wakuria people in their approach to their sacred places, may be taken as paradigm of environmental conservation and sustainable development.

What governs the attitude towards the environment of the Wakuria peoples studied? At the centre of their spirituality is a feeling of mystery, awe and respect for nature. Nature, for them, has its own identity, as does all its constituents. Nature has to be listened to; it has to be respected. If wronged or injured, or if some of it must be 'destroyed' for the sake of human survival, it must be asked for forgiveness. And because it is at one with, part and parcel of the existence and life of humanity and essentially connected with it through the divine act of creation, it must not be 'objectified'.

Wakuria spirituality approaches nature as personalised; just like human individuals and everything in nature have a 'life' and rhythm of their own. Once again, this rhythm is an act of creation; the creator God has made it so. Essentially, all creatures work in and for the harmony of the entire universe. The responsibility of man and woman in the universe, according to Wakuria spirituality, is to see to it that this process of harmonious coexistence continues unspoiled. The locations set apart and preserved seem to be a reminder of this. Failing to attend to this responsibility – as scrupulously as is humanly possible – causes chaos, and humanity is invariably the loser. This is what Wairege/Wakuria tradition says. The relevant myths trace the customs and beliefs' origins to the creator God, handed down from generation to generation by the ancestors and elders.

The “‘God of our Ancestors’ [is] recognized through the wonders of the world” (Mununguri 1998:13). This, in short, is what the stories of Bomaswa of the Wairege and those of the hills and groves of the Wakuria people of North Mara are meant to symbolise. Wooded Bomaswa and other hills of similar verdure, as well as the groves that are either sources or receptors of water, are places that manifest the awesomeness of God, as does creation itself. But even more, they are sources of sustenance for human and other forms of life. They show divine love and concern for humanity and the entire creation. If they are not kept ‘whole’, unspoiled, if they are injured or wronged, if they are needlessly exploited, existence in general is bound to suffer. This is why the story of Bomaswa hill says that God placed the ancestors of the community in their pristine innocence there. When they broke the rules and began to disrupt the equilibrium on the summit, they were forced to leave it. Thus God, through ancestral spirits, guards the hill, its trees and well jealously, as a reminder to the Wairege to maintain the wholeness of the rest of creation.

This is spirituality arising from instinctive awareness of what in modern terminology we can refer to as ‘deep’, ‘radical’ ecology, the acknowledgment of the interconnectedness and interrelatedness of all creatures. ‘Instinctive’ is an important concept here. Even though they are not and should not be separated, feeling precedes reason in every area of human activity, also in the religious and other, more empirical or concrete spheres. Feeling is the foundational language of belief and the basis of every theory or hypothesis. To argue absolutely, therefore, that the affective is not ‘scientific’ in the narrow, technological sense of the word, that it cannot be verified by empirical, quantifiable control, is self-defeating. It contradicts the foundations of both reason and science. The stories of Bomaswa and their counterparts in other parts of Mara region do not lack religious and scientific meaning and implications. They inspire a form of spirituality and ethics that can lead to hypotheses or theories and processes, resulting in conclusions that may be taken as a paradigm for environmental conservation and sustainable development.

Identifying the elements of this paradigm, we find that they may be similar to what environmentalists of different hues⁵ advocate and struggle for today (see Merchant 1992:85-210). This suggests a scientific component necessarily inherent in the affective. In symbolic and mythical language, what the traditions are saying is that in the midst of all creation there is an intrinsic, mystical and necessary connection with human life and that of the entire universe in general. There is an inherent mutuality in creation which dictates that you cannot promote one component of the cosmos without affecting all the others and that you cannot destroy one without in some way disturbing the

5 Deep, Spiritual, and Social ecologists, and Green and Ecofeminist movements.

others as well. Investigating the nature of this connection is the vocation of science.

From the research responses it is possible to construct the meaning and implications of Wairege/Wakuria spirituality as a paradigm for environmental conservation and sustainable development for our time. We can explain the theological sense of the Wairege/Wakuria ecological symbols in terms of God as “Holy Presence, Great Becoming, Sacred Whole, [and] Incarnate Spirit” (as suggested, e.g., by James A. Nash):

God as holy Presence is the Great Mysterious throughout the planet, manifest particularly in, and on the horizon of, sacred places. God as Great Becoming is dynamic power responsive to a changing cosmos and world, evolving with the universe as lure for freedom and Sharer of joy and suffering. ... God as Sacred Whole is “more” than the universe, but not “external” to it. Rather the universe has interiority; earth’s differentiated beings are animated by God, who gives vital unity to all of this valued variety. God as Incarnate Spirit inspires the universe. The Spirit enlivens and enlightens the creation, which bodies God forth (see Hessel 1996:16).

“This hill is sacred”: the Holy Presence

Beyond respect, there appears to be genuine reverence among the elders in Masurura village for Bomaswa hill as the first dwelling place of the ancestors of the people. The story about these ancestors’ activities on the hilltop indicates this. The fact that some, and eventually all of them, had to migrate to the bottom of the hill on account of wrongdoings before God, shows a sense of God’s presence up there. The hill remains the physical symbol of this Holy Presence among the people, and the taboos surrounding it are meant to underline that. Everything on the hill, the vegetation, the water, even the animals belong to God alone; no one is allowed to touch them. We were not told in interviews that it is not allowed to hunt there, but it follows logically from the prohibition of climbing the hill aimlessly.

As a paradigm of the spirituality of environmental conservation and sustainable development the lesson for us is to appreciate the connection between God and the whole of creation: that God, though transcendent, is not external to the cosmos and the universe. The questions Nancy G. Wright poses for Christian theological and spiritual consideration are significant: “How does the whole Earth community participate in God? Where is God in the natural world? Can we experience God in forests, rocks, and trees as well as in human community?” These are not merely theoretical considerations; they have consequences, to do with the following concern: “[H]ow do we bring this experience [of God in nature] to bear on our Christian faith and spiritual nurture?” (see Hessel 1996:239).

In ethical terms, if God is not completely separated from nature and is experienced there just as much as in the human community, then human perspectives and attitudes towards non-human creation will at least resemble

perspectives and attitudes governing inter-human relations that have developed during the aeons of human evolution. If it is wrong to exploit, oppress or alienate the human other, it should be wrong to exploit, oppress or alienate the other in nature, for it too stands, actually ‘lives’ in God’s holy presence. By the same token we cannot speak of development in its larger, holistic dimensions, for the ultimate result of exploitation and oppression – of other human beings and nature alike – is destruction.

Apparitions of the ancestral spirit(s): the Incarnate Spirit

Humanity also lives by concrete signs – signs of love, authority, power and so on. The white he-goat, the huge snake and the leopard cited by certain individuals on Bomaswa hill are, in the myths of the Wairege of Masurura, and for them, concrete signs of the Holy Presence that we have just talked about. They are epiphanies; they indicate not only God’s presence among creatures, but are also signs, beyond that, of God’s constant care for his own. At the same time they show the limits beyond which humanity should not trespass. Sometimes these signs appear unprovoked, as in the case of the he-goat among the goats grazing at the bottom of the hill. Often, however, as in the case of the snake and the leopard, they act as warnings when human creatures forget their position vis-à-vis God and encroach on God’s terrain, ignoring the limits to their use of creation. As far as the trees and groves of North Mara are concerned, similar warnings come by way of droughts, illnesses and other disorders.

Biblical faith expresses divine epiphany and the activity of the incarnate Spirit in similar images, among them fire, wind and water. Biblical interpretation shows the symbolic significance of these elements. All these and more – mountains, rocks, seas, lakes and rivers – are linked to God’s salvific work. In the Old Testament fire and wind are directly associated with God at various moments in the course of Israel’s exodus from slavery to freedom. In the New Testament they are linked with the Holy Spirit as the initiator and principal administrator, as it were, of the life of the church. It is the work of the Holy Spirit that keeps the life of the church in harmony with the divine will. The Holy Spirit is incarnate in the church, according to Jesus’ promise, without which incarnation or presence there can be no church. As biblical scholar John L. McKenzie (1965:922) explains, “Water has a cosmic significance ... In biblical imagery water is life and salvation. The saving acts of Yahweh for Israel are compared to the production of water in the desert.” And Jesus identifies himself as, among other things, “a spring of water welling up to eternal life” (Jn. 4:14, *The African Bible*). As is well known, initiation into the church is marked by symbolic ritual washing with water and in classical theology it is meant to effect not merely symbolic but ontological change in the person baptised, so that the ritual cannot be repeated.

What does this have to do with sustainable development? It points to the moral, or ethical, element of development. Development is not merely about production and consumption. This is the materialistic view, which is important and necessary but not exhaustive. The comprehensive view of development, one that is also sustainable, includes the element of moral responsibility, not only to the other person but also to creation. The presence of the spirits mandates humanity to observe proportionality: human consumption must not exceed nature's potential to provide. In the spirituality of Bomaswa and North Mara the spirits are supposed to see to that.

Sacred tress, groves and forests: the Great Becoming

In many parts of Africa religious rituals and ceremonies are largely based on and replicate the rhythm of nature. What funerary rites emphasise for the most part is not the end of life, although this is obviously recognised in diverse flamboyant displays of sorrow. It is continuation of life strengthened by new beginnings that on such occasions dominates most of the performative symbolism. The overall message is that although individual life comes to an end, life in its totality must grow greater.

When the Wakuria of North Mara preserve certain trees, groves, and forests but allow others to be put to human use, they are saying something similar. These locations are preserved as a sign of the continuation of the greater life of nature, of the cosmos, of which the spirits – and in the final analysis the Great Spirit – are guarantees. Their continued existence is pedagogic in the sense that they remind humanity – usually so preoccupied, due to its lost innocence, with 'destruction' for survival – not to forget to live with nature as God lives with it, respectfully and harmoniously. Only this kind of development is sustainable. Only thus can the greater life flower, and only thus can ancestral and divine glory continue to be a source of inspiration for human life in its relationship with created order. The life of the universe is a sign of divine life itself; the whole universe not only signifies and represents it. We are in the world, moulded by the Great Spirit, and "We make contact with the Great Spirit when we know and love where we are" (McDaniel 1995:195).

The Great Becoming leads to the transformation of creation, not its end. In other words, it points to creation's telos (purposeful completion), not its finis (annihilation). Perhaps this is what 'the end of the world' means in Christian imagery, with the second coming of Christ as the telos of all creation, of which St Paul speaks in Romans 8:22-27. This view endorses the belief that there is no heaven apart from this world (see Metz & Schillebeeckx 1991). Just as 'resurrection' is this body transformed and perfected, so heaven is this world transformed and perfected.

Heaven is not something we get ...; it is something we become. Heaven is something we find within ourselves, something we discover beyond ourselves, something we come to see and learn to touch and begin to feel in us and around us now. Heaven is finding God now and then growing into life always more and more. Life is not about its endpoint. Life is about making the journey to the within and the ultimate in the consciousness of where we're going (Chittister 1999:49).

H. Paul Santmire (1985:189) argues the same point from a biblical point of view. He says: “The narratives of biblical experience can be read primarily in terms of the metaphor of migration to a good land and the metaphor of fecundity (the ecological motif) ... rather than primarily in terms of the metaphor of ascent (spiritual motif).”

“[E]ternal life” does not necessarily mean life-after-death, but rather Spirit-inspired life in the here-and-now. ... In seeking an ecological version of the gospel, let “eternal life” mean life that is lived from the Spirit, not the ego, and that therefore enjoys communion with God and with that very good creation which God so loves. It is eternal, not necessarily in the sense that it endures forever, though it may, but rather in the sense that it partakes of the timeless quality of divine wisdom and compassion in the immediacy of the present (McDaniel 1995:96)

Thus we encounter the Great Becoming in all life-enhancing forces, including those forces that preserve the integrity of the environment, because this is the great life force under which all other forces shelter. Humanity enhances life force by attitudes and acts of care and concern: “Whenever we love others without expectation, or seek truth for its own sake, or share in the joys of other living beings, we participate in eternal life” (McDaniel 1995:96), that is to say, in the most singularly important activity of the Great Becoming. Sustainable development is also about sharing in this joy. It is about ‘improving the quality of life’ in both the material and the spiritual sense.

Foreigners and exploitations: the Sacred Whole

In line with this kind of perception, Bomaswa hill and the holy groves and trees of North Mara are signs of the wholeness of creation established and sanctioned by the Sacred Whole, the creator. In Wairege/Wakuria spirituality they stand for the unity of all creation, to disturb part of which affects the rest. On the one hand the white he-goat’s unpretentious association with other goats in their pasture at the foot of Bomaswa hill and his inconspicuous disappearance at the end of the day may be taken to underline this unity. The huge snake appearing to protect the trees from being cut down, or to prevent water being drawn from the hilltop, emphasises the same thing. But it also highlights the negative consequences of mindless misuse of nature. Trying to mine for gold at Bomaswa, or to use its rocks to build a bridge, or to construct a school or a church building at the foot of the hill implies forgetfulness that creation in

the first place belongs to God and that not everything in creation is to be used for human purposes. This theocentric element in Wairege/Wakuria spirituality is basic to their respect for nature and a reason for humans to use it judiciously.

This offers a response to the sustainability challenge facing religious faith today. Fundamentally it calls the human species to recognise that “we are creatures among other creatures ... who have ethical responsibilities not only to other humans but also to the entire community of life”. But this calls for deep humility towards the rest of creation, which implies ““reverence for the mystery of being [and] gratitude for the gift of life”” (see McDaniel 2005:61).

In the Wairege stories concerning Bomaswa, it seems foreigners also trespass mindlessly on the integrity of Bomaswa. Foreignness here implies being on the ‘outside’, and consequently ignorant and sometimes arrogant when it comes to respect for tradition. From the theoretical point of view of the spirituality of the Wairege of Masurura, the European miners, the Roman Catholic missionaries and the district engineers who came to construct the bridge across Nyamako river demonstrated both these attitudes. Despite warnings to the contrary, they wanted to carry out their projects just the same. In the eyes of the Wairege of Masurura they failed, just as anyone who tampers with nature eventually does.

Dialogical potential

Some important conversation partners

The renowned playwright Bernard Shaw once said, “There is only one religion, though there are hundreds of versions of it” (see Livingston 1993:3-4). This remark may be applied to spirituality: there is only one spirituality, though there are hundreds of versions of it. Furthermore, the definitions of religion of great thinkers such as Rudolf Otto and Paul Tillich may be applied to spirituality as well. According to Otto, “Religion is that which grows out of, and gives expression to, experience of the holy in its various aspects.” In the words of Tillich, “Religion is the state of being grasped by an ultimate concern, a concern which qualifies all other concerns as preliminary and which itself contains the answer to the question of the meaning of our life” (Livingston 1993:6-7). This is precisely what spirituality means.

Above we described it as an orientation to life, expressing itself in ethics. If anything, it shows the close connection (but not necessarily identity) between different approaches to spirituality, ethics and religion, a connection which provides, or can provide, a basis for dialogue between and among them. Dialogue is important for several reasons. First, each of the spiritualities in conversation with African spirituality might understand and appreciate itself better than previously because of the new elements or emphases that African

spirituality as seen in the Wairege/Wakuria perceptions brings to the discussion. Second, the spiritualities in conversation with African spirituality, when exposed to the Wairege/Wakuria visions of reality, might understand and appreciate each other better, hence they might refrain from prejudging and calling each other names such as primitive, superstitious, and so on. These epithets have for a long time been too generally and too uncritically attached to African spirituality such as that of the Wakuria/Wairege. Thirdly, and perhaps most crucially for the environment today, the spiritualities may converge and collaborate to preserve the cosmos and inform sustainable development.

The four ecological motifs of Wairege/Wakuria spirituality mentioned above already provide important foundations for fruitful dialogue with other perceptions (or ‘spiritualities’) of the environment. Here we mention only three environmental viewpoints and briefly note points of contact between each of them and African spirituality as expressed by the Wairege/Wakuria. These are Christian spirituality in general, feminist spirituality and “Green Politics”.

Dialogue with Christian spirituality

When African spirituality in the Wairege/Wakuria examples is taken seriously, not merely its externals (what the myths and beliefs say on the surface) but its deep intentionality (what they signify, imply and summon us to make our basic orientation to life), there is considerable scope for conversation with Christian spirituality.

African spirituality is not other-worldly, so to speak. It is necessarily bound up with this world. It is “at home in the cosmos” (Toolan’s 2001). It envisages no other world apart from this one. The supreme human duty, one that brings salvation, is to live well in the here and now. The phrase ‘to live well’ in African spirituality expresses an ethical imperative of community – the community of people (living, dead and yet to be born), of goods (of the human group or tribe), and of the earth and all creatures (seen and unseen). This community demands mutual respect between all its elements and dimensions if it is to survive. Accordingly African spirituality understands each element of the universe to have a spiritual power, which together coalesce in the great spirit (the cosmos) and the Great Spirit (the divine creator) for the sake of the good life or harmony of all creation and, more specifically, of the human species. Not a static position but an evolving transformation in relation to the whole of creation along a predictable path, charted and channelled by tradition, is the human person’s vocation in the world.

The Christian tradition similarly entails active engagement in and with the world. First of all, it interprets God’s loving action on behalf of his chosen people Israel as a paradigm of his love for all people. Cooperation with this salvific action of God is what Christians technically call collaboration with grace, which is the Holy Spirit. The Spirit in turn leads them to salvation ‘at the

end of time'. Thus, "the ethical takes on an eschatological dimension through which it is experienced as collaboration with the grace of God. So Christians are not indifferent to the historical" (see Metz & Schillebeeckx 1991:3).

Belief in the incarnation hinges on the fact that the divine became historical, Immanuel or God with us, in order to transform and make history divine. In that case history must have intrinsically divine qualities that demand respect and reverence as hierophanies. The attention that Christians pay to divine revelation is compatible with this approach. According to Piet Schoonenberg, the revelation received by Christians is not top-down, so to speak. Rather, it is "the experienced self-communication of God in human history, which thereby becomes the history of salvation" (see Wessels 2003:60).

Through their myths leading to practical, total conservation of certain territorial locations dedicated to the ancestors or God, the Wairege/Wakuria symbolically (and empirically) withdraw from the human person the right to use them for selfish ends. This kind of spirituality says at least three things that can provide topics for fruitful theological dialogue with Christianity. First, it says that God is sovereign over all creation, including humanity. Secondly, it underlines that humanity is not above nature but participates integrally in the dignity of creation. Thirdly, it points out that there is a need for symbols or concrete signs to remind the human person of these realities – in Christian terms, a need for sacraments.

Dialogue with feminist spirituality

One of the central concerns of this discussion has been to show, through a study of the myths and beliefs of the Wairege/Wakuria people as concrete cases, how African spirituality regards not only the cosmos but the entire universe as a sacred. For them the whole of creation is so interrelated, indeed integrated in its dynamic existence, as to be understood as one vital energy. Of course, there are distinct elements in creation, but they depend fundamentally on each other to exist and survive, so in the end both good and bad 'trends' – whether evident or obscure, conscious or unconscious, intentional or accidental – have a ripple effect throughout existence. The vital power of all existence is affected positively or negatively exclusively by human behaviour. In this sense humanity bears the sole ethical responsibility for strengthening or weakening life force.

A central idea of feminist spirituality, especially that branch called ecofeminism, is earth healing (see Ruether 1992). Ecofeminist thinking starts off from and is based on the notion of Gaia, the notion that far from being only a "unity resulting from a set of relationships, the Earth and humankind make up a single entity". The claim is that we humans constitute "a single being, complex, diverse, contradictory, and endowed with enormous dynamism – but

in the end, a single complex being that many are calling Gaia” (see Boff 1997:14).

Such claim assumes that human beings are not just on the Earth; we are not wayfarers, passengers from somewhere else who belong to other worlds. Far from it. We are sons and daughter of the Earth. We are the Earth itself in its expression of consciousness, of freedom, and of love. Human consciousness will never lose the conviction that we are Earth (adam-adama in the biblical creation story) and that our fate is inseparably connected to the fate of the earth and the cosmos of which Earth is a part (Boff 1997:14).

African spirituality preserves this notion in its myths and beliefs about tribal connections with ancestral lands and its taboos on violating the land in any useless or purely selfish way. We are our ancestors, and if the ancestral land identifies them, it identifies us. In a very real way we belong to our ancestral land; we are inseparably tied up with it. Which means that to harm it does not signify merely harming our ancestors; it means doing violence to ourselves. The relationship is complex, not primarily in the sense of being complicated, but in the sense that humanity and the cosmos in its visible and invisible reality are fundamentally and essentially intertwined as a condition for their existence.

Dialogue does not necessarily depend on concurrence of ideas and views. It can also start from differences in outlook. However, in this case there is enough agreement in perspective and attitude towards land to facilitate conversation between African and Ecofeminist spirituality. Even more significant is the contribution they both make to the construction of a new relationship between humanity and the rest of creation in our contemporary dichotomised approach to the cosmos. This approach is ultimately unethical, because it alienates humanity from nature and in consequence degrades both nature and humanity itself.

Dialogue with “Green Politics” and animal rights activists

Perhaps the easiest dialogue partners for African spirituality when it comes to ecological questions would be the Greens. The only problem is that the two are almost completely ignorant of each other, the Green movement being mainly a European and North American socio-political and economic phenomenon. One exception is the Green Belt Movement of the Nobel Prize laureate Prof. Wangari Maathai in Kenya (see Maathai 2006), who explicitly shares the values espoused by the Greens in the West. In fact, she takes the philosophy guiding her activities from them. Yet she, or her group of concerned women, has sometimes employed certain African tactics to beat the odds against her. When the government was harassing her because of, for example, women she had mobilised to demand the release of political prisoners, they fought, or rather defended themselves, using traditional methods. Confronted with police brutality, “[s]everal of them stripped, some of them completely naked, and

showed the police officers their breasts” (Maathai 2006:220). Maathai (2006:221) explains:

One of the most powerful of African traditions concerns the relationship between a woman and a man who could be her son. Every woman old enough to be your mother is considered like your own mother and expects to be treated with considerable respect. As they bared their breasts, what the mothers were saying to the policemen in their anger and frustration as they were being beaten was “By showing you my nakedness, I curse you as I would my son for the way you are abusing me.”

This tactic and Maathai’s whole movement exemplify a process that can successfully combine different spiritualities for the purpose of environmental conservation and sustainable development.

A multifaceted movement – which includes visionary, moral or holistic greens, eco- or green greens, peace-movement greens, and animal rights greens – the Greens are united in their goal of “calling for an ecological, non-violent, non-exploitative society” (Spretnak & Capra 1986:5).⁶ They are reluctant to identify with mainline right- or left wing politics, but “consider themselves the political voice of the citizens’ movements, that is, ecology, anti-nuclear-power, peace, feminist, and others” (Spretnak & Capra 1986:5). The Greens are a grassroots movement, mostly composed of younger people, bent on activism as a procedural strategy. Although the political motivation may not be as consciously apparent in African ecological spirituality as in the Green movement, the two approaches have similar goals.

“Renewed concern for the plight of the Earth, the revival of creation-centred spirituality, the reawakening of Green consciousness [embraced and actively promoted by the Greens],” according to O’Murchu (2000:64-65), “are not only contemporary fads nor are they merely movements seeking to address the precarious ecology of our planet today.” As he sees it, “They symbolise a great deal more, something profoundly spiritual, but not necessarily religious.” What is their underlying intention? “They express a deep yearning to come home to who we really are, children of Mother Earth, people whose interdependent existence requires a quality of relatedness that has been fragmented and

6 Spretnak and Capra (pp.30-31) explain that Green politics finds its philosophical foundations in ‘deep ecology’, a concept that “[f]ar more than [just] protecting or repairing the [environmental] status quo, which is generally the goal of environmentalism ... encompasses the study of nature’s subtle web of interrelated processes and the application of that study to our interactions with nature and among ourselves. The teachings of deep ecology include implications for our politics, our economy, our social structures, our educational system, our healthcare, our cultural expressions, and our spirituality.” In ethical terms, “Above all, the Greens demand a halt to our ravaging of natural ‘resources’ and our poisoning of the biosphere through the dumping of toxic wastes, the accumulation of so-called acceptable levels of radiation exposure, and the pollution of the air.”

disconnected by the forces of patriarchal power, of which formal religion is a major factor” (O’Murchu 2000:65).

Once again, the Greens have several things in common with African spirituality that can be seen as a priori, positive grounds for dialogue between them. To begin with and in general, there is the reverence for creation that characterises both attitudes. But possibly more significant in campaigning for a peaceful and safer earth, the Greens put in practice what may remain just a theoretical tradition in African spirituality. What the Greens can bring to the conversation, therefore, is an expanded vision of the endeavour. Care of the environment and the struggle for sustainable development are not merely the responsibility of a particular ethnic group in a particular area. It is the responsibility of the whole of humankind for the entire cosmos. As for the Greens themselves, they need to establish some kind of tradition for the movement, a story that unifies them, one which is coherent enough to give life and direction to their activism. Without a story like this, Green activism is in danger of becoming haphazard, unfocused and moribund.

Conclusion

There are two types of approaches to ecological spirituality. The first is the modern scientific, technological approach with an almost exclusive dependence on rationalism, empiricism and deterministic pragmatism as criteria of interpretation of existence. The scientific or technological worldview demands first and above all that whatever is real must be logically explicable and make sense intellectually if it is to be acceptable. Secondly, it demands that there must be empirical proof of the existence of the real, which essentially means that whatever is real must meet and satisfy the requirements of sensory observation. Claims of other evidence not founded on empirical observation – notably intuition, belief, emotion, extrasensory perception or what we might call generically affective reality – are at best suspect, and at worst nonsensical or superstitious.

It is now generally acknowledged that this worldview has led to a spirituality of domination, according to which the world has to be controlled and manipulated by human beings exclusively for human material benefit and profit. While the practical consequences of this approach have brought undeniable benefits for humankind, it has been at the expense of the exploitation and degradation of the environment. It is assumed that everything is explicable by human reason and by scientific demonstration alone, and that creation exists only or mainly for the sake of human consumption, often called development. This rationalist, empiricist and consumerist worldview has stripped the psyche of its adherents of the sense of mystery, awe and wonder about creation,

replacing it with a feeling of complete human control of the universe (see various contributions in Oruka 1994).

There is, however, another worldview, another way of looking at the world and approaching creation, another story about the relationship between humans and the universe which retains this spiritual element. Its detractors have for a long time referred to it as magical, pre-logical, pre-literate, pre-scientific and superstitious. Its devotees and defenders, on the other hand, see it as holistic, integral and inclusive. By whatever name, the real starting point of this approach to reality is affective; it looks at the world not only with the eyes of the mind, but also with the eyes of the heart and the spirit. It is an approach that does not purport to be able to explain everything in creation in clear, rationalistic terms, much less to prove its existence in concrete forms. It leaves room for wonder and awe. Beyond reason and empirical proof, it also appreciates feeling or, better still, intuition: it intuits or feels the supernatural in the universe. It reasons reality, but also sings and dances it in equal measure. More than the scientific-technological perspective, it is attuned to symbol, drama and poetry in its relationship with the deep aspects of the universe. In its behaviours and attitudes it is less prone to exploit creation exclusively for the sake of human consumption. It respects more fundamentally the autonomous existence of other creatures. As a result it emphasises the interdependent relationship between humanity and the rest of creation.

A marked element of this affective approach is recognition of the existence of invisible reality or spirit forces as part of the autonomy that every creature possesses. This entails the belief that non-human creatures have a certain value of their own and a right to exist apart from their immediate or practical usefulness to human beings. Acceptance of the spiritual autonomy and power of every creature means that the continued existence of human beings relies upon the existence and powers of these other elements of creation. It means, furthermore, that both human beings and the rest of creation ultimately somehow have the same destiny (see Oruka 1997:251-253). For this spiritual approach, all creation is in the same cosmic boat, to use an overworked metaphor, and whatever happens to this boat affects all created beings.

In this contribution I followed the affective approach. The overall point was to propose the African spirituality embedded in the myths and traditions of the Wairege/Wakuria people of northwestern Tanzania as a paradigm of human relationship, not only with the earth but with the entire cosmos. These are traditions that, like those of other 'original' peoples, show how to "live the dimension of the sacred and of connectedness with all things" (Boff 1997:122). They offer us a different way of relating to nature than that which the scientific worldview has established. They are traditions which, intelligently interpreted, demonstrate "how we can be human, indeed profoundly human, without having

to pass through the critical rationality of modernity or through the process of dominating the Earth as in the schemes of technology” (Boff 1997:122-23).

Any lifestyle, because it reflects a particular person or society’s option, can rightly be called spirituality, in the sense of an integrated and integrating perception of existence. However, since living is a performative rather than a passive process, spirituality also entails a certain ethics, in the sense of how to behave. How can we construct a new perception, a new spirituality, as well as a new ethics, in a world that is threatened with destruction on account of human behaviour? That is the question. Can African spirituality provide some basis for a vision to go about constructing what we may call an “ecocentric ethics”?

To arrive at ecological living that can produce results opposite to what we are experiencing now calls for a united will and effort by all human beings throughout the world. This is where exchange of visions in dialogue is necessary, regardless of any differentiating or distinguishing factors there may be. Because of its aptitude for dialogue with other ideas, faiths and movements, African spirituality can provide inspiration for this endeavour. That is why it is worth exploring.

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Spiritual values inspiring indigenous forest management

Cathrien de Pater

Introduction

The significance of spiritual values for indigenous forest management (IFM) is increasingly recognised in the global quest for sustainable forest management. This article explores how and to what extent spiritual values influence the shaping of IFM. It does so through a study of literature on the subject, placing pertinent cases in a research framework constructed on the basis of the work done by Snodgrass and Tiedje (2008). In this framework four types of situations are identified: (1) Spiritual values inform indigenous communities' practices, with positive effects – either accidental or intentional – on the ecological environment. (2) The same, but with ambiguous and sometimes contradictory effects on the ecology. (3) There is a disconnection between individually held eco-friendly beliefs and the practices of communal or higher level institutions involved in resource management. (4) A trend towards reconnection sets in between growing individual spirituality and strengthening indigenous institutions for forest management. Cases illustrating the first category are the Highlanders of Cambodia, shamanistic environmental accounting in the Colombian Amazon, and bird augury in the Kantu' *swidden* agriculture in West Kalimantan. They show that spiritual beliefs may induce conservation and sustainable resource use, but especially in complex ecosystems such as tropical rainforests the relation is often only indirect. In other cases, here described for tribal communities in Nepal and India, belief systems may have both eco-friendly and environmentally destructive elements (category 2). The third category is illustrated by the case of the Mayangna in Nicaragua, where individual eco-friendly belief existed to a degree in the past but has largely disappeared from modernising institutions regulating resource use. The fourth category represents cases of reviving spirituality operating in tandem with reinforced institutions in a variety of ways, from native foresters' organisations in North America to grassroots movements such as the African Earthkeepers in Zimbabwe. It is concluded that (1) IFM has emerged as a serious concept in the 'formal' discourse on sustainable forest management, with the indigenous owners increasingly taking the lead; (2) some IFM systems show potential to grow into large-scale commercial businesses, which

necessitates rethinking the concepts; and (3) relating spiritual values to IFM remains a complex but necessary challenge.

Problem description

Since the early 1980s many new approaches to promoting local communities' active participation in forest management have been developed in tropical regions. As a result the various ways in which many local forest-dependent communities are actively managing their forest resources are increasingly recognised (Wiersum 1997). Such indigenous forest management systems (IFM) tend to differ in many ways from 'formal' (i.e. scientifically based) forest management systems. The actors are often farmers who in myriad ways interact with the forest-agriculture continuum for their living, whereas the terminology of 'scientific' forestry is mostly based on forests as separate units – although this is changing in currently developing approaches (cf. e.g. the Forest Landscape approach in Rietbergen-McCracken et al. 2008).

IFM systems are often said to be inspired by diverse values, including cultural and spiritual ones. In the last decade these values have increasingly become objects of formal research. This is in line with a worldwide academic search for systems of sustainable forest management that offer a balanced combination of ecological, social and economic goals. It accords with international agreements such as the 1992 Convention of Biological Diversity,¹ in which indigenous and local communities are specifically recognised as important stakeholders in biological resources.

It is now widely recognised that cultural and spiritual values have significance for IFM systems. The World Conservation Union, for instance, has established a Task Force on the Cultural and Spiritual Values of Protected Areas. They recently published *Guidelines for protected area managers on sacred sites* (Wild & McLeod 2008). In this regard Verschuuren (2007) has constructed a model for research into cultural and spiritual values. The International Union of Forest Research Organisations established a Task Force on Traditional Forest Knowledge (2005-2010), which is mandated to “increase understanding of the inter-relationships between traditional and formal (scientific) forest-related knowledge and catalyse potential synergistic application(s) to sustainable forest management”.² They are currently

1 <http://www.cbd.int/>

2 <http://www.iufro.org/science/task-forces/traditional-forest-knowledge/about/> (accessed 21 September 2008). In Europe the mandate to include social and cultural values in sustainable forest management was enforced by the so-called Vienna Resolution No. 3 (1993) of the Ministerial Conference for the Protection of Forests in Europe (MCPFE).

organising a series of regional conferences and preparing a state-of-the-art report on the subject by 2010. In addition, the programme of the Thirteenth World Forestry Congress in Buenos Aires (October 2009) deals with 'intangibility', 'adaptive management' and 'cultural influences' to a far greater extent than ever before.³

But as yet the significance of indigenous spirituality for the complex driving forces behind indigenous management processes is not properly understood. IFM is depicted by some as a 'holistic' alternative to forest destruction, while others are critical of the role of the underlying (spiritual) values and sceptical about their benign effects and the viability of systems inspired by these values. Combining the indigenous and formal systems is even more fraught with conceptual and ethical difficulties (see e.g. Van Leeuwen 1998).

Our premise is that IFM and its owners have a lot to offer the discourse on sustainable forest management; IFM's potential deserves to be thoroughly researched and documented with a critical, non-romanticising mind. In the process the role of spiritual values in IFM systems should be critically examined: there are indications that they are important for IFM, but to what extent is this true and, if so, what are their characteristics? How are these values translated into action (or not)? Could spiritual values meaningfully inform and enrich 'formal' sustainable forest management systems (without the risk of superficial 'cutting and pasting')? It is these questions that are the focus of this study.

The questions do not exist in a vacuum. As said before, spiritual values never work alone; they are linked with other values and conditions, which together inspire and drive communities in their interventions. A further consideration is that IFM systems and their underlying values rarely operate in isolation nowadays. They are increasingly subject to influences and processes from the globalising world, and can therefore not be separated from their context: the ecological system, economic factors, power balances, social interactions, et cetera. An important contextual feature is the question of the ownership and user rights of indigenous communities (also termed 'forests-dwelling and/or forest-dependent' people). The importance of the debate on land rights and politics can hardly be overlooked and reports show that indigenous and local people are winning ground: at least 370 million hectares or 22% of developing countries' forests are formally under community conservation (Molnar et al. 2007:275; RRI 2008:20). This, however, says little about the

3 See <http://www.wfc2009.org/index3.html> (accessed 21 September 2008). Section 7.2 of the conference programme is devoted to 'Native People, Communities and Institutions' with special subsections on 'Natural Resources Management Models', 'traditional knowledge, social, cultural and spiritual values', and 'traditional rights of indigenous people'. Other, mostly technical programme sections contain items such as 'intangibility', 'adaptive management', 'social and cultural influences', 'traditional uses' of non-timber forest products, etc.

situation on the ground, where issues of governance, legal arrangements, economic interests, religio-cultural concepts and even research agendas are often entangled.

IFM cannot be seen as static and unchanging. IFM systems and their underlying values – including spiritual values – are dynamic and adaptive to new developments from without and within (e.g. Michon 2000; Wiersum 2000; Grim 2001, Snodgrass & Tiedje 2008). This creates uncertainties as well as opportunities which we have to take into account.

To discuss the foregoing questions we make use of Snodgrass and Tiedje's seminal analysis (2008) of the current debate on indigenous nature reverence and conservation. I will fill in their excellent framework for discussion with recent information and literature on IFM. From this I draw conclusions about the significance of indigenous spiritual values for sustainable forest management.

Scope of the paper

The subject of the study lies at the intersection of several theoretical and practical discourses. On the one hand there are discourses about indigenous perceptions of nature and forests, indigenous ways and modes of knowing, and the challenge to articulate these perceptions and epistemologies in the face of 'formal' knowledge systems. On the other hand there is the debate among 'formal' scientists to incorporate and operationalise cultural and spiritual values in sustainable forest management. The subject is closely related to the discourse on sacred lands and biodiversity conservation. However, while sacred lands and conservation areas are usually more or less exempted from economic use, we focus principally on the (sustainable) *use* of the ecosystem, even if it includes non-intervention (e.g. for restorative purposes). Admittedly the boundary between the two discourses is not clear-cut and we shall therefore include the issue of sacred lands when it arises in the discussion of management aspects.

When discussing IFM we cannot deny the fundamental importance of land tenure and user rights for the survival of indigenous people. Indigenous peoples' social and political struggle for land and access to resources is fundamental to their survival, both spiritual and physical. This discourse is dynamic, vastly documented and has many ramifications. However, in this paper we confine ourselves to elements of spirituality that feature in it.

Finally, it hardly needs explaining that while focusing on forests, we do not limit ourselves to timber production only. In keeping with the currently evolving forest landscape approach, our concept of forest management includes all uses of forests for human livelihood, including hunting, gathering of non-timber forest products, shifting cultivation and agroforestry, in natural as well as planted forest ecosystems. In this connection we touch on the discourse on

indigenous or traditional knowledge and technology. Here again our discussion is restricted to spiritual elements. What we do include, though, are the respective ways in which indigenous people and formal scientists articulate knowledge.

Definitions

For the definition of ‘indigenous’, ‘sustainable’ and related terms I refer to the introductory section of this book. It should be noted, though, that in this article the term ‘indigenous people/population/groups/communities’ refers especially to those indigenous individuals and communities who either dwell in forests or live outside forests but depend on them for their livelihood, and who actually make direct interventions in forest ecosystems or used to do so in the past.

In addition, the following terms specifically related to the subject of IFM need clarification:

- ▶ *Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK)*: “the culturally and spiritually based way in which indigenous peoples relate to their ecosystems. This knowledge is founded on spiritual-cultural instructions from ‘time immemorial’ and on generations of careful observation in an ecosystem of continuous residence” (Native American activist Winona LaDuke in Brosius 2001:128). According to Berkes (in Wiersum 2000:22), TEK consists of three interrelated components: beliefs about the human-environment relationship, biological knowledge, and management/extraction practices.
- ▶ *Forest management*: planned interventions in the forest ecosystem with one or more defined purposes and with a view to sustained achievement of these purposes. Non-intervention can be an element of forest management as well.
- ▶ *Sustainable Forest Management*: While sustainable forest management may be defined in different ways, it is widely accepted – and laid down by the International Tropical Timber Organisation (ITTO 2005) – that sustainable forest management concerns the following aspects: (1) extent of forest resources; (2) biological diversity; (3) forest health and vitality; (4) productive functions of forest resources; (5) protective functions of forest resources; (6) socio-economic functions; (7) legal, policy and institutional framework (Liang et al. 2007:6).
- ▶ *Indigenous Forest Management (IFM)*: “Forest management systems are referred to as indigenous, when they are primarily based on local experience of [indigenous peoples] ‘local world’, that is, perhaps, most important to them” (Singhal 2000:133).
- ▶ *‘Eco-spirituality’*: in accordance with the general definition of spirituality in the introduction to this book, ‘eco-spirituality’ is here defined as the belief in and interaction with spiritual beings that inspire people to intervene or not intervene in their natural environment in certain ways. In this definition, ‘spiritual beings’ may or may not be perceived as separate from the ‘natural

environment’, depending on the worldview of the people concerned – animistic or other. For a definition of animism, see footnote 5.

IFM in recent anthropological discourse

Indigenous worldviews, cosmologies and perceptions of nature have long been the subject of anthropological research (see e.g. Grim 2001; Snodgrass & Tiedje 2008:6-7). Many studies reveal reverence for environmental phenomena such as mountains, trees and animals as living, personified beings; the same reverence is extended to a vast array of supernatural beings that feature in these cosmologies as active elements with which humans are thought to be connected in manifold ways.

Whether these cosmologies and corresponding spiritual values have encouraged conservational attitudes or just the opposite has been the subject of intense scholarly debate, which has become increasingly polarised in recent times. In order to overcome what they call the ‘unnecessary dichotomy’ between ‘romanticising’ the indigenous reverence for nature and the over-simplified, outright rejection of it, and to do justice to the “subtle life experiences and complex cultures of the indigenous peoples”, Snodgrass and Tiedje (2008:9ff) propose seven ways out of the deadlock:⁴

- 1 There is tremendous diversity in outlook, worldviews and practices across indigenous societies, which scholars should take into account.
- 2 We should make a clear distinction between animistic⁵ religious thought and behaviour on the one hand, and conservationist thought and action on the other. Indigenous peoples conceive of their environment according to specific animistic frames of reference (e.g. they perceive environmental phenomena as animate), while this is not always congruent with conservationist thinking. Likewise we should distinguish between knowledge models of how the world is perceived and ethical/axiological models of how we should act in it;

4 The authors refer to ‘conservation’ instead of ‘forest management’; however, since they define conservation as “actions or practices consciously designed to prevent or mitigate resource over-harvesting or environmental damage (Smith and Wishnie 2000)”, there is little difference from the common understanding of sustainable forest management. They also use the two terms interchangeably.

5 Snodgrass & Tiedje (2008: 6) describe Animism as the personification by indigenous peoples of their environments, “treating both their lands and the non-human denizens occupying those lands as persons to be related to as cognizant and communicative subjects rather than as inert or insignificant objects”. They write Animism with a capital A in order to place indigenous religions on the same footing as other ‘world religions’ (adjectival and adverbial forms take a lower case ‘a’). Obadia (2008: 123), following Philippe Descola (2005), defines Animism as “a widely shared framework of ideas and practices based upon the continuity between humans and nature, rather than a distinct religious system”.

- 3 There is tremendous diversity of ‘cultural’ models in societies; rational structures and practice are not shared equally even by individuals in the same group;
- 4 Individuals in indigenous societies vary (as in Western societies); so how are cultural (widely shared) ideas linked to collective arrangements (agents, norms, powers)?
- 5 This leads to the question how these collective arrangements are embedded: what meaningful institutions are in place to regulate collective action, in this case leading to actual conservation on the ground? The authors distinguish between three categories of conservation related institutions, all of which could in their opinion lead to de facto open access to resources and consequent degradation:
 - ‘accidental’ or ‘epiphenomenal’ conservation (Hunn 1982 in Snodgrass & Tiedje 2008:13): traditional ecological resource management contexts leading to conservation, arguably not as a result of conscious intention but of low population, limited technology and such like
 - mix of conservation and anti-conservation institutions: in that case rituals can be either ecologically beneficial (e.g. *bhil adivasis* in India, ritually closing off degraded land for further use till it has recovered) or detrimental (the same *bhil*, lighting fires as a ‘gift to the gods’, knowingly causing soil and forest degradation)
 - disconnection between individually held eco-friendly values and beliefs and lack of institutions which incarnate these values and beliefs. The Lakota Sioux are a case in point: spiritual values are cherished at grassroots level, strategically deployed in tribal politics at the intermediate level, and violated in favour of scientific and economic paradigms at the federal level (Pickering & Jewell 2008).
- 6 ‘Modern’ or ‘Western’ conservation models are imposed on indigenous land by nation-states. These models are largely perceived by indigenous peoples as arrogant, instrumental, not in indigenous interests, and therefore not really legitimate. This has led to complex interaction between indigenous peoples and the global economy and world system. Noteworthy is the intrusion of ‘world religions’ in indigenous societies, leading to all sorts of syncretic religious systems with a bearing on the environment.
- 7 The authors point out the level or scale of (non-)conservation: individual commitment versus (lack of) collective action or arrangements. This in fact refers back to the last point of argument (5).

Research categories

While keeping in mind the important first four points, we shall structure the rest of this paper on the basis of items (5) (with its three sub-items) and (6). They concern the collective institutions in which spiritual values are translated

(or not) into behavioural patterns. This is the area most directly associated with the disciplinary field of sustainable/indigenous forest management. In the many ‘formal’ models designed in this field under various labels such as ‘participatory forestry’ and ‘multi-stakeholder approaches’, there is often a slot labelled ‘worldviews’ or ‘indigenous belief systems’ (see e.g. Wiersum 2000:25; Singhal 2000:136), on which this paper focuses.

When we look at Snodgrass and Tiedje’s sixth argument – interaction with foreign dominant conservation systems – we see an obvious continuity with the previous item: such interaction often causes or aggravates the erosion of indigenous enviro-friendly institutions in a complex way. I therefore discuss the two categories in combination.

In addition I include a type of situation which seems to be under-explored by Snodgrass and Tiedje, namely when there is hard evidence that indigenous beliefs and institutions are both ecologically benign and intentionally conducive to a practical conservation ethic. This option comes close to the first point of item (5) (‘accidental’ conservation), but instead of ‘accident’ I presume an intentional translation of spiritual inspiration into ecological action. While anthropologists may have found little evidence of such intentionality in the past, there are signs of direct indigenous inspiration of ecological behaviour in recent times. The African Earthkeepers (see below) are a case in point. As we shall see, this case also relates to item (6): the indigenous belief system mingles to a degree with the originally ‘foreign’ system of Christian churches, but the resulting new institutions pressing for eco-friendly behaviour are powerfully informed by indigenous spirituality. This case therefore exemplifies a step beyond item (6): reconnection after disconnection.

To sum up, the following types (or categories) of situations will be discussed:

- ▶ One: spiritual values in line with ecology, accidentally or intentionally
- ▶ Two: spiritual values with ambiguous effects on conservation
- ▶ Three: disconnection between individual ‘eco-spirituality’ and institutions
- ▶ Four: re-connection between individual ‘eco-spirituality’ and institutions.

The first type will be discussed with reference to evidence from three indigenous peoples who practise, or used to practise, animistic rituals directly bearing on their interventions with forests: the Highlanders in Cambodia, the Yukuna and Tanimuka in the Colombian Amazon, and the Kantu’ in Borneo. The second type will be illustrated by cases from Nepal and sacred groves and trees worldwide. ‘Disconnection’ is exemplified by the Mayangna of Nicaragua, and ‘reconnection’ by many North American First Nations organisations as well as the African Earthkeepers of Zimbabwe. I end with some conclusions referring back to the research question.

Category one: in line with ecology

Highlanders make up three quarters of the population of Ratanakiri province, Cambodia. Many Highlanders rely exclusively on the forest to survive. Following the opening up of the area since the 1990s, logging, land grabbing and cash cropping resulted in severe loss of forest resources, against which the Highlanders initially had little defence. However, NGOs and researchers started to train them in land mapping and documenting their local knowledge so that their self-esteem grew, and their legal situation gradually improved. When the researchers came into the area, they found that the communities had “a very clear mechanism for using their natural resources and protecting them”. Spirit forests featuring in this mechanism were protected since, according to a villager, “if you cut down a tree from the spirit forest, something bad will happen”. Scientific inquiry revealed that these spirit forests would not regenerate if they were cut. The soil was not fertile enough and the area was too exposed to wind and rain (The Communication Initiative etc. 2003). Here the spiritual beliefs appeared to accord with ecologically sound practice. This case corresponds with many instances of sacred forests all over the world where spiritually sanctioned protection coincides, consciously or unconsciously, with ecological protection.

Whereas in the Ratanakiri case the spiritual element is predominantly passive and only warns against (wrong) action, studies by Reichel (1992) in the Colombian Amazon reveal spiritual belief inspiring action. Reichel (1992:404) describes indigenous people’s interventions in the natural environment (which includes the supernatural world) as “shamanistic concepts of environmental accounting”. She sees shamanism as “a political and religious technique for managing societies through certain ritual performances, myths, and worldviews such that a community respects the natural environment and community life as a social common good.” Shamanism is still the basic worldview of more than 30 million Amerindians in Latin America today (Reichel 1992:402). Reichel gives a detailed account of the shamanistically informed management practices in two isolated Colombian indigenous chiefdoms, Yukuna and Tanimuka in the northwest Amazon region. These communities still entertain a worldview in which the supernatural ‘owners’ of natural phenomena such as animals, rivers, trees and places need to be informed and compensated if humans want to use their resources (e.g. kill a tapir). Shamans have the skills to negotiate prices and see to it that the resource is not depleted, the penalty being calamities befalling the group. Thus they are crucially important for group survival. Shamanistic knowledge is highly specialised and combines vast ecological knowledge with the ability to ‘travel mentally’ through space and time. This enables them to adopt a long-term perspective, and so calculate the impact of interventions such as tree felling on forest regeneration. Shamanism

is embedded in a collective organisation and expressed in numerous rituals and an extensive mythology, which “encodes and expresses indigenous science” (Reichel 1992:422) and creates emotional links with and commitment to nature.

Since 1992 shamanism has lost ground in Colombia. Many shamans have died without passing on their knowledge; resource extraction by outsiders has increased, the general security situation has deteriorated, national parks and reserves have been established, and constitutional handing over of territory to Indian communities has swept up the political and judicial machinery.⁶ The adjacent Tikunas, however, have retained much of their vast traditional ecological knowledge and reportedly follow the old ways that Reichel describes. They now share this knowledge with the National University in Bogotá in updated research programmes, in which they are the leading actors. The strength of this formula is proven by the fact that the Tikuna continue to monitor their resources and send data to Bogotá even now that the area is out of bounds for non-indigenous researchers because of security hazards (Verschoor, unpublished; Boot, unpublished).

What Reichel does not discuss is the *effectiveness* of the shamanistic approach. Obviously the ‘eco-spiritual system’ (my term) as a whole has survived and perhaps thrived for prolonged periods till recently, but that does not explain the success or lack of success of the spiritual advice in detailed intervention decisions. While noting that, like everything else, standards of ‘success’ are culturally determined, some indicators are arguably fundamental for the survival and well-being of the individual or the group. Does heeding shamanic advice correlate positively with success in hunting, high agricultural harvest rates, abundance of forest produce and the like?

This topic was discussed by Michael Dove (1999) in his studies of the Kantu’ *swidden* agriculturists in West Kalimantan (Indonesia) in the 1970s and 1980s. He specifically looked into spiritual involvement in agricultural management decisions.⁷ For centuries the Kantu’ have practised *swidden* rice agriculture in a rainforest ecosystem, which is one of the most variable and unpredictable environments in the world. A key success factor in the annual *swidden* cycle is the selection of favourable sites – not too dry, not flooded for too long. This risky decision, on which people’s survival depends, is often

6 The Colombian constitution was rewritten in 1991 to outline broad rights for indigenous people, including recognition of their traditional leadership in their territories, direct budget transfers for their own educational and health systems, and the stipulation that indigenous groups have to be consulted about decisions that affect them, such as mining or oil production projects in their territories. Ironically, shamans were not included in this process.

7 In this section I use the present tense, although the research took place about a generation ago and the tremendous changes since then must have affected the present Kantu’ generation’s culture and livelihood.

made by means of bird augury. According to traditional belief deities of the spirit world foresee events in human life and communicate them to the Kantu' by means of seven forest birds. The selection of a *swidden* field is made by the augurer traversing a proposed forest section and seeking favourable bird omens. He or she observes the birds and applies an intricate system of rituals and interpretation, leading to a positive or negative conclusion. Consequently the plot is either cultivated or abandoned for the year. Interestingly, Dove (1993:377) did *not* find an empirical correlation between the 'spiritually inspired' predictions and actual harvest results. Although birds did behave in certain ecological patterns as far as habitats, feeding and mating are concerned, these patterns did not correlate with "temporal or spatial variables critical to swidden success". Moreover, Dove discovered that the rules of augural interpretation – compounded by different augurers' subjective interpretations – effectively scramble any such correlation. So why do people continue to believe in augury and practise it?

In the first place, Dove argues that belief in augury systems is encouraged by the very fact that they are unpredictable. A direct relation between bird behaviour and harvest success would have undermined the system's supernatural character and the spiritual element would have been merely 'instrumental'. "It is precisely the impossibility of any such empirical connection that confers supernatural authority on the system" (Dove 1993:378, citing Aubert 1959). Secondly, in Dove's view the environmental irrelevance of the augury system does not render it meaningless. On the contrary, it has significant cultural meaning. The Kantu' undeniably have vast ecological knowledge of their environment, but given the extreme complexity of the Kalimantan rainforest ecosystem, they are not able to control all production factors. Their response to this structural environmental uncertainty is to diversify their strategies and cultivate a variety of fields each season, thus maximising their chances of success. The augury system enhances this strategy by giving it a symbolic and cultural (I would call it spiritual) underpinning. Thus it is in intrinsic contrast to modern science, which aims at systematising and converging forest management in definite 'rules'. In fact, Dove commends the Kantu' for their clear distinction between 'rules' and 'system'. Rules are pursued by science, which tries to systematically and limitlessly develop one 'best' strategy (e.g. for sustainable tropical forest management). The augury system, by contrast, aims at plurality and diversity of strategies to cope with always imperfect knowledge and an ever indeterminate environment, and thus ensures better adaptation to it. "The Kantu' augural system links ritual to ecology not just instrumentally, but also symbolically and pedagogically" (Dove 1993:1).

Category two: spiritual values with ambiguous effects on conservation

There is ample evidence of the extensive role played by trees, forests and forest products in Nepal and India, both in the dominant Hindu and Buddhist religions and in the manifold animistic traditions on the subcontinent (e.g. Gupta 1971; Majapuria & Joshi 1988; Nugteren 2005). It is hotly debated, though, whether this apparently omnipresent nature reverence⁸ actually leads to conservation and judicious resource management (Agarwal 2000:165ff; Narayan 2001:195ff; Nugteren 2005). To illustrate the ambiguity in 'eco-spiritual' indigenous institutions, Snodgrass and Tiedje (2008:13) sketch the case of the *Bhil Adivasis* in India. Their elders ritually close off degraded forest lands from further use for up to five years or more, which allows them to recover. On the other hand they also perform 'fire bath' rituals: setting fire to hillsides as a gift to the gods in order to obtain certain benefits from them, although they know that such fires can severely damage trees and soils. Here I describe some cases to more detail. They all come from the Indian subcontinent, but there are parallels with many other places in the world.

Nepal⁹ is the scene of a wide array of spiritual beliefs and rituals pertaining to forests and trees. The Scottish forester Andrew Ingles (1997) studied their influence on forest conservation in Nepal, concentrating on the management and condition of 'religious forests'. His findings confirm Snodgrass and Tiedje's second point, namely that the primary purpose of religious forests is not necessarily biodiversity conservation or soil protection, but to provide a sacred landscape and products for religious purposes. Conservation or sustainable forest management is not always achieved either. The rules governing the management of religious forests usually prohibit the use of the overstorey (trees and higher shrubs), e.g. tree felling or pruning, but are often less rigid about the use of the understorey (e.g. collecting firewood, fodder or litter found in the lower shrub and ground-cover vegetation). Most religious forests are small, many are open in structure and their periphery is often under pressure from land users, although they are sometimes reforested. Ingles concludes that the direct contribution of religious forests to biodiversity conservation is insignificant in Nepal. However, he sees entry points for implementing community forestry systems in the institutions and organisations to manage both the performance of rituals and religious forests.

⁸ Which is in itself debated as an intrinsic element of Hinduism (see e.g. Nelson 1998).

⁹ Nepal has been running one of the world's most advanced and widely documented community forestry programmes in recent years, systematically handing over state forests to local communities and arranging sustainable forest management systems with them.

Laird (1999:358) comes to more or less the same conclusions on sacred groves worldwide, and questions whether the complex traditions behind these areas can and should be operationalised as a tool for further conservation efforts. Rival (1999:362) warns that sacred groves and trees, rather than being the home of benign, protective deities, are frightful dwellings of untransformed ghosts with a powerful and dangerous life force. All these notions are reflected in Nugteren's summary of the debate on tree worship and sacred forests in India. While criticising the romanticised visions on Hinduism and Buddhism as a priori 'eco-friendly traditions' on the one hand, she points out that many sacred forests – especially in tribal areas – are still havens of biological diversity. She concludes that notions of 'the sacred' undeniably persist and are inseparably interwoven with material aspects of tree culture and management. She therefore argues for a contextualised, historically embedded, multi-levelled and unsentimental view when studying these issues (Nugteren 2005:363ff).

Such a view certainly applies to Obadia's description of spiritual practices vis-à-vis conservation among the Sherpas of Solukhumbu district in Nepal (Obadia 2008:116ff). The Sherpas' belief system can be seen as a combination of three magical/religious 'spheres': the animistic, shamanistic and Buddhist spheres. Shamanism presumes communication with supernatural forces/deities in nature; Buddhism propagates a protective attitude and divine power over nature ('avoid or minimise the killing of insects during ploughing'); and Animism underlies a worldview in which the world is full of spirits and natural forces with whom one can communicate. Sherpa farmers possess extensive traditional ecological knowledge (TEK). Contrary to expectation, however, this worldview and TEK do not always lead to conservationist behaviour. On the contrary, Obadia observes a paradox between 'protective' Buddhist attitudes and animistic perceptions of spirit-embodying forests on the one hand and socially induced forest destructive practices on the other. Not only were rare plants and animals all the more spiritually valuable (i.e. wanted for amulets) as they became rarer, but social drivers for well-being leading to cutting trees in 'sacred' forests for house-building or agriculture appeared to outweigh threats of supernatural revenge for this practice. The hereditary system involving continued subdivision of family land also led to opening up virgin land for cultivation. Forest destruction could even be directly attributed to religious practices, in that the Sherpas in this area favoured cremation which required lots of wood. In other words, two cultural codes applied to Sherpa society, one inducing the protection of spirited nature, and the other aimed at personal and social survival. These codes used to work in tandem, but the balance tilted in favour of the latter once 'development', tourism and Western-type nature conservation entered the area. In the ensuing complicated mix of 'old' and 'modern' values Sherpas sometimes reinterpreted their old traditions in terms of modern conservation. Thus they can be seen as playing on Western romantic

sentiments in order to assert their rights to land and benefits from the resources – in fact, the third category of the foregoing framework.

Category three: disconnection between individual 'eco-spirituality' and institutions

In many cases spiritual beliefs are still vigorous at the grassroots and family level, while community-wide arrangements or institutions supporting these beliefs have weakened or ceased to exist. Sometimes these beliefs have faded into history and only the places are remembered as 'sacred'. The forest-dwelling Mayangna (or Sumu) in Nicaragua, for instance, used to celebrate their most important festival, adolescents' initiation, by sending the youths to certain remote mountains. In olden times male youths were reportedly tested for their valiance and knowledge of nature as follows. First they were sent into the forest with the task of finding a rare medicinal plant. When they returned, the group had to go to a sacred mountain for the rest of their initiation. This must have been an important, if not the most important festival of the year. Most of the proceedings were secret, but some heavy beatings and ferocious 'fight-dance' performances seem to have topped the programme. The previously collected plants were then useful for healing, and the new initiate received a first name of his own (Von Houwald 2003:463-467).

Rituals like these have been documented throughout the world, and many of them show various ways of connecting with the natural environment on which the population depended. However, a lot of them have disappeared or were thoroughly transformed by the influx of outside forces, and the Mayangna were no exception. They were christianised by the Moravian brethren during the 19th century and pushed to inland forest areas by their neighbours from the coast, the nowadays far better known Miskito tribes. Despite this the Mayangna remained relatively isolated, subsisting mostly on agriculture, fishing and hunting, with which their religion and culture were closely connected.

Commercial forestry entered the area some 200 years ago, with companies occasionally employing Mayangna as day labourers. To the latter, however, the idea of commercial forestry was alien to their perception of trees as spirit-embodying entities closely connected with their identity and culture (Roper 2003:15; Thompson n.d.:8). Nevertheless 'formal' forestry became part of the regional economy and after its collapse in the Sandinista period (1979-1990) it was taken up with fresh enthusiasm. This involved the extraction of timber as well as non-timber products (charcoal, pine resin, tree seeds, etc.). Various models were implemented to let indigenous communities benefit more from these activities than formerly. Lately this has extended to the establishment of indigenous forest enterprises owned by the communities themselves. These

enterprises received support from the World Wide Fund for nature (WWF), Nicaraguan NGOs, URACCAN university, and funding from Germany and the USA. Lessons were learnt, especially in regard to the organisational setup, and despite many conflicts and hiccups the process of obtaining international forest certification was started in 2004.¹⁰

Category four: reconnection between individual eco-spirituality and institutions

Elsewhere we see similar emergent trends in indigenous forest entrepreneurship, specifically in Canada, the USA and New Zealand (for the latter, see e.g. Hammond 2003 on Maori owned forests). In Canada almost 80% of the First Nations (800 communities) live in forested areas covering a total of 1.4 million hectares. As part of its sustainable forest management policy the government has launched the First Nations Forestry Programme,¹¹ which has financed over 1 700 forest related projects in 460 communities, thus providing an economic base while retaining traditional ties with the land. In addition to training, employment creation, development of enterprises and new technologies, the programme has encouraged the use of traditional knowledge in decision making. Such knowledge emphasises the interrelationship between all elements of nature – of which humans are a part, not a steward or observer.¹² On the other hand, indigenous foresters have united in the National Aboriginal Foresters Association (NAFA). NAFA has initiated a strategy¹³ which calls for a broad approach to forest management – the ecosystem approach – and for ample room for traditional lifestyles, including hunting and the ‘cultural and spiritual use of resources’. What exactly ‘spiritual use of resources’ comprises is not specified in this strategy. It is a subject of debate among foresters: how should concern for spiritual values be translated into concrete management prescriptions? To answer this question, Lewis and Sheppard (2005) studied the Chaem First Nation of British Columbia. They found that the Chaem did not only derive material sustenance and cultural identity from the land, but also “a feeling of inward, spiritual security and sustenance” (Lewis & Sheppard 2005:917). They often retired to the woods to meditate and draw other forms of spiritual sustenance. While their deep roots in the land demanded respectful land use, it did not mean that areas had to remain totally untouched. Cautious

10 http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/environment/forestry/features_aug2004a.html and http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/environment/climate/country_nar/nicaragua.html (accessed 7 October 2008).

11 <http://www.fnfp.gc.ca/> (accessed 7 October 2008).

12 Source: Canadian Council of Ministers, information leaflet 2008.

13 <http://www.nafaforestry.org/roycom/roycom1.php#issue> accessed on 1 June 2009.

partial cutting was even visibly preferred to abstinence, provided enough forest was left intact 'for other animals to survive'. In the Manitoba Model Forest Management plan spiritual values were linked to certain animal species such as moose and porcupine, and consequently measures for studies and protection were taken. In British Columbia the 2005 annual general meeting of the association of Registered Professional Foresters (RPF, now ABCPF) identified factors contributing to spiritual forest values. They found that spiritual values are intangible, difficult to measure, subjective, linked to a moment in time ('peak experience'), linked to certain 'places', influenced by religious and cultural perceptions and by urban or rural upbringing, changing with structural characteristics of the forest stand, and historically and ceremonially created.¹⁴

Whereas these initiatives were launched by or in close cooperation with the 'formal' sector, there have been signs of grassroots growth of spiritually inspired environmental movements in recent times as well. The best example of this is the Earthkeepers movement in Masvingo province in southern Zimbabwe (Daneel 2001). Here the impulse to restore vast stretches of degraded land in the country after the liberation war came from grassroots associations of spirit mediums who advocated land restoration and tree planting as a God-given task. People were mobilised to plant trees and behave respectfully towards nature in an almost 'military' campaign, nicknamed '*chimurenga 2*', after the liberation war in the 1970s (*chimurenga 1*) that sent the colonial rulers home. This is one of the most explicit cases of spiritual inducement to ecological action we have ever come across. I cite it here because, unlike the cases in the first three categories, here the inherited ecological/environmental consciousness was lost at an earlier point in time. There has been a disconnection from the past and an articulated reconnection when the time was ripe. Of course, one could argue that here, too, the spiritual heritage was not transmitted from the past unchanged. On the contrary, it was intermingled with Christian beliefs, organised through churches, and assisted by a white Zimbabwean advisor from a Christian missionary background (Daneel 2001). However, the churches accepted the spirit mediums (although some had difficulty doing so), and the advisor was accepted by the supreme deity through the oracle at a shrine in the Matopos. Zimbabwe became greener after that – hopefully it has retained some of its greenness in recent troubled times.

14 www.rpf-bc.org/agm48spiritual.html accessed on 9 March 2005 (not accessible at the time of writing)

Conclusions

All three cases in *category one* present a more or less positive relation between the spiritual and physical dimensions, although the correlation is not necessarily direct, and in the case of the Kantu' even overtly indirect at the 'meta' level. Spiritual beliefs generally go hand in hand with extensive traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) and can in fact not be separated from it. Perhaps there are grounds for the thesis that the more unpredictable the environment, the more strategically TEK and 'meta-TEK' are applied.

Category two presents perhaps the most intriguing situation, where spiritual inspiration leads to divergent and sometimes diametrically opposed actions. Apart from knowledge building, there will have to be dialogue to forge creative solutions between the different perspectives: those of believing community members, spiritual leaders, administrators and researchers. Detailed knowledge, alertness and respect are obvious skills anyone operating in this environment ought to master, and wisdom is a prudent addition.

As for *category three*, like the Mayangna, many indigenous communities lost their cultural and spiritual values when they were more or less forcibly pressurised into modern entrepreneurship. The transition from isolated subsistence producers to market-oriented entrepreneurs and scientific managers is obviously fraught with difficulties. However, we observe an overall upward trend in the development of indigenous leadership and responsibility for modern-day resource management. What is hardly ever reported, though, is whether the old beliefs in 'spirited' forests still play a role in this process. Pending further investigation, we might perhaps speak of a certain 'secularisation' of the indigenous view of forests. This is not to say that people do not believe in tree spirits any more, but like the Sherpas in the previous group, they will not attach importance to them when it comes to commercial use.

Category four, however, shows hope for the future. We have seen that indigenous foresters and grassroots communities take up the challenge of formulating ecological management systems on their own terms, basing these systems on what they perceive as spiritual values.

Ten years ago Van Leeuwen (1998) could only find a handful of examples where systems were recognised and respected in their own right by 'formal' organisations. Since then many pilot projects, models and cases have been developed in which IFM has been articulated, applied and reflected upon. The cases in this paper do not represent the whole spectrum. Perhaps the IUFRO Task Force will produce a more comprehensive overview in 2010. However, just as important is the fact that the indigenous people themselves have come to play a much more active role. It is no longer Western outsiders carrying out the research but the indigenous people themselves, who play an active role as researchers as well as implementers of IFM systems. IFM has therefore

acquired a slightly different meaning than before. It has shifted from local, more or less 'artisan' systems of management to larger commercial, indigenously driven systems that may even be geared to export. How spiritual values are incorporated into such larger systems is a new issue to be investigated. Certainly these values will continue to surface in ever new forms and conditions, alive as the forests themselves.

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Iddir: metaphor for solidarity in Ethiopia

Solomon Dejene

Introduction

The aim of this paper is to gain insight into the relation between *iddirs* and sustainable development in Ethiopia. The material was gathered from a literature review and fieldwork. The method of analysis is inspired by Norman Fairclough's critical discourse analysis (CDA). CDA focuses on the relation between language use and social reality. It combines three forms of analysis. The first is linguistic analysis of texts. It deals with wording, grammar, syntax, cohesion, metaphor, transitivity and so forth. The second concerns discursive practice, that is, the (processes of) production, distribution and consumption of texts. Here we look at inter-textuality and inter-discursivity. The third form studies the socio-cognitive effects of discursive practice, in particular reproduction or transformation of the status quo. Definitions of the key concepts are given in the introduction to this book. One of the issues to be dealt with is to what extent *iddir* can be considered indigenous. The paper is divided into four sections. The first is a review of several publications on *iddir*. The second is an overview of data gathered through fieldwork. The third section critically correlates theoretical insights gathered from the literature review (first section) and empirical insights gathered from fieldwork (second section). The final section contains some conclusions concerning indigenous knowledge and sustainable development.

Journey across the landscape of *iddir*

This section reviews literature on *iddirs* in Ethiopia, their origin and development, significance and function, as well as their relation to government. The literature is diverse, and is written by both Ethiopians and foreigners, from various perspectives: historical, sociological, economic and anthropological.

Meaning and etymology of the term

Iddir is the most widespread indigenous voluntary association in Ethiopia. A village without an *iddir* is unthinkable, except in remote areas. *Iddirs'* composition, system, approach and size may differ from place to place, but they are all community-oriented, and mostly religiously and ethnically heterogeneous

unless the area is homogeneous. They have a high level of participation at all levels (Dejene 2003) and promote self-esteem, since each person and his/her minor tasks count (Alemayehu 1968). They are also egalitarian and transparent (Dejene 2003). Accountability is one of their outstanding traits (see Pankhurst 2004, 2003; Dejene 2003; Pratten 1997).

There are several kinds of *iddirs*. The most common are neighbourhood and workplace *iddirs*; that is, people working for an employer. Nowadays there are women's *iddir*, friends' *iddir*, youth *iddir*, faith-based *iddir*, family *iddir*, former schoolmates' *iddir* and so on. Membership varies from about twenty to over a thousand, depending on the area and the network. In workplaces the number usually relates to the size of the organisation (Dejene 2003; Pankhurst 2003; Shiferaw 2002; Fecadu 1974).

Concerning the etymology of the word '*iddir*', Pankhurst (2003) reports a claim made by a certain *Yähibrät Minch iddir* (tr. 'source of union *iddir*') to being the first *iddir*. Apparently it was established in Addis Ababa in 1907 during the reign of Menelik II. The group comprised *Soddo Kistane Gurage*¹ merchants, who were discriminated against and despised in Addis Ababa. They were not allowed to hold public meetings. They buried their dead at night. Caught during one of their meetings, they were brought to *fitawrari*² Habtegiorgis, then minister of defence. When asked why they had transgressed the rule by holding a meeting, they answered in their own language (*Guragigna* of the *Kistane* dialect), "*Yebelo zemed motem, biddir yelebkewey.*" Taking the word '*biddir*' to mean 'loan', he asked them about it and they replied that they called helping the bereaved '*biddir*'. Habtegiorgis approved their meeting on such occasions, gave them five silver *birr*³ and suggested that others should adopt this exemplary system. He recommended that the association should be called *iddir* instead of *biddir* (Pankhurst 2003).

The other view is that the word '*iddir*' might have its origin in the Amharic word '*dir*' ('web'). Some elderly people say that Menelik II settled a group of patriots in Addis Ababa. As a result they lost the broader contact they had in their home villages, so they put their heads together and decided to form a *dir*, seemingly inspired by the saying '*dir biabir anbässa yassir*' ('union of webs can tie up a lion'). They wanted to tackle the problems of city life by forming a *dir*. The insertion of the 'ə' sound in *iddir* is said to have happened over time. Others say that the 'ə' was not originally there but was a preposition from a rural Amharic dialect, '*wäddä*', meaning 'to'. It can also mean saying something emphatically. Or it can be used while repeating a word if it was not

1 *Gurage* is a minority ethnic group. There are certain sub-groups and the *Soddo Kistane* is one of them.

2 *Fitawrari* is a traditional military title in Ethiopia.

3 *Birr* is the local currency. It also means silver.

heard the first time. To this day some people use the ‘ə’ before a destination to mean ‘to’ or when asked what they have just said. In due course it was commonly adopted and became a proper noun pronounced ‘ədir’, which is now spelled *iddir*.

Further etymological study is required to arrive at a definitive conclusion.

Origin

Alemayehu Seifu (1968) claims that there were no *iddirs* before the Italian occupation. He says that rural life was disrupted by the occupation, so the city attracted the affected people. This accelerated migration and urbanisation. Rural people who were not accustomed to urban life found it difficult to cope. Communal life with mutual relations among neighbours/relatives was close in their former home. In towns people lived in physical proximity yet anonymously. Such feelings of uprootedness and confusion, along with lack of connections in times of need, necessitated the creation of associations like *iddir* (Alemayehu 1968).

Fecadu (1974) claims that *iddirs* originated in Addis Ababa around the time of the Italian occupation, founded by migrant groups from acephalous backgrounds. He maintains that the migrants transplanted their rural social structures to town with certain adjustments to the urban way of life. His study reveals that people from centralised social and political systems did not initially join the *iddirs*. He attributes this to the military camp-like organisation of most Ethiopian towns, which did not encourage differentiation or the development of independent social organisations. In the late 1930s the Italians restructured the towns and dismantled the politico-military structure along with its patron-client relationship system. That, according to Fecadu (1974), was a turning point for the migrants and the lower class, allowing them to organise themselves. Mekuria (1973) supports this view and claimed that the Italian occupation caused dislocation and uprootedness as “the countryside was the battleground for the Ethiopian Patriotic Forces”. Farmers were executed for harbouring them. People sought a safe haven and work in the Italian garrison towns. They were isolated or purposely isolated themselves. However, faced with a high risk of death they formed a network at least among themselves in order to have a decent burial. He further claims that *iddirs* initially drew their membership from the same ethnic group or from people coming from the same locality by transplanting their traditional mutual support system.

Academics like Pankhurst (2003), on the other hand, are of the view that *iddir* started in Addis Ababa several years after the city was founded in 1886. He points out that there are no references to *iddir* in historical travel literature and chronicles prior the 20th century. According to him the word ‘*iddir*’ appears only in D’Abaddie’s Amharic dictionary of 1881, with the meaning

‘custom, usage’. Korten (1972), too, dates *iddir* to late 19th century Addis Ababa.

Opinions also differ regarding the urban or rural origin of *iddir*. Pankhurst (2003; Pankhurst & Damen 2000) asserts that *iddirs* are of exclusively urban origin. According to him there is no evidence linking traditional forms of cooperation in rural areas with the establishment of *iddir*. Like Alemayehu, Pankhurst insists that *iddir* should not be confused with traditional forms of mutual help and other associations. Its urban character is vividly illustrated by its having lists of members, written bylaws, monthly monetary contributions, regular meetings, and differentiated and fixed coverage scheme. Such a modern system was exclusively urban, as it relates to a monetised and literate setting rather than to rural areas where these things did not exist.

Opponents claim that *iddir* is a traditional mutual support system that was transplanted from rural areas with certain modifications to fit in with urban life (Dejene 2003; Fecadu 1974; Markakis 1974; Mekuria 1973; Levine 1965). Fecadu (1974) claims that the strong social orientation among the Gurages and other neighbouring ethnic groups led to the establishment of urban support systems that could fulfil the social and material needs of the new migrant communities and channel their connection with their villages. Dejene (2003), on the other hand, states that the origin of *iddirs* can be traced to rudimentary forms of mutual support in rural areas long before the Italian occupation. His conjecture is based on the commonness of mutual support networks in rural areas. He claims that *iddirs* assumed their current form in highly monetised urban areas.

It is not known how many *iddirs* there were before, during and even after the occupation, as they were not registered. The 1966 association registration regulation changed this: henceforth *iddirs* had to be registered to become legal entities (Pankhurst 2003; Shiferaw 2002; Markakis 1974; Korten 1972). A number of *iddirs* were registered, but the vast majority did not see the need for registration, or feared that government would interfere in their activities. However, this in no way curbed the proliferation of *iddirs* (Shiferaw 2002).

Most academics agree that *iddir* membership was originally limited to the poor (Dejene 1993; Fecadu 1974; Markakis 1974; Mekuria 1973).

Initiators

Pankhurst⁴ and Endreas (1958) started the debate by claiming that *iddir* might have its origin among the *Gurages*. They base their claim on the fact that the *Gurages* had a custom of tending the cattle of a deceased person and working on his farm for up to two months. Alemayehu (1968) rejects their argument on

4 This Pankhurst should not be confused with the Pankhurst cited earlier. He is a historian and the father of the previously quoted Pankhurst, who is a sociologist.

the grounds that such mutual support systems exist among the *Amharas* and *Oromos* as well. Years later Pankhurst junior (2003) drew on his father's argument, referring to a pamphlet issued by *Yehibret Minch iddir* (a *Soddo Kistane/Gurage iddir* comprising merchants of hides, wax, fat and coffee), to which I referred earlier. Pankhurst infers from the pamphlet that the *iddir* has an ethnic foundation and is of *Gurage* origin. He says that opponents of this view do not come up with any counter evidence.

Fecadu (1974) associates the origin of *iddir* with ethnic groups from a non-centralised socio-political system. Accordingly they were initially constituted along ethnic lines and involved purely local connections, because members of an ethnic group settled in one neighbourhood. Even though he states that *iddirs* derive from acephalous ethnic groups such as the *Gurages*, he does not directly link their origin with a particular ethnic group. As residential segregation was abandoned in post-occupation Ethiopia, *iddirs* became multiethnic and have played an integrative role by bringing people of different groups together.

Ethnic and functional transformation

Many publications on *iddirs* claim that they started as ethnically based associations and later transformed themselves into multiethnic associations as a result of both internal and external factors (Dejene 2003; Pankhurst 2003; Shiferaw 2002; Pankhurst & Damen 2000; Fecadu 1974; Mekuria 1973). The external factor refers to pressure from government. Both the imperial and the *Derg*⁵ governments discouraged – in some cases even forced – ethnically based *iddirs* to change their names and review their membership (Pankhurst 2003; Shiferaw 2002; Pankhurst & Damen 2000). The internal factor was the self-transformation of *iddirs* in conformity with their environment. Their fluid nature made them adaptable to the multiethnic urban context, in which multiethnic membership was a natural result (Dejene 2003; Shiferaw 2002; Fecadu 1974). Alemayehu (1968) adopts a diametrically opposite position. He asserts that *iddirs* started as neighbourhood associations. Later on workplace and tribal *iddirs* came into existence.

Mostly the primary aim and manifest functions of *iddirs* are to provide mutual assistance and a decent burial when someone dies. This includes financial, material and emotional support to the bereaved. Some think that the spread of *iddirs* has to do with the importance assigned to death in Ethiopia. Some academics maintain that *iddirs* transformed themselves from burial associations into multifunctional ones. Nowadays many *iddirs* undertake various developmental and business activities and provide microcredit. Development programmes include sanitation in the neighbourhood, building minor infrastructure like feeder roads and sewerage systems, day care centres,

5 *Derg* is the military regime that governed Ethiopia between 1974 and 1991.

schools, good social (neighbourly) relations, social control and the like (see Dejene 2003; Pankhurst 2003; Shiferaw 2002; Pankhurst & Damen 2000; Fecadu 1974; Mekuria 1973). In some cases *iddirs* have also served as pressure groups on local administration to provide their communities with tap water and other services. In the urban context the term ‘elders of the community’ refers to *iddir* officials (Markakis 1974). Most publications on *iddirs* claim that they evolved from a monofunctional or limited functional area into multifunctional networks.

Although Alemayehu (1968) mentions that *iddirs*’ primary function is mutual assistance in time of trouble, he does not differentiate the functions diachronically. He simply lists the social functions as supplementary to support rendered in bad times. This raises the question whether *iddirs* started off principally as burial associations.

Relations between iddirs and government

A few of the efforts by government to involve *iddirs* in community development programmes bore fruit, particularly in the latter part of Haile Selassie’s reign (1930-1974). The first project was in 1957, when the Ministry of National Community Development took the initiative to establish model community development centres in collaboration with *iddirs*. By involving sixteen *iddirs* the *Ras Desta* community centre was created (Mekuria 1973); the *Teklehaimanot* centre was the result of cooperation with 125 *iddirs* (Kebebew 1981).

A striking development was when parliamentary candidates used *iddirs* as platforms to promote their campaigns in the absence of political parties during the first elections in 1957, 1961 and 1965. Politicians joined *iddirs* (became members of *iddirs*) to promote their own political agendas. Associations came to be seen as pressure groups for development. Members of parliament began to raise development issues, notably after the second election. However, parliamentary democracy was rather limited, serving the interests of the imperial system and the landed elite (Fecadu 1974; Koehn & Koehn 1973; Clapham 1969). Because anything remotely political was not tolerated, *iddirs* were forced to include a clause in their statute: “The *iddir* will not pursue any political activity or interfere in the administrative affairs of the government” (Markakis 1974; Koehn & Koehn 1973; Clapham 1969). Yet in many factories *iddirs* served as trade unions in the absence of any union or a legal basis to form one (Shiferaw 2002). denigrate

Another effort by the city council of Addis Ababa to organise *iddirs* at the *wäräda* (urban district) level and as an umbrella organisation at city level was not implemented, as the would-be committee members were for the most part government representatives, so the *iddirs* pulled out. Other collaborations were short-lived, as the high participation of *iddirs* was misused to lobby against

among others the then students' movements and girls who wore miniskirts. *Iddirs* were also mobilised to march in the parade on Haile Selassie's 80th birthday (Clapham 1988; Koehn & Koehn 1973).

After the emperor was dethroned in 1974 the military regime obliged *iddirs* to donate their tents to the army for the war against Somalia and the rebels in Eritrea, then a province in northern Ethiopia. Their halls were either confiscated or forcibly used by the *käbäle* (smallest local administrative unit) for free. It also forced them to contribute money for the war from their meagre reserve capital. Mothers – actually women's *iddirs* – were taken to military camps to prepare food for the army. The regime had a crystal clear strategy to use *iddirs* for its purposes. They were given no choice but to cooperate with the government (Pankhurst 2000; Shiferaw 2002). The little development work they did in their respective neighbourhoods was taken over by the *käbäles* set up by the government as local authorities. The *käbäles* called their meetings at exactly the same time as *iddir* meetings to make it at best difficult, at worst impossible for *iddirs* to hold meetings. The *käbäles* also used *iddir* meetings to conscript militias. *Iddir* leaders were pressurised to become members of the regime's Workers' Party. Other attempts included replacing voluntary *iddirs* with *käbäle iddirs*, which did not succeed. The regime's stringent policy drove *iddirs* into a corner and forced them to provide service only in times of tragedy and rejoicing. However, *iddirs* or umbrella *iddirs* which already owned property such as recreation clubs were left alone (for details, see Shiferaw 2002).

During the latter part of the military regime *iddirs* were no longer closely watched or harassed by the security forces, so they started organising fund-raising activities to support their members (Shiferaw 2002).

The military regime was overthrown in 1991 and replaced by former rebels from Tigray with an ideology of ethnic politics. This government has shown interest in partnership with *iddirs* and holds some consultations. However, its inclination to use *iddirs* for its own political ends still makes it difficult to undertake any significant joint project. According to Pankhurst (2004, 2003) the government has on various occasions expressed interest in using *iddirs* as vehicles for development. A seemingly noteworthy action was when the government invited *iddirs* to participate in a workshop on the draft national law on ombudsmen and human rights. The recently established Social and NGO Affairs Office in Addis Ababa has conducted a survey of *iddirs*. Pankhurst (2004) states that since the reorganisation of Addis Ababa into sub-cities (comparable to the former *wärädas*/districts) there has been frequent contact with *iddirs* and the capacity building desk of some sub-city offices have established councils of *iddirs* {.

Traits of contemporary *iddirs*

Between December 2007 and April 2008 the author conducted field research in Addis Ababa and *Emdibir*, a village 195 kilometres south west of the capital. Both in Addis Ababa and *Emdibir* I was able to reach as many as 100 *iddirs* thanks to a number of umbrella *iddir* associations that have emerged in the last few decades. Formally the research population consists of 37 *iddir* members, with whom I had mainly audio recorded in-depth interviews and unrecorded casual conversations on related issues. Twenty were in Addis Ababa and 17 in *Emdibir*. I also had several casual discussions with *iddir* members outside my research area. In Addis Ababa 60% were women, while in *Emdibir* the female research population was a mere 30%. There is also age variation between *Emdibir* and Addis. While in Addis Ababa ages range from early 20s to late 80s, in *Emdibir* they varied from early 40s to around 70. Social standing varies from day labourer and unemployed to upper middle class. I also conducted participant observation during regular and extraordinary meetings of some individual *iddirs* and one umbrella body, and I looked into the bylaws of a couple of *iddirs*.

Manifest functional aspects of iddirs

To form a picture of *iddirs* it is helpful to describe their structure and what they do at times of death and celebration. Basically an *iddir* has a *danya* (literally: judge), which is the presiding chairperson. For some time now the *danya* has been called either *liqämānbär* (chairperson) or *säbsabi* (one who gathers), or the names are used interchangeably. The other posts are *aqabe näway/hisab shum* (treasurer), *gänzäb yazh* (cash holder) and a *tsähafi* (record keeper/secretary). Since *iddirs* have been broadening their area of operation, they now have a number of additional posts and committees.

Members contribute a fixed amount of money per month and receive a certain amount of money in times of misfortune. The most common is financial benefit when a family member dies. The amount depends on the closeness of the relative who passed away and the capital of the *iddir*. There is either a clause in the bylaw determining the conditions and amount, or members make written agreements.

As for the other support during the bereavement period, the bylaw prescribes the presence of members for three days; however, those close to the bereaved visit and console the family for several days. Female *iddir* members will sit around the woman of the house and males around the man.

As soon as there is a death in a member's family or a member passes away, members communicate with each other, particularly with the leaders. An impromptu committee will be formed to organise things, even if the responsibility ultimately rests on the executive committee. In most cases those

closer to the mourner will make the necessary arrangements. Among the men some members will go to the funeral, while others stay behind to pitch a tent in the compound or on the street in front of the house and fill it with chairs, as there will be dozens of people coming to console the bereaved for days. The women also divide themselves into two groups. One will go to the funeral and the other will stay behind to prepare food for those who come after the funeral. Those who cannot make it to the funeral because of work commitments will come in the evening and take over some of the tasks if required. Normally the tent and the chairs remain for three days.

Marriage is not an affair exclusively for the bride and groom. The parents play a major role, particularly in organising the wedding ceremony, so their *iddir* has a hand in the organisation of the event. The role of *iddirs* is confined to providing the necessary materials, arranging and decorating the place and serving. They do not take part in the ritual, for instance in the church or municipal court.

Iddirs and community development

Another development in the *iddirs* is that members can rely on financial support or credit in times of sickness. If a member or one of his/her family members needs medical treatment and does not have sufficient money, the *iddir* will provide the money as either a loan or a benefit. If it is a loan, the person is exempted from interest for a certain period. The period varies from one *iddir* to another in accordance with its financial capacity and members' written agreements. Such support systems exist in both urban and rural areas, in both female *iddirs* and mixed ones, and in workplace *iddirs*.

Not all *iddirs* are involved in physical development work and those who are, work on relatively small projects. On the other hand *iddirs* actively engage in community cohesion. The not-formally-reported *shimgelina*⁶ (mediation, reconciliation and harmonisation) work, especially in the Gurage area, is highly significant. This aspect of *iddirs* does not usually come in the limelight, as the process of mediation and reconciliation takes place within a core group of those entrusted with the responsibility. The conflict need not be within the *iddir* in order to be resolved. It can be between a member and either another member or a non-member. It can also be a marital conflict. Both parties will nominate their preferred elders. In some cases the presiding elder nominates those who will work with him to resolve the issue, although he needs the approval of both parties for his selection. Usually there are three to five mediators. Both parties

⁶ *Shimgelina* is about mediation, reconciliation and harmonisation. The mediation serves to resolve problems and effect reconciliation that should lead to harmonious community life, not just coexistence. In cases of marital conflicts the accent is on the reconciliatory aspect and preservation of the family institution.

need to agree on the elders that do the mediation. Even if a number of conflicts do not reach the courtroom thanks to the *iddir* elders, their activities are not included in the annual reports of *iddirs*, mainly because such issues are considered to belong to the private lives of the parties concerned

The mere fact that their membership is diverse in terms of religious affiliation, ethnicity, political stance and socio-economic status means that they contribute to development by preventing fragmentation of the community and its resources. At the same time such a diversified constituency makes it cumbersome to identify and prioritise a project that will satisfy all members.

The tasks they perform in times of affliction and joy can also be considered developmental. If it were not for the *iddirs* many households would end up in financial and mental crisis. *Iddirs* provide financial assistance to the extent that their capacity allows it. They also support members emotionally by being present in times of joy and sorrow. Standing by the bereaved or people whose property has been destroyed by fire, or even by helping organise a wedding, fulfils a therapeutic and counselling function. This is comparable to the work of a number of NGOs that offer counselling and guidance in crises like loss of property through fire.

“Without my *iddir* I can’t receive those who come to console me in a modest way when something happens to me.” “Without my *iddir*, I can’t survive.” “*Tesfa*⁷ is really our *tesfa*.” These are testimonies by poor members. Those with fair incomes and the well-to-do say: “The *iddir* stands by me and helps me in times of affliction and joy.” “I need people around me in times of joy and sorrow.” The custom is to serve a meal to those who come to console the family. The expression, ‘receive ... in a modest way’ implies that this custom cannot be observed satisfactorily without financial support from the *iddir*. The second respondent refers to even more dire straits if they do not have the support of the *iddir*. The third poetically expresses gratitude for the initiative of the umbrella association.

In the case of richer interviewees the emphasis is on the social support they receive through their membership. This is also mentioned by a destitute, jobless member: “No rich man can organise his relative’s funeral without us. They need us not only for our work but also despite all their money they would otherwise be alone.” This describes the interdependence of the community, which is also an aspect of the *iddir*. The interview reveals that there is interdependence and solidarity between rich and poor, or among people in general. This draws on the traditional discourse of *iddirs* that emphasises funerals and bereavement, hence maintaining existing social conditions rather

⁷ *Tesfa* is the name of an umbrella *iddir* association in the central western part of Addis Ababa. Officially it is *Tesfa Social and Development Association* (TSDA), an umbrella body comprising 31-35 *iddirs*, but it is popularly known as *Tesfa* (‘hope’).

than changing them. Another common expression compares *iddir* members to family or relatives: “They [*iddir* members] are my family.” This perspective is relational rather than functional.

One impediment to *iddir* involvement in development activities is their financial weakness, despite their popularity among rich and poor and their capacity to mobilise entire neighbourhood communities. This also weakens their capacity to negotiate with other partners like government and NGOs, including churches. Being partly social-security associations, they frequently pay beneficiaries substantial amounts of money. This has been exacerbated by the high incidence of HIV/Aids related deaths. In addition, because most *iddirs* have no buffer to protect them from bankruptcy, their financial capacity has declined. Most of them do not receive either technical or financial assistance from government even when they are doing its work. Their relations with government have always been ad hoc. Only in times of national crisis government would contact them to organise something. The Ethiopian-Eritrean war (1998-2000) was a case in point.

Although registration is legally required, some *iddirs* are not registered. These keep their money at the treasurer’s or *danya*’s house or entrust it to two executive committee members, who then open a joint bank account. Most *iddirs* are known to the local administration but have little contact with it. Even registered ones have very little or no contact with the local administration. The umbrella associations of *iddirs* do have official contact, for government considers them to be development associations. They have reasonable but cautious links with local administration. Three of the umbrella associations I visited have their offices in the *käbäle* compound. All three want to move as soon as they can. Even though their relations with the *käbäle* are not bad, they do not feel free to work in a politically loaded setting, since the *käbäle* sometimes interferes with their work.

The relative freedom *iddirs* enjoy under the current regime has provided an opportunity to reconsider their role in community development programmes. The initiative of an NGO called ACORD to consolidate the resources of *iddirs* has been particularly successful in Addis Ababa, *Shashemene*, *Dire Dawa* and other regional towns. ACORD has held workshops to train *iddir* leaders in democracy, basic civil rights, women’s rights, financial management, administration and so forth. In various parts of the capital and other towns a number of *iddirs* have formed umbrella bodies in order to consolidate their financial and human resources.

Individual neighbourhood *iddirs* or an umbrella body of *iddirs* occasionally requests cooperation or support from the *käbäle* or sub-city administration. Bureaucratic bottlenecks and unwillingness of the local authority have created a gap between *iddirs* and politicians.

Umbrella associations are formed by consolidating resources in order to support the poor and the elderly. Various tasks are fulfilled by members on a voluntary basis. Each member *iddir* contributes a certain amount of money to sustain the work of the umbrella body. The money collected from member *iddirs* falls far short of the need, so they design projects and submit these to donors. With the support they receive they renovate shanty houses and help (HIV/Aids) orphans to attend school and have a decent life. They also provide microcredit facilities for young women and men to set up in trades or small businesses. In collaboration with the *käbäle* some of them employ security guards to make the neighbourhood safe. To pay the guards' salaries each *iddir* member contributes money on top of the monthly contribution in accordance with his/her income. This is supplemented with money collected from merchants and rich people in the neighbourhood.

It is worth illustrating this collaboration, as it is among the rare collaborations between the *käbäle* and umbrella organisations of *iddirs*. After the post-elections riots in 2005 the Kolfe area – a mixture of rich and poor, business and residential premises – became very unsafe. Girls could not walk on the streets with their mobile phones; shops were plundered regularly; street gangs terrorised the entire area. People made no response when the *käbäle* wanted to consult them. In the end the *käbäle* sought contact with *iddirs* through TDSA to address the problem. The *iddirs* discussed the issue in their meetings and nominated some people to work on it. In the end the *iddirs* formed a body of security guards to make the area safe. With the help of the local police those eligible for the job received basic training.

It should also be noted that the microcredit facility they provide to their members depends on the need of the members. It can be for furnishing a household or for setting up a small business to enable the member to become self-reliant. This service is usually accompanied by training in small-scale entrepreneurship. In one destitute area in Addis Ababa the women said, 'Thanks to the microcredit facility, there is no household in our neighbourhood without furniture and a TV.' The language use draws on earlier social conditions, in which some had furnished homes and a TV while others did not. At the same time the way most women put it clearly indicates that the microcredit has made them and those who benefited from it feel confident and equal to the rest.

They also pay for students who have won scholarships to study abroad but are unable to pay the airfare. But their most outstanding service is the counselling and guidance they provide for orphans, coupled with financial support for their schooling and accommodation. Women are also given the opportunity to get awareness training in areas like family rights, child rights, women's rights and the like.

Over the past few decades *iddirs* have become gender sensitive. A few decades ago nearly all neighbourhood *iddirs* were gender based, in that men and women had separate *iddirs*. The men's *iddir* is usually bigger than the women's. They possess amenities such as tents, chairs and benches, while the women's *iddirs* tend to be smaller and geographically confined to a smaller neighbourhood. Their basic functions are to prepare meals and serve them on various occasions. They usually possess only kitchen utensils. Some small women's *iddirs* are subsets of larger men's *iddirs*, with only the men's spouses as members. But members explain that over the past thirty years, the so-called men's *iddirs* have ceased to be exclusively male. Initially they admitted women whose husbands passed away, but gradually most if not all of them started taking women members. Even though not in big proportions, some already have women on their executives and subcommittees. Women's *iddirs*, however, remain exclusively female and their main tasks are to provide food, labour and emotional and financial support in times of affliction or joy.

Even if some people nowadays prefer to hire a catering company for a wedding party, they do not want to lose the support of the *iddir* as a wedding is not just a one-day event. Days before the wedding neighbours and relatives would come for the preparations and dancing. Even if the bylaw does not oblige *iddir* members to provide such support, they will certainly come and help in the kitchen. This is particularly true of women's *iddirs*. According to many members the kitchen is also where they share their personal stories. However, at monthly or quarterly meetings they raise issues relating to the *iddir*'s management, finances, administration and the like. Weddings and funerals are occasions when they meet informally in small groups to share personal news and pour out their hearts. "We speak from our hearts in the kitchen." "Those women who do not like to work in the kitchen will get what they deserve." "Even those who do not like to eat the meal we prepare will regret it later. Nobody will eat in their house. What will they do with all the cooked food then?" So the meal is also an expression of equality and respect. By talking about the kitchen as a place where they can be themselves women deconstruct the traditional meaning of the kitchen as a symbol of patriarchal society that categorises women as belonging solely in the kitchen. By speaking from an emancipated perspective women recontextualise the kitchen. The language use implies that the kitchen is no longer a symbol of oppression but a place where women empower themselves.

Iddirs are thought to be egalitarian not only in terms of socio-economic standing but also in terms of gender. Women and men have equal votes and participation. Although most of the executive members are men, women play a significant role in decision making. Yet the fact that women are not equally represented on the executive committee necessitates further inquiry. Most members associate this with women's preference to engage more in household

than outside activities. Such language use draws on the classical role division between men and women. Others assume that it has to do with their lesser educational and administrative exposure. However, there are men on executive committees with a low education level and hardly any experience. In this regard it is noteworthy that all male respondents said they would be glad to have women on the executive committees, while among women only those sitting on the executive committee advocated more female representation. The others said that they prefer to remain in the background in exclusively female *iddirs* and in the household. Again there is tension between traditional and modern discourses. Whereas women's emancipation is supposed to be expressed in their participation in leadership, there are those who think that equal rights need not necessarily be expressed that way. The two competing discourses coexist in the community.

While most women have exclusively women's *iddirs*, the majority of male *iddirs* are not solely for men. However, when asked in how many *iddirs* they are members and which ones these are most women named *iddirs* which they identified as men's. Only on further inquiry they would mention having other women's *iddirs*. Again, when referring to their women's *iddir* some used diminutive forms like *tinishua* ('small'). Yet women's *iddirs* have their own leadership committee, bylaws and all that is required of any *iddir*. Even so, the language use of many women suggests that they are subordinate to 'men's' *iddirs* or in some way insignificant. The paradox is that most women do not hold leadership posts in what they call men's *iddirs*. It is also mostly through their women's *iddir* that they get training and attend awareness workshops on various themes.

While it did not occur to many women to specify their own exclusively women's *iddir*, it is unusual to still identify *iddirs* that have both male and female members as men's *iddirs*. Men consider their wives' *iddirs* as their own. In listing their membership nearly all men included these, but when mentioning them some men use the expression, 'through my wife, I am a member of ...' The language use here is ambivalent. It could mean that it is ultimately the husband who pays the contribution as the household's sole breadwinner. It could also mean that it is to the benefit of the family, therefore of himself as well. What remains intriguing is that most women do not include their women's *iddirs* in the list.

Besides, calling inclusive *iddirs* men's *iddirs* draws on the dominant patriarchal discourse that classifies *iddirs* into two groups, male and female. This has two implications. The first is that it disowns the women. Secondly, it implies that women value their own *iddirs* less than the mixed ones. This could perhaps be related to the financial, material and other services rendered by so-called men's *iddirs*, which are usually more substantial than those provided by women's *iddirs*.

All women interviewees used the traditional title *danya* ('judge') when talking about their leader, whereas most men used *liqämänbär* ('chairperson'), some interchangeably, while still others only used *danya*. In Amharic the word '*liqämänbär*', rendered as 'chairperson', has a politically loaded meaning, albeit not explicitly. The title '*liqämänbär*' became more widespread under the Marxist-Leninist military regime (1974- 1991). However, the title '*danya*' traditionally referred to the leader of an *iddir* or other traditional association. The position is considered to be non-partisan. While *liqämänbär* implicitly connotes a particular ideological and hierarchic position, *danya* implies objectivity, neutrality and authority among equals. In using the word '*danya*' women draw on traditional *iddir* discourse. In so doing they seem to be recontextualising *iddir*, whereas men may be inclined to stick to the hierarchic social order even in the egalitarian *iddir* system.

Beyond economics and functions

When one asks people about their reason for joining an *iddir* the first answer one gets relates to its service in times of bereavement. Yet if asked whether they would terminate their membership if the same services were available from a different organisation for the same contribution, in almost 99% of cases the answer was no. Members give several reasons, notably a need for contact or social aspect and a sense of ownership. An extraneous organisation would be bureaucratic and less personal. People also believe that the *iddir* is their own. "Why would I quit the association that we ourselves have formed?" That was the answer of many respondents, although the *iddir* antedates most of them. The sentence starts in the first person singular ('I'), then continues in the first person plural ('we', 'ourselves'). This structure does not indicate lack of syntactic cohesion, but is a way of communicating the relationship between the individual and the community. The fact that most respondents mix or interchange first person singular and plural indicates the interrelatedness of individual and community. The 'I' is presented as a person with free will, responsible for choosing to become a member, to stay or to leave. The sentence clearly communicates that the person has a preference. 'We' is the universal set, of which 'I' is a set or subset. However, 'we' in the sense of the entire *iddir* or its members is in no way extraneous to 'I', nor is 'I' simply part of an overall 'we'. There is an organic relationship between the individual 'I' and the community (*iddir*), what we here call 'we'. 'We have formed/shaped the *iddir*' implies that the 'I' also plays a role.

When asked if they would find it acceptable if the *iddir* dissolves itself, most respondents answered by nominalising the verb 'dissolve' ('dissolution'). In fact, in the Amharic version the word '*biqär*' is used, which is not exactly the same as 'dissolution', and the English translation is not exactly equivalent either. Most answers read, "The dissolution of *iddirs* does not make me

happy.” “They can dissolve it, but I...”, whereupon respondents would explain their attachment to the *iddir* and its members. Such nominalisation is a metaphorical representation of a process from which the agent is excluded. Even if the agent is not named in the question, respondents suspect that their answer would lead in a direction that will explicitly involve an agent. So mostly they steer the direction of the interview and nominalise the verb in their response, thus consciously or unconsciously avoiding any suggestion of an agent. Nominalisation can obfuscate agency, and thus responsibility as well (Fairclough 2003). This is a mechanism used by *iddirs* to avoid making political statements publicly. When *iddir* members talk with outsiders about government’s desire to have control over *iddirs*, they try to avoid such insinuations by using nominalisation. In the second quotation we find the subject ‘they’ without any earlier reference to who ‘they’ are. We can say that these expressions suggest suspicion and fear of government. The language use indirectly draws on, albeit negatively, an existing discourse of fear that government would interfere by dissolving *iddirs* or subordinating them to the *käbäle*. By not speaking out openly, the discourse avoids challenging the powers that be and helps to maintain the social and political status quo.

Some members associate *iddir* more with social interrelationship than with service. The following quotation clearly illustrates this: “My *iddir* members are like my relatives, sometimes even closer than relatives ... They are like brothers and sisters to me.” Even if not in those exact words, the majority of respondents gave such a response to describe their attachment to the *iddir* as closer than to their parents. First *iddir* members are likened to relatives, then to brothers and sisters. In grading the level of relationship the family is closer than relatives. The affinity one has with relatives might not be as close as with *iddir* members because of geographical distance, so equating *iddir* members with relatives did not satisfy them. They wanted to express a more intimate relationship. By saying that they are like brothers and sisters the relationship with other *iddir* members is upgraded. They are not really brothers and sisters but ‘like’ brothers and sisters. Yet others extol the *iddir* by saying that it is even closer than parents. When making this hyperbolic comparison they immediately relativise it, inter alia by personifying *iddir* as a brother/sister. It is a metaphor that symbolises the high value members ascribe to *iddir* and is deeply rooted in their attachment to it. This should be read in conjunction with the earlier comment, “that is for us the reason to live”. The demonstrative pronoun ‘that’ refers to the *iddir* and the interrelationship between members. This informal association and the social interrelatedness that it calls forth are expressed as a defining factor for *iddir* members. The person is defined in her/his social setting. “No matter how rich one is, one’s life would be meaningless without *iddir*.” By comparing life without *iddir* to the meaninglessness of possessing wealth but no social connections the sentence poignantly defines the

social value of *iddir*. In general this discourse contradicts the traditional discourse of most publications on *iddir* that represent them as purely burial-oriented.

It should also be noted that members can hold any leader accountable at any time of his/her term. Leaders are constantly aware of this. Failure in leadership, embezzlement or any other shortcoming can mean being called to account at any moment. Hence leaders maintain close contact with members. Even though the bylaws prescribe the percentage of members required to call a general assembly, a general assembly can most likely be called to hold the leader(s) accountable if it is about calling leaders accountable. This gives members a sense of ownership and sharing responsibility. It makes *iddirs* unique.

In short, *iddir* is an association of and for the people. It is theirs. They created it, made it into what it is now. People feel that the *iddir* is their own organisation. Most of them have a sense of ownership. This is true of those in Addis Ababa and *Emdibir*. Most members say, “The *iddir* is our own. We have put a lot of effort into it for years.” A number of respondents use expressions such as, ‘we formed it ourselves’; ‘it is our own organisation’. That is why most members cannot imagine abandoning it even if the activities were carried out and the service rendered by some other party. Even members of *iddirs* that confine themselves exclusively to burials are not willing to give up their *iddir* regardless of the possibility of getting the same service from another organisation.

Unravelling the multiple layers of *iddir*

In this section we critically correlate our literature review with the fieldwork. I say ‘critically’, because we look at *iddir* from the perspective of sustainable development, which is a normative frame of reference as explained in the introduction to this book.

Origin

Most academics agree that *iddirs* came into existence around the beginning of the 20th century and became widespread during the Italian occupation. The opinions of the interviewees are diverse. While some think that they always existed but in another form, others link them with the establishment of Addis Ababa and the settlement of the aristocracy with its dignitaries and labourers.

After the victory over Italy at Adwa in 1896, Menelik launched a cautious centralisation process. The growing town of Addis Ababa attracted migrants from the countryside. These migrants were not entirely detached from their families in rural areas. They were not accustomed to the centralised, patron-client system of their new abode (Fecadu 1973). The autonomy of their

respective regions moreover succumbed to the consolidation of the central monarch's power (Messay 1999; Bahru 1991). This, added to the uprootedness caused by migration, compelled them to develop a social network.

Haile Selassie intensified the centralisation process to the extent that he put an end to the centuries-old dual political system between regional nobilities and the imperial monarchy (Assefa 2005). The ancient tradition of regional autonomy and national unity came to a grinding halt. Haile Selassie refused to recognise the title 'king' for regional lords, but ironically retained the title *Näigusä Nägäst* (king of kings/the kingdom).⁸ In this regard the constitution of 1931 was the beginning of the end, as it paved the way for declaring the infallibility of the *näigusä nägäst* and his absolute power over the people of Ethiopia (see Messay 1999; Bahru 1991, 1984; Schwab 1979; Markakis 1974). Even if none of the interviewees explicitly supported this point, it is not unreasonable to argue that the ever growing centralisation measures necessitated the formation of a social structure like *iddir*. As people from rural areas settled in the city, particularly those from the south where the patron-client relationship was absent, such hierarchic structures might have driven them to establish a network to preserve and realise their identity.

The problematic situation during the Italian occupation, too, drove people to form small networks in order to survive. After the Italians left Ethiopia in 1941 Ethiopians were optimistic, but Haile Selassie showed no sign of changing his centralising policy (Messay 1999). "As civil servants, merchants and labourers outside our birthplace, we had no one except *yagär lij* (people from our area). We tried to make life as it was in the area where we grew up. Even if burial, *märdo* (news of the death of a relative) and the like play an important role to form an *iddir*, we set up the *iddir* to socialise (*lämahibärawi hiywät*) and make life easier (*nuron lämaqläl*)." The phrase 'we had no one' clearly depicts the need for social connections underlying the interest in forming a network. Yet burial and *märdo* matters might have played a decisive role in the formation of *iddir*. This accords with Alemayehu's observation (1968) that a lot of things can be postponed, but not a burial.

The Därg regime imposed even harsher centralisation measures. It built up an excessive military apparatus to rule the people with an iron fist. The regime constructed a pyramidal government hierarchy, starting with the *käbäle* that was meant to exercise control at the grassroots. Although the *käbäles* were not

8 The translation of the Ge'ez *näigusä nägäst* as 'king of kings' or 'emperor' is fallacious.. The word '*nägäst*' has no singular form, which means that it could not be the plural of *näigus* (king). The word itself is described in Ge'ez grammar as *mädbäl*, which means compound noun. So I would argue that the word '*nägäst*' could mean the whole complex structure of a nation, which I equate with 'kingdom'. Hence instead of king of kings or emperor, I would translate it as 'king of the kingdom'. The official translation of *Näigusä nägäst* as emperor implies that the throne itself assumed this common (mis)understanding of the meaning of the title.

allowed to deviate from the dictates of the central regime, they ruled autonomously over the citizenry under their jurisdiction (Clapham 1988). In the name of socialism and national unity local power was used to promote the ideology of those in power. No challenge or opposition was tolerated (Assefa 2005). By confiscating land and big companies the regime destroyed the competitive spirit that had existed for centuries (Messay 1999). Autocratic and tyrannical politics alienated the people from the authorities. So “people must learn to innovate and to adapt the remnant of the past to meet the demands of the changed circumstances in which they find themselves. Innovation and adaptation always have characterised human behaviour, but now their systematic and intensive application has become requisite to survival” (Biernatzki 1991:19). During this period *iddirs* grew not only in numbers but also in diversity. People sought a kind of refuge and social cohesion in the *iddirs*.

Even though the post-Därg regime has declared decentralised rule based mainly on ethno-linguistic lines dividing the country into assumed linguistic territories, central government dictates to the regional states. Abbink (1997) describes it vividly when he says that power in the current Ethiopian political system is entirely concentrated in the hands of the prime minister and council of ministers. In the name of helping oppressed ethnic groups, regional territories were delimited by central government without any consent and research. This drastic measure that disrupted the existing way of life caused a series of ethnic conflicts, particularly in ethnically diverse areas. Group/ethnic identity counts more than personal identity. Accordingly people’s personal and territorial identities have been defined for them purely on the basis of their ethnicity. Other alternatives have been blocked systematically. Parliamentary seats are made available mainly to ethnic parties. Ministerial posts are distributed on the basis of ethnic affiliation, provided one supports the party and its system (see Abbink 2006; Bahru & Pausewang 2002; Messay 1999). Given such a predominantly ethnicised discourse the national census in 1996 forced people from mixed ethnic lineages to choose one of them, even if they had no affinity with it at all. The same happened in the 2006/7 census.

Faced with such trends, people tend to form groups where they can be themselves, where they can define themselves in relation to others. *Iddirs* seem to fulfil this need. Members state that they see their fellow members as individuals and would like to be seen as individuals themselves. Ethnic and political affiliation does not play a role in membership. “Perhaps I have my own ideas on ethnicity, but here we see each other as equal. It doesn’t matter to me if someone is an Amhara or an Oromo or a Gurage or a Tigre. She should pay the monthly contribution and be present where she should be.” In a largely ethnicised political discourse the language of ordinary *iddir* members seems to constitute a competing discourse. During the interviews members showed pride

in their *iddir*, as they believe that it is only in the *iddir* that even those from the ruling party and dominant ethnic group have no privilege or influence.

Function

Dessalegn (1999) maintains that informal institutions such as *iddir* shield individuals and families against state interference in various ways and afford neighbourhood solidarity, besides creating an alternative realm of discourse where the formal structure is criticised, ridiculed or rejected. He further states that the strength of such informal institutions lies in their autonomy and fluidity. Shiferaw (2002) confirms this in his master's thesis by stating that traditional and indigenous organisations are part and parcel of people's coping mechanisms and survival strategies. Expressions like "Without my *iddir* I can't receive those who come to me", "Without my *iddir* I can't survive" suggest that the *iddir* serves as coping mechanism. "I need the people in time of sorrow and joy." This, too, depicts a social coping mechanism. The first quotation draws on the commonly known discourse of *iddir* as a burial association, while the second draws on the speaker's socio-economic condition.

One can see that political instability and the collapse of a natural social structure since the late 1960s have driven people to find ways of meeting their need for interpersonal and social relations and belonging. Even though the operational scope of *iddirs* was limited by political control, they provided personal security, a sense of belonging, authentic interpersonal relations, a system with which they can identify, et cetera. This is corroborated by Alemayehu (1968:14), who says that people are likely to join an *iddir* to get some love and attention. Some people become members "to satisfy their desire to belong, which is closely tied to the desire for security. People believe that in belonging they gain security, for in conformity there is comfort and in union, security, real or fancied." This is confirmed by some *iddir* members: "They [*iddir* members] are my family." "They are like brothers."

With the greater freedom they enjoy in the post-Därg period, some *iddirs* have embarked on fundraising activities and built halls for their meetings, which they rent out for various occasions. Others have opened cafés. Still others provide credit facilities for their members in order to assist them to become self-reliant. Initially such projects were undertaken by only a handful of *iddirs*. Income generating activities have enabled them to provide more money in times of misfortune, as well as do more for the community at large. This in turn creates job opportunities for the lower classes, as they are employed in *iddir* 'businesses' (see Dejene 2003; Shiferaw 2002). This is corroborated by many interviewees, particularly with reference to umbrella *iddir* associations.

Nature

The claim that *iddirs* started off as ethnic associations is one way of representing reality. Asserting that *iddirs* started off as associations based on people's area of birth and upbringing is another. Markakis (1974) goes even further, mentioning that Christians and Muslims have separate *iddirs*, since funeral ceremonies have religious aspects. He seems to overlook the fact that religious differences in Ethiopia cut across family lines and ethnicity, and the services rendered by *iddirs* extend far beyond funerals. Besides, in the Ethiopian context Christians and Muslims attend each others' religious funerals. Observation of a few funeral ceremonies and interviews with members indicate that this is a superimposition of the ethnicisation discourse. All the interviewees confirmed it, saying that neither religion nor ethnicity plays a role in their *iddirs*. Even members of the supposedly ethnically based *iddirs* say that it relates to the locality they come from rather than to their ethnic group. Good examples are *yeMecha iddir* and *Bäha Giorigis yeKäffa iddir*.

A textual analysis of the pamphlet cited by Pankhurst (2003) clarifies his arguments. To substantiate his claim that the *iddir* was probably a Gurage initiative, Pankhurst refers to a pamphlet of a *Soddo Kistane iddir*, a subgroup of the Gurages. The pamphlet does not state that their *iddir* was formed as an ethnically based association. Pankhurst's presentation is somehow contradicting. What the *Soddo-Kistane* people said to the minister can be translated as, 'when someone's relative dies, don't you owe him something?' In other words, 'won't you go to the funeral?' or 'won't you bury him?' The word '*biddir*' seems to have the same meaning as in Amharic with its figurative connotation of paying tribute to the dead and his/her family by attending the funeral. But the minister took it literally and gave them some money. This is supported by *Kistane Gurages* of today who said that the word '*biddir*' means 'loan/debt', as in Amharic. Yet others say that in some *sebat bet*⁹ *Guragigna* dialect *biddir* is a special type of dirge that expresses the relationship between the deceased and the mourner. Of course, this is not a widely held view among the *Sebat bet Gurages*. But the minister mistook the word for loan, so he gave them money which they seemingly needed for the burial. Whether the word *biddir* by then meant something else in *Kistane* or not the argument does not substantiate the temporary conclusion of Pankhurst.

What was true until recently is that merchants¹⁰ in general, and those trading in raw materials in particular, were despised and discriminated against. The

9 *Sebat bet* (lit. 'seven houses') is a collective name for seven subgroups of the Gurage ethnic group.

10 Until recently merchants in general were despised and given derogatory names like *mächanya näkash*. Literally it means a person who bites a rope. Merchants used ropes to fasten

Soddo Kistanes might have been the first to establish an *iddir*, but neither the pamphlet nor any other historical source has yet provided convincing evidence that their *iddir* is ethnically based. What the pamphlet does provide is grounds for concluding that they formed a group because they were discriminated against and treated with contempt for being merchants. By citing ethnic identity as basic to the formation of the *iddir* academics have maintained the ethnocentric discourse that dominated Ethiopia in the late 1960s, through the 1970s and since the 1990s.

Iddirs were founded by natives of the same area, like *yäSälale täwälajoch iddir* (people born in *Sälale*), *yäMecha iddir* (people of *Mecha*), *yäKämbata iddir* (people from *Kämbata*), et cetera (see Shiferaw 2002). Most of the names denote an area rather than an ethnic group. The name of an area could be associated with an ethnic group, but it does not per se indicate a particular ethnic group. Most – sometimes all – members of such *iddirs* could belong to the same ethnic group, but it does not justify calling them ethnically based.

People who came to town from the same locality formed an *iddir* and named it after that locality. Such *iddirs* are usually based on solidarity among themselves and with the people in their birthplace, often expressed by contributing to the development of the area in accordance with their means. According to some members it is also a way of keeping the memory of their village alive. Above we quoted an *iddir* member saying “We tried to make life as it was in the area where we grew up.” This clearly ascribes the initiative to longing for his background and a search for identity. *YäSälale täwälajoch iddir* is an *iddir* for people born in *Sälale*. Even if *Sälale* is in the Oromia region and predominantly Oromo, the very name of the *iddir* will allow anyone from *Sälale* of whatever ethnic background to join, unless the statute explicitly forbids it. It is highly unlikely that they would admit someone from a different area purely because the person belongs to their ethnic group. Thus *yäSälale täwälajoch iddir* will certainly not accept an Oromo from *Jimma*, *Arsi* or wherever.

Shiferaw (2002:51) corroborates this when he points out that *iddirs* designated by ethnic and regional names during the imperial period did not exclude outsiders, with the exception of some *Gurage iddirs*. Comparing this with the post-1991, reemerging ethnically oriented *iddirs*, he claims that the reemerging ones are strictly exclusive. This is substantiated by members of *Bäha Giorgis yäKäffa iddir* and *yeMecha iddir*.¹¹ One member of *Bäha Giorgis*

their goods on animals' back. They apparently used their hands and teeth to fasten their goods. Stereotypically biting the rope was considered as an indicator of low esteem.

11 Dejene Woldeyohannes, father of the author of this article, has been a member of the *Mecha iddir* for years even though he is not an Oromo by birth. He was born and brought up in the

yeKäffa iddir said, “We are *yäKäffa iddir* and that means we have an attachment to the area, but we are not ethnically centred.”

Again the meaning of the *iddir*'s name is debatable. The founders probably had something in mind when naming it after their place of birth and/or upbringing, while later members and outsiders (researchers, members of other *iddirs*, etc.) use their own sources and give the name either the same or a different meaning. Names like *yäKäffa*, *yäKämbata*, *yäWolayta* and *yäGurage* are somewhat ambivalent. They can imply both the area and the people, while the names *yäKäffoch*, *yäKämbatoch*, *yäWolaytoch*, *yäGuragewoch* refer exclusively to members of those ethnic groups. It should also be noted that some of these *iddirs* are named not merely after the locality but after a church in the locality, yet they include Muslims. *Bäha Giorgis yäKäffa iddir* is a good example. It is named after a local church, St George near, *Käffa. Bonga*

People from minority ethnic groups might form an *iddir* comprising only members of their own group. This is mainly because most minority ethnic groups like the *Kämbatas*, *Wolaytas* and *Dorzes* come from relatively small, homogeneous areas. It was also a common phenomenon for rural migrants to cities to form an *iddir*, as they usually settled in the same neighbourhood (Fecadu 1974).¹² In such a homogeneous setting this is to be expected. Even after the demography of the towns changed those *iddirs* continued to exist as links with those in the rural area and future urban migrants. Another reason is that some people would like to be buried in their place of birth or in a family burial place and the *iddirs* facilitate the process.

Such a reading of social structures relates to the ethnicisation discourse that dominated among the political elite and the students' movement in the 1960s. Haile Selassie's oppressive, autocratic regime with its mainly *Shewan* inclinations caused resentment among other ethnic groups and even among Amharas. The students' movement and the elite resorted to a Marxist-Leninist approach by demanding self-determination for all nations and nationalities. They set themselves up as liberators of the masses (Messay 2006; 1999). This ethnicisation discourse began in the 1960s and reached a climax in the early 1990s.

This discourse constructs an ideology and affects power relations. By conducting a Marxist-Leninist ethnic discourse, the students' movement constructed a reality. “Certain uses of language are ideological, namely those,

Mecha area, where his father settled as a child. Their *iddir* is geared to solidarity between those who still live there and those who have left. Thus the aim is to strengthen solidarity among people of the area rather than their ethnic affiliation, which many academics misinterpret as ethnically based development.

12 Names like *Gondere seffer*, *Gurage embassy*, *Gojjam berenda*, *Dorze seffer*, *Tigre seffer*, *Gofa*, etc. indicate that people from the same area did settle in the same neighbourhood.

in specific circumstances, to establish or sustain relations of domination. The ideologies embedded in discursive practices are most effective when they become naturalised, and achieve the status of ‘common sense’” (Fairclough 1992a: 87).

Thus once the ethnocentric discourse gained ground among the elite and certain political groups, social reality was read and described from that perspective. Some academics doing research on *iddir* and other social structures have accepted this reading without paying attention to its ideological implications. It is also possible that they deliberately attributed ethnic origins to *iddirs*. That is why *iddirs* have been (mis)construed as social networks originally based on ethnic affiliation, while in fact they were started as associations for people who were born and grew up in the same area.

Burial or development?

Many have described *iddir* as a social network of mutual support when someone dies. To justify their argument they claim that Ethiopian culture puts great emphasis on death. Dejene’s statement (2003:45) about “the often-disapproved after-death services” emanates from such a discourse. He uses nominalisation to avoid agency. The syntax assumes that the reader shares the view of the text producer. By obscuring the subject, Dejene tries to make his readers believe that this is a sentiment that is taken for granted. By whom is the after-death service disapproved? Again *iddir* members think somewhat differently: “It is not only the financial support I receive that matters to me but I would also like to have my *iddir* members around me if something happens to me.”

Death is an integral part of life. Death, more specifically burial, is a symbolic testimony to the life of the deceased and/or the family: ‘*mot näwa hulachenenem yämiyastäkakälän*’ (death makes us all equal). The greater the number of people attending the funeral, the more it attests the good social relations or uprightness of the deceased and/or the family. This is also true if the weather is good during the funeral. Expressions like *qäbari atasatagn/ayasatah* (may God not deny me/you people who bury me/you) or oaths like *mäqabərəh lai alqoməm* (I swear not to attend your funeral) are usually taken literally, while they have implications for interpersonal/social relations. The first expression reflects the person’s inclination to live on peaceful, friendly terms with those around him/her. The second stems from a serious personal or social offence against a person.

“I don’t want my funeral to be attended by only a few people as if I don’t have relatives.” These and comparable expressions are used by a lot of *iddir*

members. They indicate that burial is not purely about burying the dead but a testimony to their (social) life.

Fecadu (1974:367) differentiates in this regard. He states that the “primary manifest” aim of *iddir* is “mutual aid in times of misfortune, death, sickness, etc.”. He does not limit the aim to death or burial matters but extends it to various afflictions. Furthermore, the use of the phrase ‘primary manifest’ could suggest other non-manifest aims. Alemayehu (1968) observes that one can postpone marriage for lack of money, but burial cannot be postponed. As death necessitates immediate action, those who form *iddir* prioritise services associated with death. This should also be seen in the context of impoverished groups. In view of this it is not difficult to grasp why death plays a manifest primary role in *iddir*. The nature of such associations is more than what their manifest functional aspects (like burial matters) make us think.

For *iddirs* burial matters unite all people. Rich and poor, young and old, healthy and sick – everyone dies. Just as *iddir*’s structure is egalitarian, so their unifying symbol is death, which also does not discriminate. It is not that *iddirs* were/are excessively concerned with death and burial matters, but they deal with death as an integral part of life. By organising a good funeral ceremony they keep the deceased alive in their memory and/or that of the surviving relatives.

In regard *iddir*-government relations Pankhurst’s (2004, 2003) depiction corresponds with the responses of most *iddir* members, especially when it comes to the periods of the imperial and military regimes. His depiction of the contemporary *iddir*- government relationship, however, is less critical. When inquiring into *iddirs*’ views on this and the concrete measures to involve them actively in development programmes, one finds that the efforts are largely nominal, propagandistic and PR-oriented. The involvement of *iddirs* in a workshop on a draft bill is, of course, a positive development but the point is really whether their suggestions and comments were taken seriously or whether the aim was purely political propaganda. Most *iddir* members ascribe government’s attempts to involve them more to its political interests than to genuine commitment to development.

Pankhurst’s reference to a new desk at the sub-city offices needs to be investigated thoroughly before ascribing any positive or negative value to it. The identity and history of the *iddirs* whose councils now have a desk in the sub-city offices need to be inquired before any value judgment. Were these originally neighbourhood *iddirs*? Are they politically non-partisan? How come that *iddirs* that excel most in multifaceted projects are not given this opportunity? How do those in official positions relate to their constituencies? How do other *iddirs* perceive them? These and similar questions need to be answered before one can ascribe either positive or negative value to this development.

It is also worth mentioning government's move to show its commitment to transparency. On 21 December 2008 Prime Minister Meles Zenawi held a consultative meeting of the metropolitan women's and residents' forum. The forum was composed of residents designated by the *käbäle* administration to take part. Whereas the Premier dealt with issues relating to current political, economic and social affairs with special reference to their relevance to all households, failure to include *iddirs* in such a forum indicates the degree of government's actual commitment to involving people at the grassroots. Some *iddir* members commented, "We know why they selected these people, and who they are."

Solidarity

Iddir is a communal, cultural reaction to an unfriendly social, cultural and political order. It is a nonverbal discourse against political hegemony, cultural alienation and national instability. When there are conflicting interests and worldviews among individuals/groups/regions and authorities, social structures arise as means of cohesion. No wonder that the more oppressive regimes become, the more diverse smaller structures have been emerging in the form of various types of *iddirs*. Not all social structures will manage to satisfy the needs and interests of the deprived, but those that survive the external pressure and bind the people together become part of the culture. *Iddir*, born of oppression, conflict, deprivation and alienation has outlived the regimes and the systems that broke up smaller units of social mobility. *Iddir* is one of the most significant survival strategies of the (urban) population in Ethiopia (Dessalegn 1999; Dejene 1993; Salole 1986). It is a realisation of the principle of subsidiarity in a political order where the central government wields great power.

Iddir membership is a kind of indescribable education. There one learns about the ethos of one's culture, one's personal responsibilities and one's personal relations to others. Culture gives people a sense of identity, security and self-esteem. It is an instrument with symbols, rituals, stories, worldviews that people use to structure their lives (Biernatzki 1991). *Iddirs* are 'root paradigms' for Ethiopian society. Root paradigms are models of cultural behaviour. "[R]oot paradigm ... is probably concerned with fundamental assumptions underlying the human societal bond with preconditions of *communitas*" (Turner 1974:68) *Iddirs* likewise assume human bonds in that their leitmotif is the well-being of the community. Root paradigms provide participants with a pattern to structure and regulate their (social) actions at every stage. They give form and stability to "processual units". Through their written and unwritten norms *iddirs* structure the community and determine its (social) actions. At the same time the egalitarian nature and unmediated personal relations prevent people from being assimilated into a collective. It

rather makes them realise their uniqueness while recognising their commonality. Such relations do not blend identities but free them from conformity (Turner 1974: 274).

Iddirs' egalitarian nature and their relational function transcend their structure. Structure attempts to define each member as a separate entity, but the 'anti-structural'¹³ characteristic dictates the former. This is manifest in social activities that exceed the requirements of written norms.

Iddir is a locus where the person can be defined interpersonally and relationally. This relationality also expresses itself in the person's participation in the community, which is a manifestation of human agency. The high level of participation in *iddirs* promotes human agency. Agency is here directed not only to the person but also to the community. This community orientation reveals itself in the solidarity that is characteristic of *iddirs*.

Solidarity displays a disposition, buried under established social and political conditions, towards cooperation, mutual aid, common feeling, hence towards the common good. Solidarity is anticipatory insofar as it draws a picture of the future human being, who will ultimately be free to develop its cooperative and common strengths unhindered (Kurtz 1999).

Iddirs came into existence partly because of deprivation, discrimination and oppression. By forming an *iddir* people express their solidarity with each other and build a buffer against an unjust system.

Conclusion

From our literature review and fieldwork it is clear that *iddir* is a fairly recent phenomenon. However, it can be considered indigenous in the sense of a local response to national and international challenges. It is spiritual because it draws on localised forms of Islam and Christianity. *Iddir* contributes to development through community building and 'democratic' conflict resolution. As such it guarantees harmonious relations and interdependence, which enables people to work in a two-way relationship rather than according to the traditional top/down approach. It is sustainable because *iddirs* offer their members mutual support and they try to offer future generations some sort of insurance. Whether *iddirs* will survive rapid population growth and urbanisation in Ethiopia remains to be seen. But they have been able to resist unstable economic conditions and harsh political pressure in the recent past.

13 The term 'anti-structure' in Turner's studies connotes a body that is undifferentiated, egalitarian, direct, extant, nonrational, existential, an I-Thou relationship. It is not negative but rather a generative centre in the positive sense (Turner 1974: 272-298).

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Baradari: spirituality that sustains community

Clement Waidyasekara

Introduction

Culture is a core component of a vision for sustainable society. Respect for and acceptance of cultural diversity are widely recognised in various UN conventions and charters, but in a globalised world preservation of cultural diversity is an uphill task. Since the emergence of the nation-state the policies of most governments have been geared to assimilation and homogenisation. Indigenous communities are the groups worst affected by this process.

Indigenous people themselves have been struggling to protect their identity, culture and collective wisdom. Their struggles for self-determination in many parts of the world have met with modern military onslaught and resulted in genocide.

The negative – often disastrous – consequences of modernisation and competitive development, which in many cases have been prescribed by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund through their Structural Adjustments Programmes (SAPs) that are conditions for so-called ‘aid’, have brought increased awareness of, and willingness to look positively at, the body of knowledge, science, values, and so forth that are essentially indigenous: harmonious with nature, rooted in community spirit and collective wisdom. Increasingly, such resources are being accorded due recognition by social anthropologists.

In line with the renewed interest in indigenous cultures and their rich heritage, it is important that efforts are made to facilitate interaction within and among different cultures and communities in Asia. By this we mean mutual enrichment and consolidation of indigenous people’s efforts to confront the challenges posed by alien developmental models and to build a better world. Asia has a rich diversity of cultures and indigenous traditions, from which a shared vision of a sustainable future for humankind and solidarity could emerge.¹

¹ If one looks at the Asian continent, Japan can claim an *Ainu* indigenous population of 50 000, while China and the South-East and East Asian countries have 67 million indigenous people. The *Maoris* of New Zealand continue to practise their traditional culture, art, music and

It is quite apparent that indigenous communities all over the world are struggling for survival and that the various 'development' paradigms are creating problems for them, while their customary traditional rights are denied in the name of modernisation.

Cultural domination can be harmful to the dominated communities and may have even more far-reaching consequences than colonialism. Threats to survival not only have demographic implications but serious cultural repercussions as well. It has also been emphasised that traditional practices are sometimes replaced or rejected in the name of modernisation. I believe that a proper development strategy should have been worked out on the existing knowledge base rather than on something imported from outside.

My paper focuses on the people of Punjab, Pakistan. I briefly explain the dominant form of social organisation based on what is known as the baradari system and how it operates in Punjabi culture. The province of Punjab is situated in northwestern Pakistan. Located between the Himalayan foothills and the Indian state of Rajasthan, it comprises an area of 205 344 square kilometres (total area of Pakistan: 796 095 square kilometres); its population constitutes 56.5 percent of the country's total population. Population density in the province is 348 persons per square kilometre.

The name '*Punjab*' (or *Panjud*) is a compound of two Sanskrit words: *panca*, 'five' and *ab*, 'water'. Hence it means 'five waters' or 'five rivers', referring to the *Jhelum* (825 km), *Chenab* (1 242 km), *Ravi* (901 km), *Sutlej* (1 551 km) and *Beas* (397 km), which originate in the northern Himalayas. Though not the largest province in area, Punjab is the most populous and comparatively the most developed territory in Pakistan. It is considered the nerve centre of Pakistan.

Overview of Punjab society

Punjab is a rural agricultural province. Its vast plains are covered with an intricate network of thousands of villages approximately five kilometres apart.

language. Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Burma, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka are home to over 81 million tribal people. The Oblates of Mary Immaculate (OMI) community in Bangladesh has become the voice of the voiceless in their struggle to safeguard their traditional land: the *Khashi* and *Gharong* tribes, and the *Tripuras* of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, who live in some of the remotest areas. Some may argue that the whole of Africa is tribal and that all communities are indigenous. While this may be historically so, communities like the *San* (100 000) and the *Pygmies* (200 000), who have retreated into the jungles of Congo, need special mention on the list of indigenous peoples.

The traditional village setup

Punjab is a vast plain dotted with thousands of villages. To study Punjabi culture one has to study its villages, for the village is the hub of Punjabi society. Villages come in clusters of three or four. It is difficult to speak of an average sized village, for patterns of habitation are complex. Most villages have a minimum of a dozen houses and a population of a few hundred people. Even large villages rarely have more than 2 500 inhabitants. Several villages form a cluster, in which one village is separated from the next only by a few fields. Consequently the village units, in spite of being separate entities, are closely knit within the overall structure.

There is no great rift between village and city life. Even when people migrate to the city they retain a piece of land where their relatives live and, for the sake of prestige, they maintain a house there. Because it is believed that every village is founded by an ancestor, people never sever contact with their birthplace; they gather in their villages for important ceremonies and in their turn invite relatives and those who are traditionally attached to their family in some way to the city. This sort of behaviour keeps relations between village and city alive.

The compound

Each house opens on to a courtyard surrounded by high walls that demarcate the household boundary and assure privacy from the outside world. All daily activities – washing, cooking, weaving, social contacts – take place in the courtyard or on the veranda. A significant feature of every courtyard is a large tree to shade it in summer. A hammock lies next to the tree and is used for various purposes: to prepare food, spin and weave, sit and chat, and lie down during the day and on summer evenings. The family and close friends gather in the courtyard on bright moonlit evenings to tell stories, recite poetry, solve riddles and sing folksongs. In the midst of all this there is a place where animals are tethered. The buffaloes, the most valuable domesticated animals, stand at their clay mangers along one of the walls of the compound. Chickens roam freely in the open space.

A compound will house either a nuclear family consisting of husband, wife and children, or an extended family consisting of an elderly father and mother and their unmarried daughters and sons. Such an extended family is considered to be a single household, whose income is pooled and expenditure is met from a common purse. Many years after the sons' marriages the eldest and his family are given a separate room in the house or in the same compound, where he will manage his own affairs. In this way a compound could be divided into several households. This is evident in the separate *chuls* or clay hearths used for cooking each household's meals.

Land

The most valuable possession received from nature is arable land. It is the main source of livelihood, and Punjabis' financial situation depends by and large on the fertility of the land. Yet land is limited. This makes it even more precious and it is seen as something sacred, to be worshipped as Mother Earth.²

Closely related to the importance of the soil are the sun and rain needed for the fields to be fruitful. Seeing nature as their sole provider, people are much attached and close to it, as a result of which they deify natural phenomena and have local gods who are responsible for the abundance of the harvest and the general prosperity of the village. Intimately related to this are seasonal festivals when the whole village, especially the farmers, rejoice at the fulfilment of their year's hard work in conjunction with nature's generosity.

Arable land and nature's timely gifts of rain and sun are the principal interests of the agricultural community. The people's hopes and despairs, happiness and sorrow – their economic and social well-being – depend entirely on the gifts of nature. Hence land is seen as a source of power and prestige: more land means more income; more money brings more friends, which in turn creates more relationships, support and security, and ultimately higher social status. Such dependence on natural phenomena has led to their divinisation, thus generating superstition and belief in magic that have become part and parcel of people's religious beliefs.

The Punjabi worldview

Every culture has its own worldview or central, governing set of concepts, philosophical assumptions and presuppositions that its society lives by, in other words the mode of reality which shapes everything pertaining to a particular people. It contains their most comprehensive ideas of order. A child born into a particular culture receives a ready-made worldview and is moulded by it to the extent that what it experiences as 'truth' or 'reality' is what that culture has made it. A person's truth and reality derive from his or her culture, not from outside it.³

2 This worship of Mother Earth is less visible today than in the past, although it still exists in Punjabi thought and behaviour concerning the land. Even in the past no shrines were erected, because she is believed to be present everywhere in the form of soil. For different Mother Earth cults, which in their turn have local deities, see Bedi (1971:34-38).

3 A worldview is learnt unconsciously early in life and is not readily changed. As children learn to understand their surroundings in a socially accepted way, they form a worldview that will influence their actions for the rest of their lives. It becomes the integrating core of their perspective on reality. The child's worldview bridges the gap between the objective reality around it and the culturally agreed perception of that reality. This acquired, integrating core provides the framework for accepting or rejecting new elements. They are borrowed only if they fit into the person's worldview or if they can be re-shaped or re-coloured to fit it; see Kraft

Depending on its worldview, something that one culture sees as questionable or problematic is completely overlooked by another culture, so that what is considered a value in one culture may well be an abomination in another. Thus one culture says that the caste system is socially discriminatory, while another justifies caste as affirming the dignity of the human person.

To understand the Punjabi cognitive world – how people think – we must understand the relationship between the person and the group. Authority is vested in family ancestors and elders. Interpersonal unity is conceived of in terms of extended family relationships. One's family is seen as one's most valuable possession, and one's daily relations with the family are paramount. It is as a family group that one relates to other groups and to the outside world: order is family-based. The family is seen as the ideal of beauty and security, without which life would have no meaning. The family is the basic economic unit, the basic political unit and the hub of social life and obligations.

Definition of a person

As a result of the close-knit family system a Punjabi has no identity apart from the family: a person reflects his or her family, is obligated to it and depends on it. Thus the family unit is the lens through which the world is seen. In this way Punjabis are *relational beings*.⁴ They operate and find their identity in relationships that fan out in concentric circles, diminishing in intensity as they move outwards from parents and siblings to extended family, clan, other geographical locations and the nation.

Individuals cannot be understood in isolation as independent beings free to choose and direct their lives as they please. They are what they are because of their relationship with the group. Thus they find their identity and are recognised as long as they are part of the group; the group makes the individual what she is.

Honour and shame

The group also gives the individual status, hence recognition from others is important. This socio-relational understanding of self entails two indispensable values for understanding the person: honour and shame, known as *izzat* and *be-izzat*. *Izzat* is a claim to worth, plus acknowledgment of that worth. *Be-izzat* is

(1978:4). On the other hand one has to ask: does morality depend on worldviews and religion? Or is there a relation between worldview and morality? (See Musschenga et al. 1992:1-7.)

4 Cf. Moghal (1997:27). Nakamura says this way of understanding a person as a relational being happens because it puts more emphasis on the underlying features or essence of the individual than on the particular surface qualities of self: Asians, especially Indians, tend to stress the relational meaning of a thing/person more than its fundamental uniqueness (cf. Nakamura 1971: 61).

an attitude of sensitivity about one's honour, a concern for what others do, say and think in relation to oneself. Because of the group's centripetal focus on the individual, *izzat* and *be-izzat* are a paramount concern.

Izzat is a cultural phenomenon with psychological implications. It serves as a moral criterion of good and evil. As long as one is loyal and obedient to the *qaida aur kannon* (rules of conduct) of one's clan and caste one earns *izzat* for oneself and one's whole group. It is considered morally good to support one's group at any cost, even though the conduct of a member of another clan or caste is objectively more correct. Disloyalty to the customary behaviour of the culture, clan or caste, on the other hand, brings *be-izzati* or shame on one and all and is seen as morally evil. It may take years, even a whole lifetime to repair this lost *izzat*, which can lead to revenge – even murder – or sometimes to reconciliation.⁵

Basic social unit: the family

In Punjab, as in other rural societies, families are larger and more extended than urban families. They include several generations of the male line (grandfather, father, son and grandson) as well as uncles, aunts and cousins, making up clans or clan-like organisations. Family and kinship relations are closely intertwined with the institution of property (land), specialised crafts, the institution of marriage and basic norms of behaviour such as those governing the definition of incest. The extended family facilitates the transfer of property and, with it, of responsibility from an aging elder to a younger family member, particularly since the norms of succession have been institutionalised, as has happened in many peasant societies. Certain privileges and rights are accorded and certain duties and responsibilities accompany the assumption of the role of head of the family.

5 The concept of *be-izzati* or shame goes hand in hand with its moral emotional partner, guilt. This aspect has been discussed in the literatures of many cultures designated 'shame cultures' because of their intense concern with honour and reputation, as opposed to 'guilt cultures' where sin and inner worth predominate. The difference between shame and guilt is that shame tends to be associated with wrongdoing that is publicly exposed and guilt with situations in which it is not. Shame is the feeling of disgrace and humiliation which follows the discovery of some transgression; guilt is a feeling of secret badness not known to others. Thus shame and guilt are not the same, either ethically or psychologically, but they are of the same family. For a comprehensive critical review, see Piers & Singer (1953, especially 11-12). Shame cultures differ from industrialised guilt cultures in that their members are group-oriented and their attitudes and actions are governed primarily by the opinion and appraisal of significant others. In contrast to guilt cultures with their developed sense of individualism, internalised conscience and interest in introspection, in shame cultures what other people say is the chief sanction of conduct. For the theory that shame and guilt are present and contemporary in all cultures, see Augsburger (1986: 111-143); Malina (1993, 63-69).

Family organisation is strongly patriarchal, and most people live in large extended families. Women have low social status; they are restricted to the performance of domestic chores and fulfilling the role of dutiful wives and mothers.

Women spend almost their entire lives in the confines of their homes because of social concern about honour or *izzat*. A woman who ventures into the male domain of public life is always suspect. Most women are burdened with a constant need to avoid any suspicion of behaving in a way that could bring disgrace or *be-izzati* on their families. Rich peasants, landowners and members of the urban middle class keep their women in seclusion or *pardah*: on the rare occasions that they set foot outside their homes, they must be veiled.

In the extended family system the conjugal relationship centres on the husband and eldest son. The wife should serve her husband with total respect, obedience and love. The husband in turn loves and respects his wife and family.

Social organisation revolves around kinship rather than caste or *zat*. *Baradari* or patrilineage is the most important social institution. Marriage arrangements are preferably made within the *baradari*.

The *baradari* system

Background

The basis of the Punjabi social structure is not the nuclear family unit but the group of families, the extended family, which collectively forms a socio-economic unit. Each extended family is traced back to a common ancestor, who founded a particular village and whose land was divided among his descendants. These descendants may consist of as many as twenty or thirty families, all belonging to the same extended family. It is a net-unit that keeps members of a family or clan together, bound by customary duties and rights. This net-unit is known as *baradari*. Thus the original or strict sense of the word *baradari* derives from the patrilineage and links persons who can trace their relationship, however remote, to a common ancestor. Hence *baradari* refers to the whole patrilineal group and to any individual member of the patrilineage.⁶ However, the term is also applied more generally to other groups, whose members are linked by religion, language, occupation and so on.⁷

Although all the inhabitants of a village may have a common ancestor, this does not mean that all the families have the same occupation. There will be

6 Cf. Eglar (1960, 75-76); Klass (1980, 90).

7 Cf. Yusuf (1979: 157-158).

zamindars or landowners and *kammis* or village artisans, and the latter will include barbers, carpenters, launderers and so on. Although they all belong to the same village *baradari*, the arrival of outsiders from time to time means that not all of them are necessarily related. Blood relations are known as family *baradari*.

In this system no one is completely isolated. Each Punjabi belongs to a group in one way or another. A person's worth or value depends on his or her loyalty to the group. *Baradari* is therefore basic to Punjabi society; it is at the very heart of the people and could be called their 'soul'. The essential elements of the Punjabi way of life flow from it.

The term *baradari* derives from a Persian word⁸ meaning 'brotherhood', 'fraternal relation' or 'relationship'. It signifies 'getting together', which sets the group apart from other groups. It is not easy to determine the precise nature and extent of the brotherhood from the term itself. *Baradari* refers to different realities according to the context in which it is used. Hence it covers a wide range of meanings, from brotherhood to clan, caste, community and a circle of family members, from close to distant relatives.

The common understanding among the Punjabi people is that to understand the meaning and origins of *baradari* one has to look at it in the broader context of the Indian caste system as sanctified by Vedic tradition. This takes us back to the time of the Aryans and their social structure, which was based on a caste hierarchy. It raises the question whether the *baradari* system is an offshoot of the Indian caste system.¹⁰ The rationale underlying the *varna* or *baradari*

8 There are two sources that give the same transliteration. First, *biradari* means 'fraternity', 'relationship', according to *The student's practical dictionary: containing Hindustani words with English meanings in Persian characters*, 12th ed., Allahabad, India: Ram Narain Lal, 1956, 105. Second, the original Persian word '*biradari*' means 'brotherhood', 'fraternal relation', 'relationship'; cf. F. Steingass, *A comprehensive Persian-English dictionary*, 8th ed., London: Kegan Paul, Trench Trubner, 1988, 167. The right pronunciation would be *biradaarii* (double vowel = long vowel), but Punjabis pronounce it '*braderi*'. When writing the Persian word '*biradari*' in Punjabi using the Persian script one has to spell it '*baradari*', because there is no way to write *bir(-adari)*. This is because when using the Persian script to write Punjabi phonetically one cannot reproduce the actual Punjabi sounds, as it lacks the necessary sound signs (letters). Cf. Kohli (2000, 578).

9 It should be noted that the *baradari* includes women as well, yet people use only the term 'brotherhood', never 'sisterhood'. *Baradari* here is not the same as the Islamic *umma*, ('people' or 'community'), also translated as 'brotherhood'.

10 Ancient Indian society was divided into four *varnas* (*brahman*, *ksatriya*, *vaisva*, *sudra*). *Varna* is the most important traditional concept of an ordered society in Vedic India. It literally means 'colour' and in an extended sense is understood as 'class'. There are four *varnas* – in other words, society is divided into four layers or classes. These *varnas* were regarded as fundamental, primeval and divinely ordained. Moreover, it has been observed that there were sub-castes apart from the official four *varnas*, whose numbers increased so as to form several groups. Each group

system is the assurance of security and cultural stability. Security as a basic human need depended on cultural stability, which became a moral value.

Methods of formation of baradaris

A *baradari* may be established, first, by blood or some common bond, and secondly, by voluntary ritual.

Blood

The first concept of *baradari* is that of blood relationship: the very fact that someone is born into a clan means that the person belongs to that particular *baradari*, with all its duties and rights. Members of the same clan may live in different villages but they are joined together by horizontal solidarity.

Some common bond

The primary notion of unity by blood is extended to other levels of society. People are united in Christian or Muslim *baradaris*. A Christian *baradari* or brotherhood can comprise Christians in a certain village, or all those living in a region, or a local church; even the universal church can be said to be a form a *baradari*. The same applies to Muslims united as a group or *baradari* in a particular village, region or country, or as all the Muslims in the world.¹¹

There are other ways in which people form *baradaris*. Some unite in a *baradari* under the name of a common ancestor, for instance the *baradaris* of Gill, Bhatti, Sohtara, Randhawa or Dalu-du. Before the construction of the irrigation network for agricultural purposes in Punjab, each of these groups lived as a separate unit or cluster in different villages. The creation of canal colonies meant that the groups dispersed from their original villages, but as *baradaris* they are not destabilised. In the strict sense the Gills, Bhattis and so on are not related by blood. But customarily a clan member does not marry within the clan; for example, a Gill will not marry a member of his own clan but a member of the Bhatti, Sohtara or some other *baradari*. This is a tradition and each clan maintains it – which brings *izzat* to that particular ancestor and those who bear the name.

The name '*baradari*' may be applied to people who do not belong to any kin group but are united by a common occupation. *Kammis* unite in a *kammi baradari*, which includes all *kammis*. Each craft will form its own *baradari*, for

had its own behaviour, duties, rights and moral code, and tried to defend itself by dominating the others (cf. Yusuf 1979:157).

11 This Muslim brotherhood should not be confused with the Islamic traditionalist movement that emerged in the early 20th century in Egypt as a strong political movement to propagate orthodox Islam all over the world, and which has since spread to other countries. Cf. Mitchell (1969) for a detailed description of the movement.

example the *baradari* of *musalis* ('sweepers'). They unite in the *baradari* of *kammis*, or more specifically in the *baradari* of *musalis* in a particular village, region, country or the whole world. *Zamindars*, too, unite in a *baradari* of *zamindars*.

Baradaris are also formed according to language groups. Punjabi speakers will form their own *baradari* and Pushtu speakers will form theirs. Such language groups can extend beyond national boundaries as far as East Punjab (in India) where Punjabi is spoken.

Lastly, members of different types of *baradari* who live in the same village will tend to unite, irrespective of their particular *baradaris* and their religion, to form one common village *baradari*.

The term '*baradari*' is broad. It applies to family, village, occupation, language, religious and other groupings. Inasmuch as an individual is part of a group, he or she belongs to a *baradari*. A daughter belongs to her father's *baradari*, but after marriage she is also included in her husband's *baradari*. Thus a person can belong to more than one *baradari* at the same time. He or she operates in different *baradaris* in concentric relationships: those closer to the centre are the strongest and therefore demand most loyalty; as one moves away from the centre *baradari* relationships become weaker and so does the demand of loyalty.

Lived experience of the *baradari*

Functions of the baradari

We have discussed the different kinds of *baradari*. One can find all these kinds in the same village, although they do not all function simultaneously but at different times, under different conditions and on different levels. A *baradari* comes into effect at a time of need, especially when there is opposition from outside its ranks.

As far as the family *baradari* is concerned, the individual family is free to find partners and arrange marriages for its children. However, the family informs the relatives who form the family *baradari* and they collectively give their consent. At this level the family *baradari* functions collectively. If one member does not agree with the proposal, this is taken into consideration; extensive discussions will take place and finally the *baradari*'s decision has to be accepted. Acceptance of the *baradari*'s decision maintains its unity, bringing *izzat* to the *baradari* as well as to its individual members. This is how a *baradari* functions independently of other groups. In these cases the family *baradari* plays the determining role, not the village *baradari*.

People unite as a *baradari* to enhance the status of a village, a person, et cetera. What is significant is that the system does not allow injustice even to

the lowest person and no group can dominate another. Even if a very popular person harms the least popular member of a *baradari*, he will never escape punishment. If a group of *zamindars* or landowners with their household of *kammis* or village artisans attempts to dominate the village, another group of *zamindars* and their household of *kammis* will rise to oppose such domination. Then there will be two powers in the village (*pati bazzi* or political parties) holding each other in check. In this way a balance of power is maintained.

The baradari as a source of influence

All *baradaris* consist of men and women, elders and children. But the *baradari* as a decision-making council comprises only male heads of families. A woman will express her views to the head of the family on a matter like marriage, career or a quarrel. He will present the question to the *baradari* council and this particular group of men will decide. The initiative in certain matters may come from women, but ultimately the decision is made by the council of the *baradari*. Women and children are excluded from *baradari* meetings, although youths can attend as silent observers. Even decisions about quarrels among women are made by the all male council.

Although all heads of families form the *baradari* council, decisions are not taken by the members collectively. They will discuss the question together, but decisions are taken by a body called the *panchayat*.¹² Though '*panchayat*' literally means 'gathering of five', today the number holds no significance. The term has been used through the ages for traditional village assemblies. Members are not formally elected, but are men respected by the village or by the parties, who are asked to assemble to help resolve the problem. It is a voluntary committee that varies in size depending on the gravity of the offence or the importance of the parties involved. In short, *panchayat* is a council comprising an unspecified number of *mu'tabar* or trustworthy, respectable people, summoned or meeting on their own initiative, called by one or both parties to a dispute or by a third party, and given *ikhtiyar* (authority and discretion) by one, both or neither of the parties to decide a conflict.

The *panchayat* consists of men with high social status, power and prestige who head a clan. Among these is the supreme head, the *nambardar* or village headman, who makes the final decision. The *panchayat* is involved solely in instances when the concern is a village matter and not a personal family matter, unless it is something that affects the well-being of the village.

12 The word '*panchayat*' comes from the Sanskrit word for 'five' and consists of a five-man governing body. It is an old Indian institution for the self-government of an Indian caste, where it functioned as a court of law to sort out major and minor disputes in the caste (cf. Singh 1981:15). Thus it is a traditional judicial system operating through *panchayat*, a folk system of law varying from village to village and area to area (see Chaudhary 1999:85; Klostermaier 1994:63, 181).

The consent of both parties is a precondition for calling a *panchayat* meeting. If one party is unwilling, a *panchayat* cannot be called. If, however, a *panchayat* is convened through the influence of the stronger party, the poorer party with less status would not dare ignore the summons of the *panchayat*.

There are no fixed, formal procedures for the meeting. The nature of the *panchayat* and procedures change according to the situation and circumstances. Punctuality is not considered necessary, nor is there any prescribed time limit. An important aspect is to let people voice their grievances and make their *gellee shikway* (complaints) to each other. After both sides have expressed their grievances the *panchayat* deliberates and works out a compromise.

Decisions of the *panchayat* are seldom a surprise, as they can already be guessed from private discussions among the people. *Panchayat* decisions are not abrupt but are reached gradually; the actual meeting could be seen as the last step in the process. If a compromise is arrived at and is accepted by both parties, they are made to stand up to embrace each other and shake hands. Embracing and shaking hands symbolise the end of the conflict.

Although the *panchayat* has no legal power, it has moral force which can influence any government in power. This consists not only in solving problems but in fulfilling a common need – the common good of a person or a village. Because a *baradari* is a close-knit unit, it can solve most problems within a clan or village, or with neighbouring villages, without referring to civil courts.

The baradari as a symbol of group awareness

Each member is expected to safeguard the *izzat* of the group at any cost, even if means telling a lie. In elections of government officials or those of any other organisation the whole *baradari* is in duty bound to support their member, whether the person is qualified for the post or not. The more the members keep united, the more the strength and security of the group are ensured, which means that no outside force will be able to exploit or discriminate against its members.

Members of a *baradari* assist one another in times of sorrow, sickness and death, and with regard to work and marriages. Hence an individual *baradari* member is never isolated and will never have to carry his or her burden alone. Sharing at all levels is seen as a great value in Punjabi culture. An individual depends on the *baradari* for personal growth, strength and support. In this sense no-one is isolated, nor can an individual be understood without considering the whole cultural climate.

A family belonging to a *baradari* may move from their original home, but no matter where they settle, members of a *baradari* never sever connections with their native village. They try to keep their relationships alive and active in many ways. To keep the *baradari* alive and affirm their unity and solidarity, ‘activity’ is important – not just any activity for its own sake, but participation

in important social occasions. This is where the custom called *vartan bhanji*, the exchange of gifts, comes into it.

Vartan bhanji in the baradari

Renewal and activation of different sorts of relationships in the *baradari* are effected through *vartan bhanji*, an exchange of gifts on occasions when all assemble. Participation in *vartan bhanji* is the underlying factor that assures the cohesion, dynamism and continuity of the *baradari* system. It is a cultural force: the ceremonialisation of a social alliance.

The process of exchanging gifts involves a wide range of relationships between the various groups that make up society. The hierarchical order for the exchange of gifts at an important occasion is as follows:

- (i) affined relatives
- (ii) friends
- (iii) members of the same caste: a *zamindar* with other village *zamindars* and *zamindars* of other villages; a *kammi* with other village *kammis* and those of neighbouring villages
- (iv) members of different castes: a *zamindar* with a *kammi*, and a *kammi* with another *kammi* (e.g. a barber with a carpenter)
- (v) neighbours
- (vi) the village as a whole
- (vii) villages with neighbouring villages.

The verb '*vartan*' means 'to trade' and '*bhanji*' means 'sweets', so *vartan bhanji* literally means 'trading in sweets'. *Bhanji* has the extended meaning of 'relationship', so *vartan bhanji* is taken to mean 'trading in relationships'. It does not entail a mere exchange of gifts, but denotes the relationships established through this exchange. It involves an exchange of material goods – sweets, fruit, money, clothes – but also includes favours and services such as collective labour (*mang*) at harvest time. The performance of this ritual exchange of gifts symbolises the renewal and activation of all relationships maintained with those one deals with. There is a proverb: a well is a well as long as it works; in other words, relatives are relatives as long as they meet. It should be borne in mind that *vartan bhanji* is vital for accruing *izzat*.

This traditional institution only functions on ceremonial occasions such as birth, marriage, the death of an old person and some lesser events. Among these marriage takes pride of place, since that is when new relationships are created. The renewal or inception of a relationship is symbolised by the exchange of sweets, clothes, money and cooked or uncooked food at a

ceremony, according to the customary laws and behaviour.¹³ The exchange is not between two individuals but between groups in a sequence dictated by the closeness of the relationship. The family first trades gifts with their *baradari*, then with close friends, then with their clan, and so on.

The exchange of gifts is reciprocal but unequal. Each gift is recorded in a permanent family register, a running record of obligations and credits to and from other member families of the *baradari*. To perpetuate the relationship, indebtedness must be maintained and each gift given is larger than the one received from that family member on the previous similar occasion. Thus the obligation is continually passed back and forth between the participating families as one or the other becomes the recipient of the most recent gift. Ritually the commitment of both participants to the relationship is affirmed. If for some reason one of the parties wishes to terminate the relationship, a messenger is sent bearing a gift that exactly equals the amount of the obligation; in this way the chain of indebtedness – and thus the relationship – is broken. However, people make every effort not to terminate a relationship. In a family *baradari*, when one family severs its relationship with another family in the same *baradari*, the whole *baradari* takes every measure to heal the rift before a major social event such as a marriage. If all *baradari* members are present on that occasion, it shows the unity of the *baradari*, which brings *izzat* to the group.

Certain principles are evident in this traditional institution of *vartan bhanji*. The first is that of *reciprocity*.¹⁴ For each gift received one must be given: a gift for a gift, a favour for a favour, a joke for a joke, good for good, bad for bad, evil for evil. What counts most is the intention, the attitude of the giver. The quantity and quality of the gift manifest the intention and the purity of the relationship. If one is unable to reciprocate for whatever reason, one's presence at a ceremony is taken as a sign of goodwill. In this reciprocity there is no

13 There is another kind of relationship where no gifts are exchanged, but in which two parties, two individuals, two families or two villages feel free to ask favours of each other. This relationship implies a certain degree of friendship and rapport, a willingness to request and grant favours. For example, if a *zamindar* needs *mang* (collective labour) during the harvest season, he may ask for assistance from his friend in another village with whom he has a relationship involving the exchange of favours. That puts him under an obligation to his friend, who in his turn is obligated to all the people who join *mang* at his request (cf. Eglar 1960:105-106).

14 This reciprocity extends to political affiliation as well as giving evidence in a court or *panchayat*. Villagers give their votes in return for favours. Reciprocity also features when a person appears as a witness in a court case or makes a statement to the police. Generally a person agrees to be a witness not for the sake of truth, love of justice, or against criminals who should be punished, but according to who has helped him or her in the past and who could be of assistance in the future. Whenever witnesses are required they are mostly relatives, members of the plaintiff's *baradari*, friends or those who have helped him or her. Thus justice is not always done: you have to reciprocate (cf. Chaudhary 1999:68-71).

equilibrium. A degree of imbalance creates indebtedness, which is necessary to keep the relationship alive so that it will continue.

One way or another every giver is a recipient, so no-one goes away from a social ceremony empty handed. The exchange is also carried out according to the person's means, social status and the closeness of the relationship. It is not that the poor get more and the rich get less. The Punjabi proverb goes: '*vartan bhanji* is neither charity, nor is it trade.'

Finally, proper display of the articles given and received is an important part of the ritual. If the ritual is properly performed, it brings *izzat* to the family and its *baradari*. For this reason parents continue to train their children in this custom even after their marriage, so that they can perform it well and honestly, for it is the means of maintaining good relations that ensure stability in the communication and propagation of the culture.

***Baradari*: foundation of sustainable society**

Baradari is an indigenous community; it symbolises the Punjabi way of life. The *baradari* is a symbolic reality and must be understood within the totality of Punjabi culture. The *baradari* is the perspective in which nature, self, religion and society are viewed, and through it Punjabis express their understanding of life and all attitudes towards it. Thus the *baradari* is the symbol for interpreting life in general and the actual Punjabi way of life.

As a symbol of an indigenous community, the *baradari* consists of historically transmitted patterns of *meanings* embodied in symbolic forms,¹⁵ meanings derived from various sources: history, geography, interrelationship between humans and the rest of the physical world, racial miscegenation, the Vedic caste system, the intermixture of languages, the closeness of family systems, the importance of land and nature, and so on. All these elements have helped to build the Punjabi social structure, which is conceptualised in the notion of *baradari*.

As such the *baradari* is the core or focal point of the Punjabi's daily routine of work, religion and social activity. *Baradari* permeates every inner attitude and all external activities. Everything in the Punjabi way of life is dictated by this sense of *baradari*, so that it becomes the people's general order of existence and contains their most comprehensive idea of order. It explains all relationships: those between husband and wife, children and elders, society and religion, the material and the transcendent. It is the unifying force – politically, economically, socially and religiously.

15 Cf. Geertz (2000:54).

It is believed that every village is sacred to the Punjabis, because it was founded by an ancestor. It is the ancestral worldview that is absorbed in the *baradari* system. Therefore people never sever contact with their birthplace even if they move to the city. There is a connection between the past and the present. This relationship between village and city and among the *baradaris* is sustained by a strong sense of community. The driving force that keeps the *baradari* together is the 'spirit' of the common ancestor communicated from generations to generation. This community consciousness is sustained by a strong sense of solidarity. Solidarity is understood as loyalty and obedience to *baradari* values. The basic values that bring meaning, continuity and sustain the community spirit are the principle of *izzat* and *be-izzati* (honour and shame), the process of *vartan bhanji* (gift exchange, renewal of relationships, reciprocity), and a strong sense of sharing through the practice of hospitality. These are not mere cultural values, but communicate a spirituality,¹⁶ via which they give direction, and create motivations.

Baradari solidarity is motivated by a search for security and cultural stability, which is the thought pattern and way of life of an agricultural society. Solidarity brings a strong sense of rootedness. This obviously lessens individualism and creates a community spirit. This sort of solidarity is rendered more accurately to the *baradari* members by the Punjabi word '*wafa'da'ri*' ('loyalty') for the purpose of ensuring security and cultural stability.¹⁷ But solidarity, known as *ayat* or *atfaq wafa'da'ri*, is a broader term extending to people outside the *baradari* and is practised by way of 'hospitality' (known in Punjabi as *khatir twazo*, a hospitality open to outsiders). Thus even a stranger is not excluded, but becomes a guest or *mehmaan*.

Hospitality is a bridge to reach a stranger in 'friendship' (relationship), but there is always an element of exclusiveness. This could be the case in most cultures when it comes to relations between in-group and out-group solidarity.

16 Native spirituality (theology) is a reality that we affirm to be living in the historical experience and daily lives of indigenous communities, and to be alive in their rituals, songs, stories, interpretations, expressions, morality and metaphors, but always as an enduring history. That theology is not an abstract academic exercise but has a lot to do with interpreting God's presence in people's daily lives.

17 Parekh (2000:160-161) notes that loyalty to one's cultural community is not as unfamiliar as loyalty to one's culture. It implies loyalty not to the ideals, values and so forth of a culture, but to the community of men and women built around these. For example, just as we generally feel loyalty to our families, schools and political and religious communities, we also owe it to our cultural community. Loyalty provides support, solidarity, moral and emotional resources, and a sense of rootedness. Since a culture can only be preserved by a community, one is also indebted to the latter for keeping the culture alive, sometimes against formidable odds and at considerable cost. The obligation of loyalty is stronger if the community is threatened with disintegration from the outside.

Basically the aim of both solidarity and hospitality is to bring about harmony: in nature, in the village setup and, most of all, in relationships, as opposed to division. Thus hospitality is extended to an outsider when that person is in need of help. The one in need becomes a brother or sister at that very moment. When there is need, the opposition between outsiders and insiders is overlooked and overcome, so that outsiders become insiders.

When *baradari* is concretised in action, especially when people gather in *vartan bhanji* with those who exchange gifts honestly and fairly, it induces a distinctive set of dispositions, in this case a tendency to be generous and a capacity to be honest. Thus *baradari* activities create and establish powerful, pervasive, long-lasting moods and motivations.¹⁸ For instance, in *vartan bhanji* correct conduct creates feelings of belonging, security, indebtedness, identity and recognition in the participants. These in turn motivate them to be loyal and obedient to their *baradari* at any cost, because it is through this that the whole *baradari* acquires *izzat*.

What is morally good is what brings honour to one's group. What is good for the *baradari* creates harmony and order in individuals and the groups to which they belong. Thus goodness is what brings harmony between life as perceived and life as experienced. This harmony imparts understanding and meaning to one's life world. Any act by an individual that brings *be-izzati* or shame on the group, on the other hand, causes confusion and destabilises the general order of existence as conceptualised in the *baradari* system. Thus whatever brings *be-izzati* on the *baradari* is evil, and this evil is shared by the members. Evil means lack of harmony, lack of interpretability, loss of direction and orientation in life. This in turn threatens to overwhelm individuals, pushing them beyond their powers of analysis, endurance and moral insight. Ultimately all behaviour is underpinned by the principles of *izzat* and *be-izzati*. It is what motivates a Punjabi to do good and avoid evil.

Finally, *baradari* could be described as the indigenous spirituality of the Punjabi people, because it creates motivation, a basic inner orientation and commitment to life. It is a 'spirituality' based on a strong sense of solidarity shared by the principle of hospitality. Indigenous spiritualities have human and spiritual values to offer Christian churches, especially on how to treat and relate to nature. Unity, solidarity and loyalty are the fundamental values of the *baradari* system, which resists any form of diversity and individuality.

18 Cf. Geertz (2000: 97).

***Baradari*: challenged by social and cultural change**

We accept that living cultures are dynamic, not static. There is neither a simple linear movement nor a closed circular movement, because human experience does not work that way. If all human thinking were one-directional, life would proceed in one direction only, not in many different ways. What happens when the Punjabi cultural symbol system comes into contact with other cultural symbol systems? In other words, what would be the implications of interaction between the Punjabi worldview and other worldviews?

We live in an era when modern technology, deforestation for the sake of accelerated development, nuclear tests and heavy industries are causing immense damage to the environment. On the one hand we theologians and scholars of religion have much to learn from indigenous people about how to respect and protect human cultures and the ecosystem.¹⁹ On the other hand loss of identity has become a serious threat to indigenous culture. It must also be said that attempts to assimilate and integrate indigenous communities²⁰ with the majority have proved counter-productive.

Today *baradari* faces many challenges on account of changing realities in the world at large, creating friction between old and new value systems. It is not easy for young Punjabis entering an urban situation to adapt their traditional ways. They were born into a particular culture and its worldview. The *baradari* system has given them a communitarian and collective consciousness, in which the group decides for the person. However, in the city they are independent and cut off from their families and *baradaris*. This contact with new opportunities, new customs and new values causes confusion about what to accept and assimilate and what to reject.

Thanks to advanced modes of transport Punjabis migrate from their villages to seek jobs in the city or even abroad. Contact with other worldviews leads to

19 Indigenous people's thinking pattern is that we do not own nature. Thus trees, valleys, rocks, water, etc. are common to all. Nature is God's gift. It is our duty to take good care of them, because from them will spring the future generations of people. We walk the earth with great respect, for it is a very sacred place.

20 Today the world is becoming aware that there have been attempts and instances when governments engaged in genocide and ethnocide of indigenous communities. A clear case was the dispersion of the *Hmong* communities of South-East Asia. Equally, there is greater awareness that indigenous people have an inalienable right to their particular myths and religions, languages and educational systems that respect human and cultural values. Recent UN declarations have assured indigenous people of their right to their traditional economic structures, often based on common ownership and sharing, and on their typical ways of life, including hunting, fishing, herding, gathering fuel wood and cultivation in ways that are always respectful of nature. Despite stringent laws to safeguard indigenous people's cultural expressions and knowledge of traditional methods of healing and medicinal plants, these have been plundered in a clandestine way, thus infringing their intellectual property rights.

behavioural change. These changes affect every aspect of a Punjabi life: economic, social and religious. Yet people never sever their connection with their village. Instead they bring their city experience and development home to the village. In this sense there is not such a big gap between city life and that of the more prosperous people in the village.

The socio-economic and political structure of the village has undergone and is undergoing enormous change.²¹ In the old system *zamindars* or land owners were members of the *panchayat* or village council, which not merely decided disputes and conflicts within and between the *zamindar baradaris* or village artisans but often those between *kammi baradari* as well, since the latter were totally dependent on the *zamindars* for their living. It is not so much that *kammis* are taking the place of *zamindars*, but that the village hierarchy is changing. The key roles are now played by those who have money. This has shaken old institutions of social control such as *panchayat* and other village councils.

More and more boys and girls are seeking education. The proportion of educated girls is increasing steadily. This brings changes in marriage customs and ways of choosing partners, and the whole system of *vartan bhanji* has been modified by a reduction in the duration and frequency of the celebrations. Education has lessened youth's esteem for the advice of parents and elders, to the extent that young people frequently do not heed their opinion at all. More education and migration to the city, where there are job opportunities, mean that young people are gaining economic independence and it has become more difficult for parents to instil traditional values in their offspring.

However, indigenous communities cannot and must not resent or try to avoid change. Change needs to be seen as continuity of the cultural system. Communities, societies and cultures do not remain static and unchanged. They are, as Turner (1976, 97-122) points out, always in flux and change. For him the social world is a world *in fieri*. Today new values emerge and old values undergo changes. Yet in spite of dominant global cultural pressure indigenous people's customs persist because of people's in-born spirituality, which expresses loyalty to their ancestor's 'spirit'. This 'spirit' in turn becomes a driving force to sustain their cultural stability. They use their resources in a sustainable manner for the common good.

21 Some village *kammis* have been particularly affected by technological development since manufactured goods became available. The weaver, for example, is no longer wholly indispensable. This challenges the *kammi* to modernise by purchasing machines. Some specialised *kammis* (e.g. silversmiths, weavers) are no longer found in every village. The old patterns of life have changed. Many *zamindars* have gone into business, in which *kammis* have become their partners. Some *kammis* have become big businessmen and have taken *zamindars* as their partners.

Indigenous spirituality implies that communities share resources, that they think of the next generation and leave things to them because they all descend from a common ancestor. So there is a connection between past and present, between city life and the village. Spirituality is an inner driving force which motivates people and gives direction to life. Therefore *baradari* creates motivation, basic internal orientation and commitment. It is a 'spirituality' of community, togetherness, loyalty and solidarity expressed in a strong sense of hospitality.

However, these cultures are increasingly threatened in the name of development. The traditional customary rights of indigenous communities are denied. Indigenous communities are often under pressure to embrace the dominant cultural traditions for the sake of modernisation, ignoring their rich socio-cultural traditions, arts and crafts, and traditional knowledge and wisdom. The threats facing indigenous communities not only raise serious concerns about developmental models, their impact on the environment and violations of fundamental rights, but also the survival of diverse cultural traditions.

People are being exploited by different cultural systems, putting indigenous cultures at risk. Change does not mean destruction of a culture in the name of development. Globalisation is promoted as the most appropriate system for ensuring development. This system attempts to influence and incorporate a majority of the world's peoples and natural resources into its centralisation agenda,²² which entails destruction, direct and indirect, of diverse communities, cultures and knowledge systems. The system of globalisation not only fails to overcome, but perpetuates in new forms the historical division of humanity into rich and poor, north and south, as well as aggravates gender based discrimination. That the present model of development has serious negative consequences is all too evident. It fosters individualism and a spirit of competition and causes loss of solidarity and harmony. It is this new paradigm that invades the space of indigenous communities.

Simultaneously the growing homogenisation of culture, consumption patterns and values imposed by the 'global culture' is undermining and destroying cultural and biological diversity. Almost no part of the globe remains unaffected by the globalising trends of cultural annihilation, ecological destruction, widespread social and economic insecurity and large scale marginalisation of the people. Instead of creating a peaceful world where diversity and pluralism are the sources of a civilization's wealth, forced

22 The system is unsustainable because it continues to depend on for its sustenance on the expansion of private accumulation, which justifies and legitimise the intensive and extensive exploitation of natural resources and energy, ever expanding consumption, and the generation of uncontrollable amounts of waste, all of which go far beyond the environmental capacities of our planet. We are destroying the very basis of the subsistence of humankind and other forms of life on our planet.

homogenisation is giving rise to new kinds of people-to-people conflicts (Ichiyo & Kothari 1996:144-149).

We need to talk not merely about development but about sustainable development, environment-friendly development, which protects the community dimensions of participatory development. Go to the people and talk to them about the needs to be addressed, identify these and then respond in a participatory process where all have a chance to interact, to share and to be in solidarity in spite of cultural differences.

Outsiders may observe that *baradari* is clan-oriented. People become clan-oriented when there is a threat to community life, community solidarity as opposed to individualism. This could be a way of safeguarding themselves and their future. Self-defence is a basic human right. If people become clannish, there is a reason. We cannot judge a particular culture from the perspective of another value system. If our yardstick is another value system, things will look different. We have to identify with the people to understand and assess their cultural traits.

Furthermore, for a culture to be sustainable some of its practices and attitudes need to undergo change and modification. Ideally this should come through dialogue in which the partners respect and accept each other. When we speak about dialogue we understand the parties to be partners in dialogue. Dialogue suggests mutuality where both partners can benefit. This is how dialogue can even help to purify a culture. However, Punjabi culture's encounter with Western culture has not encouraged mutually enriching dialogue. Instead it has led to cultural conflict as Western culture has invariably sought to impose cultural homogeneity, intolerant of differences. If one culture is so domineering and overpowering, the other will wither and disappear totally sooner or later. The history of colonialism shows that Western culture seeks to impose values that are injurious to traditional cultures and ways of life.

Alien cultures have destroyed the knowledge base of traditional communities that sustained them for centuries. New technologies, lifestyles, dietary habits and social relationships promoted mainly through mass media (especially through the infiltration of satellite TV) have had a devastating effect on traditional societies, which are not strong enough to resist the cultural onslaught.

On the other hand theologians and scholars of religion must not be blind to the deficiencies and even positively harmful aspects of indigenous models, which can benefit and be purified by encounter with an alien model. The indigenous model, for instance, may subject women to gender inequality, whereas the alien model may accept the equality of all humans irrespective of gender. Community decision-making processes and mechanisms in indigenous cultures tend to devalue the individuality of the person, whereas the Western

model emphasises individual rights, fundamental rights, respect for human dignity, religious tolerance and tolerance of differences.

There is also a certain disproportion between committed faults and punishments in the indigenous model. Deviation from commonly accepted norms of moral behaviour tend to be severely punished. What the alien model can contribute is that punishment should be commensurate with the nature and gravity of the offence. Offenders should have the opportunity to defend themselves.

Conclusion

In conclusion we can say that the indigenous communities have a strong sense of community, which embraces nature as well. Development in their view is sustainable and is firmly grounded in their indigenous spirituality. Modernisation poses serious threats to this way of life. How long indigenous cultures can withstand the onslaught of globalisation and lopsided development paradigms remains to be seen.

The signs of a dynamic culture are its openness, its capacity to give and receive, its power to develop, to allow itself to be purified and conform more and more to truth and humanity. The *baradari* system is no exception: it has to be purified in the face of change and contact with other worldviews. But this does not mean that a dominant culture should overpower the other culture. We need a methodology of development based on dialogue which respects all partners. We also propose such dialogue when dealing with solidarity. This requires proper comprehension of one another's perspectives and standpoints and respect for each other's value systems. That would lead to mutual enrichment, whereby the common good and community dimension of life will be respected and upheld.

Theoretically we could envisage that openness and adaptability created by dialogue would make the *baradari* relevant today and will bring growth not only for members of a particular *baradari* but to the entire Punjabi community. The transformation of the closed circle of the *baradari* should lead to the birth of new openness, fullness and universality.

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Conflict and reconciliation in northwest Ayfat, West Papua

Ien Courtens & Louise Thoonen

Introduction

The Roman Catholic Church was accepted in northwest Ayfat in a time of crisis, triggered by a tragic event: a homicide. Forty-six years later, when we were doing our fieldwork,¹ another homicide was committed. By that time the Catholic Church had gained a central place in people's daily lives. What happened at the time the Catholic mission entered the area? And how did local people and missionaries handle the crisis following the murder in 1995?

Venbrux (1995:15) comments, "In a dramatic incident such as a homicide one can expect things to become manifest that usually remain latent in ordinary life." By focusing on homicide we reveal tensions between indigenous religious notions and practices (what locals call *adat*) and Christianity (known as *agama*, religion) in present-day northwest Ayfat society.² In the process we adopt the native point of view, which explicitly distinguishes between *adat* and Christianity or the church. Nowadays native religious leaders underline that *adat* and *agama* 'walk together'. In ordinary life generally this is indeed the case. But the crisis caused by the homicide gave rise to serious tensions between the two domains. By exploring these tensions we seek to highlight what Barker (1990:1) calls "ethnographic appraisals of Christianity as it is currently experienced" in West Papuan society.

1 We conducted anthropological fieldwork in northwest Ayfat (Papua, former Irian Jaya) in 1994 and 1995 as PhD research scholars of the Centre for Pacific and Asian Studies, University of Nijmegen, Netherlands. During this period we also conducted archival research in the diocese of Sorong. Although we conducted separate studies – Ien on female ritual healers and Louise on female initiation and Christianity – we cooperated closely in our fieldwork. The field research was financed by the Netherlands Foundation for the Advancement of Tropical Research (WOTRO) and the department of anthropology of Nijmegen University. Preparation for the fieldwork was carried out in cooperation with the NOW's (Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research) priority programme, "The Irian Jaya studies: a programme for interdisciplinary research" (ISIR) financed by WOTRO.

2 Under the colonial administration Indonesian law was a mixture of Dutch and local customary law, referred to as *adat*. Although it is not connected to Papuan 'tradition', in northwest Ayfat the term is commonly used to refer to tradition.

The article comprises two parts. In the first we describe the background to a revenge killing in 1949. The second describes a debate on revenge killing in 1995. In the conclusion we discuss changes that have taken place in the interval between the two events.

Acceptance of Catholic mission during a period of crisis

The Catholic mission entered the Bird's Head area in 1949 via the village of Tabamsere in north Ayfat (located in the interior of Bird's Head), an event which the population still perceives as extremely significant in recent local history. Elderly inhabitants of both northern and western Ayfat still tell the story of father Rombouts, a Dutch priest of the Order of the Friars Minor (OFM), who was the first Catholic priest in their area. Our starting point in this paper is one of these stories about the arrival of the Catholic church, told to us by a local woman called Maria Baru. It is followed by the perception of the arrival of the Catholic church recorded from the perspective of the early missionaries.

Maria Baru was born in Tabamsere shortly after the arrival of the Catholic mission. She is a relative of the village head Hauch Titit, who was the first in the entire Bird's Head region to accept a Catholic priest: Tabamsere's village head was her maternal uncle. Although the Catholic mission entered via Tabamsere, in later years the village of Ayawasi (located in west Ayfat), became the centre of the Catholic mission in Bird's Head. The homicide committed during our fieldwork took place in the village of Ayawasi,³ where we were staying at the time.

A conversion narrative

Maria Baru narrated the story of the acceptance of the Catholic church as follows:

On 19 March 1949 the mission entered via Tabamsere. Father Rombouts came to Tabamsere and asked permission from uncle Hauch.⁴ The father came to spread the mission.

When father Rombouts arrived the first time he was accompanied by Mr Yappen [an Amboinese clerk of the local Dutch government]. Later the father set off for Sorong to pick up the teachers,⁵ then he returned to Tabamsere accompanied by Willem Nuhuyan [the mission teacher who was to be stationed in Tabamsere]. Hauch accepted the father. He did

3 Northwest Ayfat region is inhabited by various ethnolinguistic groups, typified by their members on the basis of similarities and differences (cf. Schoorl 1979:11-17). Cognate features in language and cultural practices link the ethnolinguistic groups of northern and western Ayfat.

4 Father Rombouts asked permission to instal a teacher, as schooling was the major missionary method in the early stages.

5 In those days all teachers came from the Kai Islands.

not want to listen to the Protestant minister [who went to Tabamsere after he discovered that a Catholic priest was working in the area]. The minister said to my uncle Hauch, “The Catholic priest will kidnap your children and sell them.” But uncle Hauch answered, “That’s enough! We allow the Catholic father to stay with us. We’ll just try it out for a couple of years, to see whether any changes occur.” So he permitted father Rombouts to stay. Then they slaughtered a fat pig, a white one, and ate together, because they enjoyed the arrival of the Catholic religion.

From our village father Rombouts opened up other villages and baptised the people. (...) In those days father Rombouts constantly visited other places and then returned again, but the teachers remained. So it all started in north Ayfat. From there the Catholic religion spread everywhere. (...) Later, in 1950, the mission entered Ayawasi. I don’t recall the precise date. However, I do remember that it happened in the year 1950, because my elder brother Agus accompanied the father. By that time, father Rombouts had left. The priest who introduced religion in Ayawasi was father Jorna.

The arrival of the Catholic Church as recalled by Maria and other native persons is largely consistent with missionary reports and accounts. Yet when examining the process from the missionary perspective it is clear that some other factors played an important role, which generally are not explicitly mentioned to in the oral accounts of local persons. The first is the political web of the local Dutch colonial government in which the missionary process was embedded. As will be shown below, Catholic missionary work was limited or hindered not only by Protestant successors but also by government regulations. From the missionary perspective the establishment of the Catholic mission proceeded as follows.

In July 1948 father Rombouts was summoned by the prior of the Dutch Franciscan fathers to leave the hinterland of Hollandia⁶ where he was employed at the time and proceed to Bird’s Head immediately. The father was instructed to start a missionary station in the centre of Bird’s Head. Just before that the prior, Monsignor Cremers, was informed that this was ‘still virgin territory’: many villages in this central part of the region were outside the field of the Dutch Protestant mission, which had started working there 75 years before (Rombouts n.d.:1, 28).⁷

A second instruction to father Rombouts was to enter the region unobserved, not only by the Protestant missionaries who were expected to take counter measures, but also by the Dutch and Amboinese administrators (who generally were Protestant too). Although Bird’s Head had been under Dutch government

6 Hollandia is the present city of Jayapura, capital of the province of West Papua.

7 The very first Protestant missionary station in former Dutch New Guinea was established in 1855 by German missionaries (deployed by the Dutch Protestant mission) at Mansinam near the future Manokwari in Bird’s Head. The first permanent Roman Catholic missionary station was established in 1905 by the Dutch Fathers of the Sacred Heart (MSC) in Merauke (Cornelissen 1988:3-6; Jaarsma 1990:70; P. Schoorl 1996:8), although previously, in 1894, the Dutch Jesuit order had established a station near Fak Fak (Mertens 1997:147).

since 1910,⁸ the administrators had not yet penetrated the main part of the Bird's Head's interior in the late 1940s. As father Rombouts (n.d.:4,5) notes, the colonial government forbade missionary activities in unruled areas (Thoonen 1998).

The mission requested Willem Yappen to guide the priest on his tour: Yappen had assisted other Catholic missionaries in previous years. Yappen was also ordered by the government to patrol the interior and combine this with the mission's request. Before they started the journey they hired about twenty native porters⁹ to carry their luggage – mainly daily rations and gifts. The gifts, named 'contact goods' by the missionaries, were meant to foster goodwill among the native people: once they received the sarongs and coloured linen and cotton fabric, the fathers supposed, they would be willing to cooperate.

After travelling through the forest for almost two weeks, during which period father Rombouts made no headway, they reached Tabamsere. At the time Tabamsere was one of the settlements officially belonging to the Protestant mission. In practice, however, hardly any missionary activities had taken place in the entire region for years. As a result locals living in Protestant settlements were dissatisfied with the Protestant mission. Several people expressed their disapproval by telling us that the ministers "had not done anything for them". A similar statement appears in a missionary report: on the day of their arrival in Tabamsere Yappen noted that the people felt happy because the priest had come to them and told him that "finally something would be done for the people in this region. The Protestant mission has been present for 75 years, but has done nothing for the population" (cited in Rombouts n.d.:24).

Although Maria said that father Rombouts put the request, in reality it was Yappen who did the talking on behalf of the priest. The clerk introduced the priest to the local leaders and conveyed the missionary's request. For his part the clerk was assisted by an interpreter whom they had met on the way: Yappen did not speak the local Meyah language, and the native inhabitants generally did not speak Malay. Although Hauch Titit had expressed pleasure at the father's arrival, he did not give his permission at their the first meeting. Later father Rombouts and Willem Yappen went to Werur (on the north coast) to welcome teacher Willem Nuhuyan. From there the father travelled to Sorong before walking inland again from Werur (Thoonen 1998).

8 The present province of West Papua came under Dutch colonial control in 1828, when the entire western part of the island of New Guinea was proclaimed part of the Netherlands East Indies (P. Schoorl 1996:8).

9 Both women and men worked as porters. This is contrary to Elmberg (1968:20-21), who states that in the opinion of school teachers, evangelists and lower civil servants in the Ayamaru region women "could not be used as carriers".

During this second tour teacher Nuhuyanan also visited the villages to convey the father's request. In fact, it was Nuhuyanan, assisted by an interpreter, who gained Hauch Titit's permission to establish a school in Tabamsere,¹⁰ as the teacher informed us personally. At the time of our field research Nuhuyanan was retired and living in Fak Fak, but we met him in Manokwari, where he granted us an interview. This is what he told us about his encounter with Tabamsere's village head:

When I arrived in Tabamsere I informed Hauch that I was a teacher of the Catholic mission who wanted to establish a school. Then Hauch said to me, "What can we do for you?", and I answered, "Clear the place so you can build houses, including one for myself, and a school." At the time Tabamsere was not actually a village yet. It only had four houses. Hauch replied, "We will start right away," and he summoned his son to set to work. In the afternoon father Rombouts returned from Ases. He asked me, "How are you?", and I said "Father, look for yourself, they have accepted me and have started building houses already so I can live here."

Hauch Titit then confirmed his permission and signed with a thumbprint. By accepting the mission's teacher he simultaneously accepted the Catholic mission. When the agreement was concluded the inhabitants rejoiced. The arrival of the Catholic Church was celebrated with a festive meal, after which the people danced until sunrise.¹¹

From north Ayfat father Rombouts walked to western Ayfat, as converts had to be won village by village. The father was accompanied by native youths from villages that had accepted the Catholic mission. The youngsters (all male) took over the clerk's (and the teacher's) task of conveying the missionary's request and acted as porters. When the missionary tours of inspection had been expanded to Ayawasi father Rombouts left the interior: he returned to Sorong because of severe illness and father Jorna OFM took over. One of the persons who accompanied father Jorna was Maria's elderly brother Agus, as Maria had told us, and they indeed entered Ayawasi in 1950. Like Tabamsere, Ayawasi officially belonged to the Protestant mission, but in practice hardly any missionary activities had taken place. And like Hauch Titit in Tabamsere before him, the village head of Ayawasi, Waisafo Tenau, signed consent to build a school with his thumbprint, thus accepting the Catholic mission.

In her narrative Maria stated that father Rombouts "came to spread the mission" and that "the Catholic religion entered". In present-day northwest

10 For the Catholic mission importing teachers was crucial, because in the opinion of the orders involved conversion would be most successfully realised through the younger generation. The basic assumption was that children and youngsters were more malleable than the elderly. Besides, children were expected to transmit the knowledge they gathered at school to their elders.

11 Although Tabamsere's people cherish the date of the 19 March in their memories, the mission did not actually arrive on that particular date: the mission visited the village for the first time on 8 February 1949. Hauch Titit accepted the mission in mid-April (Rombouts n.d.:24, 37).

Ayfat it is commonly believed that Catholicism was introduced by the Dutch priests with the assistance of mission teachers. During the early missionary days, however, adults did not actually associate the arrival of teachers with religion: Catholicism had no religious significance for them but was related to the establishment of a school. In other words, at the time the church arrived the major missionary method of stationing teachers was not perceived by the local people as a conversion process. Neither did they have the slightest idea of the implications of Catholicism (or of Protestantism) when they accepted a teacher from the Catholic mission. Why, then, did local leaders agree to the establishment of a Catholic mission school in their village?

The revenge killing in 1949

For local leaders accepting the father and a village school had two major advantages. Neither was directly connected with education. Maria has stated the first motive in her narrative: the village head wanted to see if they could effect changes. Another motive was that local leaders were hoping that the Catholic mission would 'do something for them'. What these expectations actually meant to inhabitants of Tabamsere and Ayawasi was explained to us by Maria and her brother Agus. After Maria had recounted the arrival of the Catholic Church, we asked her to explain to us why her uncle decided to choose the father rather than the minister. When we put the question to her, Agus was also present. They replied as follows:

MB: Hauch Titit and Atmarot Hay had killed a man.

AB: It was a tribal fight.

MB: It happened before the father arrived. That was the period of the [Dutch] government and of *adat* [tradition]. Religion had not yet arrived. The government had appointed village heads, but because of the war between the Netherlands and Japan the government did not actually take care of us.

This is what happened. Two of our ancestors are Etaya and Sesai. One of their children was called Atmarot, who was a younger brother of Hauch [in local kinship terms]. When their mother [Atmarot's consanguine mother] married for the first time, she gave birth to Sesai and Atmarot. After her husband died she married again and gave birth to Etaya and Times. Before the father arrived, Etaya and Times killed Sesai. His death was avenged by Hauch and Atmarot, who killed Etaya. Because people had been killed here, the Dutch government did not care for us. It had been reported already.

AB: In Sausapor.

MB: Ah! In Sausapor, to the government. So that's why we wanted to receive Catholicism, because we did not want the government. The church must enter. At the time the Catholic and the Protestant church, which both came from the Netherlands, were present simultaneously. But Hauch and Atmarot did not want the Protestants, they wanted the Catholics. The Protestants came to pray only. They did not come to guard us, nothing like that. It was empty. Hauch and Atmarot did not want it the way it went, and that's why they accepted the Catholic Church. To see if they could change things.

The hope that the Catholic mission would ‘do something for them’ and effect changes, therefore, meant that Tabamsere’s inhabitants (and the village head in particular) were hoping that the Catholic mission would protect them against the Dutch colonial government. The prime motive for accepting the Catholic mission in Tabamsere derived from a topical event that accorded with indigenous law but was perceived as a criminal act by the Dutch coloniser. According to indigenous law, when a person killed somebody the relatives of the murdered person had to avenge him by killing the offender or one of his¹² relatives and eating the victim’s body. According to ancestral religion this not only ensured that the hostile party suffered an equal loss: the revenge killing was a ritual practice that had to be performed to placate the restless spirit of the murdered person, so it would no longer wander around and disturb the world of the living. Besides, in keeping with the practice of killing a hostile warrior and eating his flesh (as happened in headhunting, by killing and eating the offender), the man who avenged the homicide increased his strength.

The core aim of the ritual revenge was expressed by its name (*mafitania*), which means ‘substituting the life force’.¹³ After the homicide had been avenged, the settlement was concluded symbolically: the two parties (among other things) jointly cut a piece of taro (*awiah*) in half, saying ‘*awiah fetah awiah fetah mafitania*’ – two parts of an *awiah* which make up a whole (life force). This expressed that, now the parties had suffered an equal loss, the matter was settled. The colonial government, however, regarded the revenge as a crime: generally they arrested the offenders and sentenced them to imprisonment. Hauch Titit (and Atmarot Hay) were afraid that this colonial punishment awaited them and seized the opportunity the Catholic mission offered them: unlike the Protestant mission, the Catholics would station a teacher in the village permanently who, while living in their village, might guard and protect them.

Hauch Titit and his brother were never sentenced for the ritual killing, although this was not thanks to the mission’s support but to the fact that the colonial power was not yet in actual control of the Meyhabehmase region. After the Catholic mission had settled, missionary workers indeed stood up for the population in cases of cruelty perpetrated by civil servants. In 1952, for instance, an Amboinese civil servant¹⁴ and his clerk ill-treated people of Tabamsere and the vicinity. They flogged them with a rattan whip, extorted huge amounts of food while local people were in dire need of it, locked up the population without any food for a whole day for registration, raped women and maltreated their husbands who tried to protect them, and kidnapped many men

12 As far as we know killings were only executed by men.

13 Nowadays also referred to as *ganti jiwa* (substituting the soul).

14 HBA: *Hulp Bestuurs Assistent*.

and women for building a new settlement for government officials on the north coast. Whenever local people reported the cruelties to the missionaries or the teachers, father Jorna took counter measures: he admonished the civil servants and reported the crime to his prior. The father notified that it had to be reported to the head of the subdivision, “because justice demands” that the servant should be punished (Jorna 1952: 6,7). On the other hand the priests (and the teachers), in cooperation with the government, acted forcefully against indigenous practices such as headhunting.

A homicide in Christianised present-day northwest Ayfat society

In 1995, while we were doing fieldwork in Ayawasi in the centre of the Bird’s Head area, village life was disrupted because an inhabitant committed a serious crime: one evening in May a drunk man stabbed a male relative with a spear during a fight. The man died soon afterwards. The last time a villager had been killed in Ayawasi was in 1962, when the mission had not yet secured an influential position.¹⁵ That homicide had been avenged according to the custom of ‘substituting the life force’.

In 1995 ancestral religious laws were still important guidelines. However, 98% of the nearly 1 000 adult villagers were baptised, many of whom were devout Christians striving to live in accordance with biblical principles. So the church occupied a key position in daily and religious life. As noted above, in present-day local society native religious leaders underline that ‘*adat* and *agama* [religion] walk together’, which is normally the case in everyday life. Against this background, how was the crisis caused by the homicide resolved this time?

Debate on revenge killing in 1995

On that particular day in May 1995 the village was startled out of its night’s rest by people running around shouting in panic. Before we had a chance to get up and see what was going on, a local woman called Maria, who stayed with us, knocked imperiously on our door. On opening the door we looked into her terrified eyes as she explained: “Paulus has been killed. Stabbed with a spear in his belly by Karel.¹⁶ His whole stomach has been ripped out. *Kampung Bori*¹⁷ is covered with blood.”

15 According to the villagers, in those parts of northwest Ayfat area that are not Christianised revenge killing is still common practice.

16 The names ‘Karel’ and ‘Paulus’ are pseudonyms.

17 *Kampung Bori* is the name of a specific part of the village.

Overcome by a sense of foreboding, knowing that a dangerous situation had been created, we kept to the house. Together we spent the rest of the night sitting in darkness and listening to the sounds of people running back and forth. Maria was very upset, as her family lived in *Kampung* Bori. She did not dare show herself in front of the open window, as she was afraid that someone might discover her hiding place. Once in a while we tried to get a glimpse of what was going on outside. Thus we saw people taking refuge in the woods, carrying only *kain timur* ('traditional' cloths that are valuable possessions, e.g. to pay bride price and fines. Special cloths, the *kain pusaka*, are the main form of legacies).

The next morning the village was not only terror stricken but half deserted. Many villagers had fled. Especially the members of the offender's clan had run away in terror of revenge: according to *adat*, as noted above, Paulus's death had to be revenged, preferably by killing the perpetrator. If Karel could not be found, however, any other member of his clan would do. So from the moment the homicide occurred, all villagers lived in fear because it was likely that a second homicide would follow. Besides that, every person in the village greatly feared possible interventions by the dead person's restless spirit that wandered around the village and would definitely cause serious harm.

Although the villagers' panic stemmed from the expectation that the matter would be resolved in the 'traditional' way by a revenge killing, the local village head, who came from Ayawasi, reported the murder to the police in Sorong (a coastal town), so the killer would be brought to trial. The next morning one of the fathers at the local Catholic mission discovered that the offender had fled to the presbytery, where he hid himself in the guest room. Father Fatem, the local priest, decided that Karel should remain there until the police arrived from Sorong to arrest him.

The case embarrassed the local villagers and caused great controversy. Some villagers felt that father Fatem, who was one of them as he came from the eastern Ayfat area, had to free the perpetrator so the victim's kin could take the law into their own hands. Others (just a few persons) emphasised their allegiance to the Indonesian state, arguing against a response according to *adat*. A third, very large party, while underlining their Catholic identity, took the position that the father had acted correctly. People were also ambivalent, sometimes changing their minds from one moment to the next. This not only depended on the social context in which they voiced their opinion, but was also because they were confused and found it difficult to form a single, clear opinion. For many adults it was the first time they faced the problem of homicide in their own society. Some pointed out that they did not know how to deal with this novel situation. Below we elaborate on the controversy and the different views that people took.

Three different views

A large number of villagers made it clear that they wanted the case to be resolved in the 'traditional' way by killing the perpetrator. They argued that their *adat* was still strong and ought to be observed. A number of persons from this party went to Karel's house in fury and set it on fire, so it was burnt down. Some others, armed with spears, went to the presbytery with the purpose of killing the perpetrator, but did not succeed in entering the building. Various male relatives searched the village, the food gardens and woods for Karel's relatives. The relatives of the victim in particular were vehemently opposed to solving the matter in the modern way by turning in the killer. The day after the homicide an aeroplane arrived from Sorong. It brought two policemen, who had come to arrest Karel and take him to prison in Sorong. The empty aeroplane waited, its engines running. Nearly all the people who remained in the village had gathered around the airstrip and watched from a safe distance, anxiously awaiting what was to happen next. Paulus's relatives stood guard near the aeroplane's entrance. The victim's mother danced nearby threateningly, waving a large chopping knife. The victim's wife shouted that the killer had to stay so they could take revenge. Later, under the eyes of the police officers, the mother and the wife took off their underpants as a sign that they longed to be dead themselves.¹⁸

Before the aeroplane arrived the village head had called on the villagers to cooperate. He requested them to let Karel go with the policemen and not to kill him or any other member of his clan. The local police officer (who came from Java) obviously opposed the idea of killing the perpetrator. He stressed that he would personally give evidence against any person(s) who killed Karel or one of his relatives.

The village head and the policeman were supported by a young native man, who walked through the village carrying the Indonesian flag, which he planted in front of his house in the end. Two other young men followed his example. This act surprised us, because in the year we had lived in the village we had never once seen an Indonesian flag in the hands of a local inhabitant. To the contrary, the villagers generally emphasised that they were Papuans, relating to the cultures of Papua New Guinea rather than Indonesia. Mostly Indonesia was referred to as a state that had annexed their homeland in the 1960s. In this crisis, however, the three men used their allegiance to the Indonesian state to demonstrate their opinion on the crisis in their village. When we asked them to explain their act to us, they answered, "We want to show that, in our view, it is

18 According to *adat* a woman has to be killed when a man has seen her genitals. That was why the women took off their underpants at this particular time: it meant that they would rather die than let the police take away the offender. These women's act, however, was ineffective in the sense that they remained alive.

wrong to kill [the perpetrator]. We have to obey the law of the government.” Clearly these three men were just a minority.

Some hours after the aeroplane had arrived it returned to Sorong without Karel or the three policemen. The latter, the village head, and the priests decided that it was too dangerous to let Karel out of the presbytery in the heated situation.

The third party consisted of father Fatem and devout Catholics. Immediately after the homicide and during the weeks that followed father Fatem urged the villagers not to resolve the homicide in the *adat* way by a revenge killing, because they were Christians now and ‘only God decides about life and death’. He was supported by members of a special Christian prayer group, *Kelompok Sabda* (‘Group of God’s Word’). This group consists of Christians who perceive themselves as true believers. Many of them have Christian visions. The Group of God’s Word is led by Maria Baru, the relative of the village head who first accepted the Catholic mission (see the first part of this paper). Maria Baru is a well-known and highly respected religious leader and spiritual healer in present-day village society (Courtens 1998, 2000; Thoonen 2000a, 2000b). Other members are healers, using prayer and Christian symbols such as a crucifix, a rosary and a statue of the virgin Mary. The healers combine these symbols with indigenous notions and practices, like dreams and the application of medicinal leaves and bark. In the process they create new religious rituals. The members have weekly Bible study groups and play a leading role during Mass. One member, a woman called Lys Korain, refers to herself as an apostle, because she accompanies father Fatem when he travels to other villages to explain the Bible (Courtens 1998, 2000).

The morning after the homicide, when people were angry, afraid and confused, Lys Korain walked down Ayawasi’s main street at a good round pace, holding the Bible in her hands. She walked right up to two groups of villagers confronting each other angrily, spears in hand. Resolutely she put herself between them, parting them fearlessly. Pointing to the Bible, Lys preached:

People have no right to decide whether someone should live or die. That is up to God. We have to obey the laws of the church now. We do not kill anymore. Instead, we hand Karel over to the authorities, where he will be put on trial and brought to justice.

Although Lys Korain’s statement met with strong resistance as the majority of villagers wanted to revenge Paulus’s death, no one actually harmed her. Indeed, Lys Korain moved freely amongst the hostile crowd.

During the days following the crisis Lys Korain and her husband Petrus Turot frequently referred to the Bible they held in their hands, insisting that Christians are not allowed to kill other persons. Other members of the Group of

God's Word hid relatives of the killer in their houses or food gardens to protect them against the wrath of the victim's kin. In the weeks after the homicide members of the *Kelompok*, together with father Fatem and other missionary workers, patrolled the village day and night to prevent acts of revenge. On several occasions when the victim's family tried to attack father Fatem because of his stance on the matter members of the *Kelompok Sabda* shielded the priest.

Some prominent villagers, however, who supported father Fatem in public, informed us privately that they were of the belief that the matter had to be resolved according to *adat*. One of them even quoted a biblical passage to underline her private opinion:

If Paulus's family do not get the opportunity to kill Karel, they surely will kill someone else. So the father has to act as Pilate and wash his hands, saying, 'Whoever wants to kill, kills.' In that way Paulus and Karel can be buried simultaneously. Then we shall cut an *awiah* in half and put one half on each grave so the matter will be resolved.

Fear of the victim's spirit

Supporters of solving the matter by revenge killing (nearly all of them Christians) generally took this view because they were deeply grieved by Paulus's death and wanted his soul to be paid for by another soul. The opponents (all Christians too) generally believed that the matter had to be resolved in accordance with the Bible, which prohibits killing another human being. As indicated above, some of these were also in favour of a solution according to *adat*, because they feared that the 'new way', too, would lead to another killing. Despite their different views and reactions, both groups shared one overwhelming emotion: deep fear of the victim's evil spirit that was still roaming around the village and would not rest in peace as long as his death had not been avenged, one way or another.

The moment the sun set nearly everyone who still remained in the village hid in their houses, as the spirits of those who had died an unnatural death are believed to appear after sunset and cause people harm. The spirit of a person who was killed is perceived as the most malignant: it may cause fear, serious illness, insanity, and even kill other persons.¹⁹ Paulus's daughter, for instance, was believed to be possessed by her father's malignant spirit because she had convulsions after his death. The fact that during his funeral she shouted loudly that she would follow her father soon was considered evidence that she had become *gila* (mad), which is the result of a malevolent spirit penetrating a person's body. It was also said that Paulus visited Karel each night to frighten him, sometimes by spitting blood all over the room where Karel stayed, and on other days by letting him sweat blood instead of water. These were seen as

¹⁹ For further information on spirits and illness in northwest Ayfat, see Courtens (2001).

signs that Paulus's spirit was so angry that it would even follow Karel all the way to Sorong. It was a sign, moreover, that Karel would die before he grew old. The victim's spirit also visited his own house each night. It was told that one night Paulus's spirit brought the bloodstained spear that had killed him to his house. Thereafter his wife and children did not dare stay in the dwelling anymore and moved to another house, where they lived with relatives. Because of fear of the spirit of the murdered man it was hard to find relatives willing to keep watch over the corpse. After two days a member of the Group of God's Word decided that he (a member of the Christian prayer group and an official – he was a teacher) would do it, because otherwise the body would be eaten by mice. Some other members followed his example. They said they were not afraid as "God's spirit is much stronger than the spirit of the dead man".

Christian protection

In this situation of deep fear Christian symbols and practices were perceived as protective by the great majority of villagers (members of the Group of God's Word as well as non-members). Most inhabitants frequently prayed before a crucifix, as prayer and the cross would fend off evil spirits. As they explained, "When we pray by means of a cross, the spirit does not dare enter the house. Because when we pray, God comes and the spirit does not dare enter." Many people also blessed their homes with a rosary to keep the malevolent spirit out. Simultaneously they said indigenous spells to ward off the spirit and planted *tah* leaves, known for their protective properties, in front of their homes, a pre-Christian practice still commonly used.

Father Fatem performed a ritual on the bloodstained scene of Paulus's murder. The blood, like the spirit, was perceived by inhabitants as a force that could cause insanity: whoever looked at it would go mad. During the ritual the father planted a cross in the ground, and blessed the blood stains with indigenous *tah* leaves. Then he said his prayers, reiterating, "There is no need to be afraid, because the spirit of God is stronger than any other spirit." The father also performed Christian rituals at the local hospital where the man had died to allay the villagers' fear. During Mass father Fatem preached about showing remorse and granting forgiveness. He underlined that those who wanted to resolve the crisis by taking another human life did not possess these qualities, hence Jesus' ascension to heaven had no meaning for them.

Although Paulus's family did not want Paulus to be buried before his soul was paid for, after three days father Fatem decided to bury him in the local graveyard. He was afraid that the decomposing body would cause sickness among the villagers. Only a few persons attended the burial, watching from a distance. Paulus's relatives tried to attack the father, because "he buried Paulus whereas he protected Karel".

Paying for the soul by way of fines

The village head organised several meetings in which the matter of the killing was discussed. In the end, after some weeks, it was decided that the killer would be turned over to the police. At that time the party of the murderer and the party of the victim agreed that the victim's life would not be paid for by a 'soul', but by huge amounts of *kain timur* (including the *kain pusaka* of the murderer's family), pigs, and money. Paying fines is common practice in cases of violation of local laws such as adultery or causing someone to commit suicide. This was the first time, however, that a murder case was settled by paying a fine, which heralded a new era.

In the end Paulus's family agreed to this and claimed damages worth 50 million rupiah. The process that followed was an emotional, prolonged one, in which members of both parties, standing at a distance from each other, publicly negotiated the amount of *kain timur* (including *kain pusaka*) to be paid. During the negotiations the various parts of the victim's body were enumerated and counted for a specific amount of cloth; the heart was recognised as the most precious. During these weeks the victim's mother and wife kept protesting, but they could not prevent Karel from being taken to Sorong.

Various persons informed us that the fact that the homicide was resolved in this way was no guarantee that, after some years, Karel or someone in his family would not be killed after all. As a member of the Group of God's Word underlined, there had been a portent foretelling this. He told us, "On the day Karel was brought to Sorong, it rained heavily. We call this blood rain. It means that, some day, another life will be taken."

Discussion and conclusion

In part one of this paper, in which we explored the acceptance of the Catholic mission in the Bird's Head area, it was shown that Tabamsere's village head's decision to accept the Catholic mission was prompted by his desire to have the mission's protection against the Dutch colonial government. The immediate cause was a revenge killing that was perceived as a crime by the colonial government, while it was common practice in the indigenous belief system.

In 1995, when the Catholic mission occupied a prominent place in northwest Ayfat society, a homicide in the village of Ayawasi caused confusion and controversy about the way to resolve the crisis. In the process locals divided the possible solutions into two categories: first, a solution according to *adat* and second, a solution according to the 'new order' of the church and the Indonesian government. Thus the opposition between *adat* and church prevailed.

Although in everyday life the locals explicitly distanced themselves from the Indonesian state, they generally did not emphasise differences or incompatibilities between indigenous religion (*adat*) and Christianity or the local church. On the contrary, most people combined indigenous and Christian religious notions and practices. In the crisis caused by the homicide, however, profound differences between *adat* and church were displayed when it came to the question of how to respond to the homicide.

Nevertheless, at the level of the threat posed by the victim's evil spirit, the villagers generally shared the same fear. At this level they followed the principle that *adat* and church have to 'walk together' as they sought protection by means of both indigenous and religious practices to ward off malevolent spirits.

In the end, after a prolonged, emotional period, *adat* and church were reconciled even at the level of the solution of the crisis: in line with *adat*, Paulus's soul was paid for. The manner of payment, however, was in accordance with biblical (and government) norms: another human life was not taken as a substitute for the soul, but a huge fine was paid to compensate the loss. In negotiating the amount of the fine both parties aimed at 'paying' for Paulus's body by calculating the value of each part of his body. The case illustrates Ewing's (1990) point that persons dealing with conflicting identities seek to achieve reconciliation. At first glance the fact that the offender was handed over to the police might seem to imply that the party that wanted to handle the crisis in the 'traditional' way had to make concessions. However, the 'alternative' payment for the soul meant that they could hold on to the *adat* way to some degree, as the principle of paying for the dead person and, as a result, placating his spirit was upheld – but in a way that was not counter to Christian norms. Thus *adat* ways and Christian ways were fused in a new, harmonious way of paying for the soul. The case therefore also illustrates that local people play a significant role in determining the course of religious change without, as Otto and Borsboom (1997) argue, sacrificing their own identity.

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Giryama grassroots and Kenyan state cooperation

Froukje Krijtenburg

Introduction

In many African countries a central, Western inspired judicial system has superseded local forms of justice. In this respect Kenya, which is the setting of this paper, is no exception. Still, it is not a discussion of the disappearance of a local judicial system, but rather, one could say, a tentative integration of local judicial mechanisms with the present-day judicial system of Kenya. In one part of Giryamaland (Coast Province),¹ which has the administrative name of Tezo location,² one can observe grassroots courts that comprise both a local government administrator (known as the [assistant] chief) and Giryama elders; the elders are the jury and the (assistant) chief acts as clerk of the court. This kind of cooperation is new and operates only in this location of Kilifi district. Ideally, it might be argued, the new development boosts local ownership of a judicial process that has been instigated by the Kenyan government, but is it the case? That is what this paper seeks to find out.

The theme of local judicial ownership is relevant in the Giryama context, judging from Giryama Rev. Shadrack Thoya's comment on police court practice (lowest formal Kenyan court). He explicitly refers to the sense of estrangement that the Giryama experience in the Western (Anglo-Saxon) inspired Kenyan courts when he asked me rhetorically:

Is it possible that a *Mugiryama* [Giryama person] could go through the court process and even after the verdict he remains a bitter man? The Kenyan law system is based on the British law system...

1 Giryamaland is a term generally used by the coastal peoples of Kenya to denote the area where the Giryama live. The name does not have official geographical status.

2 A location is a Kenyan administrative unit, which is divided into sub-locations. Tezo location is divided into two sub-locations: Mtondia-Majaoni and Kibarani. Tezo location stretches along the Kilifi-Malindi road, which is the main coastal road. As a result it has been more exposed to influences from Kenyan institutional actors than most other parts of Giryamaland. This may explain the emergence of a combined judicial practice.

Clearly the Giriyama understanding of what justice is about does not coincide with the state's interpretation, which is based on the British system. Having a court which conforms to the Giriyama understanding of the judicial process and is officially ratified would therefore be a cause of great satisfaction for the Giriyama.

The question considered in this paper concerns the (in)ability of Giriyama men and women to identify with the judicial practice at Tezo location. It does so by looking at and describing from a discourse perspective which elements of the Giriyama conception of justice manifest themselves in it. The discussion centres on a case study of a court session., but first I list and describe the characteristic components of Giriyama and Western (Anglo-Saxon) notions about judicial processes. They serve as points of reference for the analysis of the court case in the case study. Looking for (traces of) these components in the court case will enable us to assess whether and to what extent Giriyama and/or state judicial conceptions determine the judicial process in Tezo.

The discussion is divided into three parts. The first is introductory. It describes the status of Tezo grassroots courts and possible motives for their existence. Then I deal with the analytical framework and the analytical tools used in the case study. The second part analyses a court case involving a marital conflict. The case study is preceded by a description of an instance of a Tezo court session, which, unlike the case study, represents a model performance by all actors. Juxtaposing the ideal and less ideal situations highlights which elements are prone to manipulation/adaptation. The paper ends with some conclusions.

Setting the scene

Background

During fieldwork among the Giriyama in 2004 I stayed in Tezo location. In previous years I had observed local judicial processes in other parts of Giriyamaland, and they struck me as an alternative form of justice that was kept alive by the Giriyama in the face of the hegemonic Kenyan judicial system. The Giriyama court sessions seemed to fill a judicial gap. Civil and petty criminal cases were heard that would not be heard in a government court, such as cases of witchcraft and adultery, illegal border crossing and theft.

What I observed in Tezo location was not what I had become familiar with. As in other parts of Giriyamaland, there was a group of elders sitting under a tree presiding over an open air public court session, but unlike in other parts these sessions were held close to the office of the chief or assistant chief rather than at the compound of a homestead. Also, one of the two local administrators attended the session. The types of cases seemed to be the same as the ones I

had observed in other parts of Giryamaland – which, as it turned out later, wasn't exactly true.³ The major visible difference was that the (assistant) chief, having participated as a member of the audience during the hearing of a case, played the role of a clerk at the end of the proceedings. He rounded off the meeting by recording the outcome of the case on paper and having it signed by the complainant and the defendant.

I was told by the elders and an assistant chief that the 'Tezo variant' is part of the Kenyan judicial system. It has been formally accepted by the local government of Kilifi district, of which Tezo is a subdivision. Approval by central government is probably only a matter of time, since Kilifi district already leads the way in Kenya with respect to socio-political innovation of local administration. Indeed, developments that can be observed in Kilifi district are advocated in the Draft Bill of the Kenyan Constitution under the caption 'devolutions of power' (DBKC September 2002, ch. 10).⁴

The cooperation of formal administrative and traditional local actors in the grassroots courts of Tezo location seems to demonstrate that the government is serious about decentralising power structures. Against this background, the Tezo grassroots courts could be viewed as an idealistic attempt to hand back power to the people. The actual state of the local Kenyan judiciary, however, seems to suggest a different reason for (local) government's interest. The judicial system in Kenya suffers from a tremendous shortage of qualified personnel, penitentiary institutions and funds to improve this sorry state of affairs. As a result there is a backlog of cases that cannot be expected to be cleared in a reasonable time. Thus it seems that some self-interest is involved in the (local) Kenyan government's exploration of new forms of justice. The three Tezo grassroots courts can be considered an example of this exploration. They not only hear cases that were traditionally heard by the Giryama councils of elders (and still are in other parts of Giryamaland), but also ones that were the sole preserve of the police court in Kilifi, such as cases of rape, severe physical assault and illegal possession of land.

As it is, the Tezo grassroots courts not only relieve the police court in Kilifi of a heavy burden but are also a cheap judicial institution. The courts sit on a fixed day of the week. Their logistics are largely in the hands of actors outside the administration. In fact, a major actor in getting a case to court is the complainant. Complainants personally bring their cases before the jury, the council of elders. If it is not a serious case (e.g. theft or petty land issues), they seek the intervention of the lowest grassroots court, which convenes next to the office of the assistant chief. In cases of witchcraft they will by-pass the lower

³ Tezo grassroots courts also hear cases formerly heard by the police court.

⁴ The Draft Bill of the Constitution of the Republic of Kenya has been a bone of serious contention since 2002 right up to the present.

grassroots court and seek direct intervention by the higher grassroots court outside the chief's office. Once they have agreed with the council of elders on a date for the hearing, they inform the defendant of the date and the nature of the accusation. The defendant is expected to come to the agreed court session. However, there is no way to force the person to appear. As a result the complainant will only find out on the day of the court session whether the defendant is ready to participate in the judicial process. Often it takes two or three attempts by the complainant to get the defendant to present himself/herself to the court. The run-up to the court session involves no paper work. The court session is largely financed by the complainant and the defendant. Each pays a fee of Kesh 250 (approx. €2.50) to the members of the jury. This means that the expenses of the Kenyan government are minimal.

Apart from failure by the defendant to show up, the grassroots court's efficiency is seriously impaired by the absence of the (assistant) chief. If the government official does not show up, the court is obliged to adjourn its meeting. In the case study below the absence of the chief caused a stir, but was diplomatically resolved by the assistant chief when he offered to stand in for the chief on this one occasion. Not surprisingly, perhaps, the elders and the complainant are the most stable factors in the Tezo grassroots court setup, as both parties expect to benefit from the judicial process.

Analytical tools

Judging by the number of cases presented to the Tezo courts, we may assume that the Giriama are happy with the new judicial practice in their location. For one thing, the sessions are held closer to home, hence they involve hardly any travel and definitely require fewer hours of sitting around waiting than the police court in Kilifi. Another advantage is that the judicial arrangements are largely in the hands of the Giriama themselves. This in itself could be a sign of a kind of 'ownership' of the judicial practice. Also general familiarity with councils of elders as juries from homestead level upwards could indicate Giriama appreciation of Tezo court practice (this point will be amplified in the section on *kilongozi* (leader)). Still, can we assume a Giriama sense of identification on the basis of these outward signs? They could well be suggestive of positive identification, but they are also easy targets for manipulation by the Kenyan judicial system.

To find out the actual state of affairs we need to dig deeper. I would argue that a reliable assessment of the Giriama potential to identify with the judicial practice in Tezo location can be made on the basis of the Giriama experience of 'naturalness'. As Rev. Thoya's remark illustrates, a sense of 'unnaturalness' can trigger very negative emotions about the judicial process. 'Naturalness' here refers to a social group's generally shared experience of something as 'normal' (in the sense of 'expected', 'according to the norm'). In other words,

if the Tezo grassroots court is 'normal', the Giriyama experience the judicial process as 'natural', because it corresponds with their socio-cultural understanding of it. This understanding with its implicit norms, values and emotional ramifications is acquired largely unconsciously or subconsciously through socialisation processes, and is transferred from one generation to the next. As a result it is deeply incorporated into the minds and behaviour of a social group, directing and structuring their everyday thinking and behaviour (see Blommaert 2005; Bourdieu 1977; Varela, Thompson & Rosch 1991).

One way of gaining insight into these subconscious or unconscious socio-cultural interpretations is through discourse analysis. In his *A discourse-centered approach to culture* Greg Urban (2000:1) highlights the role of discourse in studying culture: "[C]ulture is localized in concrete, publicly accessible signs, the most important of which are actually occurring instances of discourse." Applying Urban's proposition to our context in this paper, we could argue that the actual instances of judicial discourse in Tezo grassroots courts are the appropriate domain for identifying interpretations that reflect Giriyama and Kenyan state judicial cultures.

The characteristic aspects of the two judicial systems are presented by way of *key terms*, a descriptive concept borrowed from ethno-semantics (cf. Wierzbicka 1997). A key term is a central cultural concept in a particular domain of experience, for instance 'justice'. The selection of key terms is governed by the principle of salience. In line with Wierzbicka's explanation of 'salience' (1997:16-17), in this paper a word is considered culturally salient – and therefore a key term – if it connotes general organising principles in the Kenyan and Giriyama domains of justice, lending structure and coherence to the particular domain.

Salient notions in Western judicial discourse

One generally shared Western principle of justice is that a party must be proved 'guilty'. If that cannot be proved, the party is pronounced 'innocent'. If a party is found guilty, the person receives a punishment commensurate with the seriousness of the offence. The victim of the offence may receive redress. In the Anglo-Saxon world the question of guilt is decided by a jury comprising people from all walks of life. Their decision is ideally a 'just' one. The process is guided by a judge, who hears all the witnesses and any other evidence presented by the parties to the case, assesses their credibility, and then issues a ruling on the matter. Personal qualities such as moral impeccability and objectivity are generally considered salient aspects of a person's character. Aides to enhance a fair and just trial are the public prosecutor and lawyers, defending the rights of the different parties. The process and the verdict are recorded by a court clerk and signed by the judge.

Condensing this description in key terms, we could argue that the judicial process may be schematically reflected as moving from *conflict* to *guilt and accompanying punishment*, or *lack of guilt* with the help of a *jury and judge*. Values such as objectivity, fairness and receiving just punishment or being justly acquitted are highly salient in the three areas. A written record of the case is essential for the validity of the verdict.

Salient notions in Giriyama judicial discourse

In a traditional Giriyama court the starting position is that of two parties in conflict, one a complainant and the other the defendant. At the meeting the jury – a group of usually four to seven Giriyama elders – assesses the veracity of the accusation and pronounces the verdict. The first task of a Giriyama jury is to appraise the Giriyama norms and values that were breached in the conflict, and the seriousness of the defendant's offence. The audience, complainant and defendant participate in the appraisal. Everybody is allowed to give their views on the matter. Once that is done, the members of the jury helps the two parties realise which Giriyama values or norms they have disregarded and how they can help to restore a normal relationship between them. Once the complainant and the defendant agree on the importance of observing the norms/values they have breached, they can start reintegrating with society. Finally, the jury assesses if retribution must be made by the defendant, and if so, of what kind. The end of the judicial process is ritually affirmed by a handshake between the complainant and the defendant.

The salience of the reintegration aspect in the Giriyama judicial process must not be underestimated. The following description by a 40-year-old Giriyama man vividly illustrates how even in a simple case of two people fighting the concept guides the mediation process.

...nidzakwenda thekeza at'u manaheha, mimi rangu ni ningire kahikahi. Kuthanya kwangu, namuhala yuyu, adziyekosana na yuyu...mimi nina amani nao osini aa. Nangira kahikahi na nimuthanye...yuyu nimwike bala ii, na yuyu nimwike vivi bala ii. (...) Hasa wale nitawalisha amani. Wote nitawauliza. Huyu, nimjue wamekosana kivipi. Vilianzaje mpaka wakakosana. Mimi nikipata hiyo, nasuhulisha hiyo.

If I find people fighting, it is my responsibility to intervene. [What] my separating [is about], I take the one who started the dispute I make peace with all [i.e. both] of them. I enter between them and separate them.... The one I put on this side and the other I put like this, on the other side. (...) I especially feed them peace.⁵ I ask them all [i.e. both] (...) how they came to have a dispute. How did it begin until they were having a dispute? Once I find this out, I solve it.

⁵ The words are from Kiswahili, but the idiom does not exist in Kiswahili. They are a direct translation of Kigiryama *kurisa dheri* (feed peace, i.e. teach peaceful living).

The man is describing an imaginary situation in which he acts as a mediator. He describes his task as one of separating the parties and ‘feeding them peace’ by tracing the course of events that led to the present fight. Not mentioned by this Giriyama person – but part and parcel of the concept of feeding peace – is telling the parties which Giriyama norms and values were breached, and persuading them to restore these in their relationship.

In the Giriyama language there is a word which conveys the notion of having the same norms and values in interaction; it is *kuelewana* (understand each other). Applying the term to the Giriyama judicial process, we could argue that it aims at restoring *kuelewana* between the conflicting parties.

Assuming that *kuelewana* is the driving force behind the actions in a traditional court, we infer that the situation which inspires it is its opposite. In Giriyama it is called *k’ondo*, which for want of a better equivalent is translated as ‘conflict’. Another reason for defining the initial situation as one of *k’ondo* is that the Giriyama phrase referring to a traditional court case is *kuthanya k’ondo* (to stop – lit. ‘separate’ – conflict). Thus a grasp of the two concepts is indispensable to understand the Giriyama conception of justice.

The process from *k’ondo* to *kuelewana* cannot happen without the presence of an authority that oversees the process. The authority is the jury, the council of elders. In Giriyama they are called *athumia* (pl.) (older people), which not only refers to a specific age group, but in the singular, *muthumia*, is also a polite form of address for a leader (*kilongozi*). Indeed, the elders are leaders in the process of reintegrating the conflicting parties into society. Because of the *kilongozi*’s central role in this process we shall explain the Giriyama notion of leadership as well. While the three notions are presented as distinct concepts, in reality they are closely related.⁶ This should be clear from the following descriptions.

Kuelewana (understand each other)

As noted already, *kuelewana* refers to a state of normality, a situation in which people interact in a shared moral universe. It refers to both peace and peace-making. Implicit in the Giriyama understanding of peace and peace-making is that both are considered to be essentially an interaction between two or more people. The interaction is based on shared norms and values and is characterised by reciprocal morally good behaviour.

Interestingly, if one looks at the grammatical features of *kuelewana* the same picture emerges. *Kuelewana* is a verb, the suffix *-na* implying reciprocity. Its meaning, ‘understanding each other’, refers to the shared set of norms and values which facilitates good social interaction, and by extension peaceful

⁶ A detailed description of the three concepts and how they were selected as key terms can be found in Krijtenburg (2007).

coexistence. When people interact in this way, I was told by various informants, they feel happy and contented. One value that the Giriyama consider fundamental to good interaction is mutual respect. This value manifests itself in ‘speaking good words to each other’, meaning discussing matters – however touchy – openly and frankly, with respect for and interest in one another.

There is also a more applied form of *kuelewana* among the Giriyama, referring to a decision-making process, which operates in the same conceptual framework. In fact, this type of decision making is generally practised among the Giriyama, from the smallest and lowest social unit, the family, to the largest, the community, and the highest, the council of elders of Giryamaland. Characteristically it is an inclusive process. All the people present at a meeting are expected to participate in the discussion and to express their views on the matter. As a result the discussion lasts for quite some time. Once all the participants have voiced their ideas, the discussion proceeds to a phase of transformation and integration of the ideas expressed. In other words, the decision-making process moves from a variety of individual opinions to a single, shared view of the matter under discussion. The process is moderated by the discussion leaders.

As noted in the previous section, decision-making behaviour can only be enacted if the larger conceptual framework of *kuelewana* is in place. As a matter of fact, the basic *kuelewana* moral principle of reciprocal respect confers naturalness on the decision-making process. The interaction during the *kuelewana* decision-making process is guided by norms inspired by this reciprocity. They manifest themselves when people are open (in the sense of being honest as well as showing an open mind) to one another, are attentive to each other’s words, and show interest in the other person. Not surprisingly, success in reaching a generally shared decision gives rise to an experience similar to that of peaceful coexistence: a feeling of general contentment.

K’ondo (conflict)

Like the English word ‘conflict’, *k’ondo* can refer to either verbal or physical animosity. It can be on a small scale involving only two individuals or it can refer to a state of war. In these respects the two words are very similar. In one essential aspect they differ.

When asked to give examples of situations which are denied by *k’ondo*, Giriyama informants generally react by saying that if there is *k’ondo*, there is no *kuelewana*. Thus there is a clear opposition between the two concepts. In fact, we could phrase it even more starkly: *k’ondo* – whether physical or a verbal, whether it involves two or more individuals – is a direct threat to *kuelewana* and everything that goes with it. In this sense it is different from the Giriyama concept of *fujjo*, which is a quarrel that may involve several people, but does

not directly threaten *kuelewana*. *K'ondo* does, because it is essentially a direct attack on the shared norms and values of Giriyama society. As a result it threatens the survival of the community that shares the norms and values denied by *k'ondo*. In the case of *k'ondo* the question of guilt is not salient. Much more important is the reintegration of the two parties into the Giriyama moral framework of *kuelewana*. Instances of actions which are destructive of community welfare are marital conflict (see case study), witchcraft and dispossession of property.

Kilongozi (leader)

As noted already, Giriyama elders are considered leaders. In the Giriyama context leaders are the men and women that head social units, from the smallest family unit to the largest, that of Giryamaland. Giriyama leaders at every level have the same qualities. Essentially they are expected to have the well-being of the community at heart.

To be able to effect or maintain communal well-being the leader must have two qualities, the Giriyama maintain. They must bring about *kuelewana* among the people, and they should have mutual understanding with the people based on the norms and values that underpin *kuelewana*. In other words, the leader is an authority who excels in the ability to effect or maintain peaceful coexistence. At the same time leaders can operate at the same level as ordinary people, having a relationship with them that involves doing things together with them and/or thinking along the same lines as ordinary people. To be convincing as an authority leaders should demonstrate qualities like wisdom, vision and trustworthiness; to be a people's person leaders should lend a sympathetic ear to members of their community, taking seriously matters that are of concern to them, and addressing these matters with undivided attention.

From this description one concludes that Giriyama leaders are close to the people, both physically and mentally. As they are responsible for the communal welfare, one of their tasks is to resolve conflicts. At the lowest level the heads of households together with the homestead head resolve homestead conflicts in council. One level up from the homestead is the village. At this level the heads of homesteads constitute the elders of a village comprising five to ten homesteads. Villages form groups, which are headed by a council of elders selected from the village councils. From the ranks of village elders the lowest formal government representative, the assistant chief, chooses elders for the council of elders of the sub-location. They can be of either gender.⁷ In Tezo location this is also the level of the lowest grassroots court in the Kenyan

⁷ In 2004 I was pleasantly surprised to find that in both the remote and less developed areas of Giryamaland and the areas closer to the Westernised coast women have been chosen as *athumia a vidzidzi* (village elders). This was a notable change from the situation I observed in 2000.

judicial system. At the next level, that of the location, the chief selects a council of elders from among the sub-location councils, possibly including some other people whom he considers to be of good social standing. This council is the highest grassroots judicial institution.

From the Giriyama leadership structure one concludes that the elders on the jury of a grassroots court are intimately acquainted with the problems and conflicts that are part of the Giriyama's daily lives. This makes them not only credible, but also lends them judicial authority in the eyes of the Giriyama.

Tezo judicial practice: an analysis

I could give many examples of constructive cooperation between elders and assistant chief, but for the purpose of this book on indigenous knowledge and sustainability it seems more interesting to study a case where the Tezo juridical practice did not work out well. The hearing of the case is studied with a view to references, direct or indirect, to the Giriyama and Western central judicial concepts outlined above. Since the primary interest is in identifying the potential for the Giriyama to experience the court case as 'natural', the discussion primarily focuses on references to *kuelewana*, *k'ondo* and *kilongozi*. Attention is also paid to the Western concepts of guilt and punishment and their salience in the case study.

Description of the events

This is a case of *kuuyirana* (lit. return to each other), a term used specifically in the context of marital conflict. The term indicates what the judicial process ideally aims at, namely reunification of husband and wife.

The scene is the grounds of the offices of the chief of Tezo location and one of his assistant chiefs. A big tree provides shade for the council of elders and the audience. Three of the six elders sit behind a narrow, table-like structure facing the audience, which fluctuates between fifteen and twenty people. The other elders are seated in the audience. The parties are an aged husband and his young wife. The husband is the complainant. Seated on a tree stump opposite the three council elders, he tells them that his wife committed adultery with a younger man two years ago. When he found out he sent his wife to this person to tell him that he could marry her, and that he owed him, the ex-husband, the bride-price that had been paid to the wife's father at the time of their wedding. The man replied that he did not want to marry the woman. So she came back to live with her husband. Shortly afterwards, however, she moved out of her own accord. This time she went to stay at her parents' home, where she has been ever since. All this time the husband has been providing food and clothing for her and the children. Now he wants them to return to him, but his wife refuses

to come back. That is the reason, he explains, why he seeks the intervention of the council of elders. The audience is silent during the complainant's speech. The only sounds are one of the presiding elders' exclamations of disbelief, surprise and agreement.

Then the wife is invited to take the seat in front of the elders. The elders ask her why she refuses to go back. She accuses her husband of having an excessive sexual appetite and of using *bhang* (cannabis). She also tells the elders that her husband and some of his younger friends beat her up severely when they found out that she had committed adultery. During her speech the same elder as before makes sounds suggesting agreement and puzzlement, but this time his reactions are not so loud.

The old husband admits that he uses *bhang* sometimes to forget the hardships of life. He adds in his defence that he has always taken good care of his wife and her three children, who were born from a previous alliance. He also says that his friends incited him to beat up his wife when they found out about her adulterous behaviour.

Then the wife's father, who came with his daughter as a stakeholder in the case (having received the bride-price from the husband), is heard. He remains seated in his place. He says he was informed of the adultery by his son-in-law. After his daughter had been turned down by her lover, he took her into his home. When asked by the elders if he has any problems with the son-in-law, the father says he has not. He agrees with his son-in-law that his daughter should go back to him, but says that he cannot force his daughter to go.

As a first reaction the elders say they get the impression that the wife is holding back some information. They tell her to realise the consequences of her behaviour for her father (who will have to pay back the bride-price). The woman looks at them defiantly. Then a female elder asks her whose baby she is carrying on her back. She answers it is her husband's. The husband denies it, saying they have not shared a bed since she left him two years ago.

After this the meeting is unanimous about the wife's bad behaviour. Everybody seems to agree with the elders' verdict, which is that she should return to her husband. The wife, however, does not agree. Her reaction causes a stir among the women in the audience. They start discussing the possibility of a ten-minute women's-only consultation with the wife. The elders and the assistant chief agree with the suggestion, and four women, including one female elder, move to one side, counselling the woman out of earshot from the rest of the audience. The consultation lasts about half an hour. When they come back, the women report that they tried to advise the woman on good spousal behaviour, but she turned a deaf ear to their words.

All the elders regret the state of affairs. However, they stick to their decision that the reunification of husband and wife is the best way out of the impasse. There is some discussion about how to implement the decision. In the end the

assistant chief indicates the course of action: the wife can stay with her father another ten days to prepare for the return to her husband. After these ten days the husband will come and collect her and the children.

After the assistant chief's words the husband is asked to pay *kadzama* (allowance).⁸ Since he appears to have come without money, he is asked to pay in three days' time. The assistant chief then asks the husband and wife to shake hands in confirmation of their commitment to these terms. The wife seems unwilling to shake her husband's hand at first, but then reluctantly gives him a feeble handshake. The agreement is not recorded in a written document by the assistant chief.

As a parting shot the assistant chief adds a piece of advice to the wife on good spousal behaviour. After that the meeting breaks up. The elders are not satisfied with the outcome. They fear the two will break up again, because the wife is not following Giriyama ways. "*Gigiryama kicho?* (Is this the Giriyama way?)" one elder asks rhetorically.

A discourse analytical approach

Like any case of *kuthanya k'ondo* (ending a conflict), the Giriyama consider this *kuuyirana* (reunification of husband and wife) an intermediary state between *k'ondo*, from which it has sprung, and *kuelewana*, the condition it aims at.

A meeting of (a council of) elders is generally considered a guarantee of the solution of problems and conflict, as the Giriyama saying '*Hariho athumia k'ahagwa kimba*' (Where there are elders, a carcass cannot fall) illustrates. This meeting, like any other Giriyama court case at this level, starts from a situation of *k'ondo*. The disagreement between husband and wife is a serious threat to communal welfare.

Firstly, the situation is detrimental to the welfare of the wife's father. After all, he is a stakeholder in the marital conflict. If the wife sticks to her decision not to return to her husband, he will have to pay back the bride-price that he received from the husband. In general repayment of the bride-price distresses the parents and their family, as the money has usually been invested or used for daily subsistence.

In addition the wider community is affected by the wife's behaviour. Although the community is not threatened by material loss, the wife's blatant rejection of Giriyama norms and values relating to spousal relationships is a direct threat to their communal sense of sharing a set of norms and values. This is what the elders and the audience realise during the court session. Several

⁸ *Kadzama* is a calabash filled with palm wine. In former days elders' allowance was measured in numbers of *kadzama*. Since money has replaced palm wine the word *themo* (fee) is more generally used.

details of the court case illustrate the commitment of the elders and audience to reconcile husband and wife within the framework of *kuelewana*. One example is the women's-only consultation, which specifically seeks to harmonise the wife with the Giriyama moral framework for marriage. Another clear example is the outcome of the court case which, albeit voiced by the assistant chief, shows that the court does not intend to punish the wife either for her previous misconduct or for her present bad behaviour. Indeed, the verdict is guided by the ultimate goal of restoring *kuelewana* between husband and wife, and thus among members of the wider community.

As indicated in the section on the Giriyama understanding of *kilongozi*, leaders are distinguished by an ability to think on the same lines as the common people, a characteristic feature also of *kuelewana* as a decision-making process. In the present case one of the council elders expresses this ability in his repeated wordless comments on the speeches of both husband and wife. His reactions to specific utterances basically signal agreement with the relevant speaker's point. In this way the elder highlights statements that either express or negate Giriyama norms. For instance, he indicates emphatic disbelief when the husband first tells the meeting that he has provided for his wife and children (from a different father) ever since she left, and then goes on to say that his wife refuses to come back to him. Still, not all of the elder's comments convey 'thinking along the same lines as the speaker'. There is a subtle difference between his reactions to the husband and the wife. By responding more softly to her speech he already signals certain reservations, suggesting that he is not thinking along the same lines.

Another nonverbal element expressive of *kuelewana* as a decision-making process is the atmosphere of concentration among the elders and the audience. During the various speeches not a single word was uttered by the audience; people were listening attentively.

Lastly there is the women's-only consultation. It conforms to a wife's consultation with the mother's sisters and the grandmother in cases of marital conflict that are solved at homestead level. Its proven value in that context probably prompts the elders to agree to the women's suggestion. It also illustrates the lengths to which a council of elders is prepared to go to achieve *kuelewana*, as well as the lack of salience of time-management in Giriyama decision making. Especially in complex processes such as peace-making (e.g. between husband and wife) the elders are careful to include the people present and integrate all elements that manifest themselves during the meeting.⁹ That is why the women's spontaneous suggestion is supported. The principle underlying the interactions is that peace-making should be conducted carefully

9 A (physical) instance of organisational flexibility is the way the elders are seated. Some are presiding over the meeting, while others are seated among the audience.

and pragmatically, at all times reflecting the norms and values inherent in *kuelewana*.¹⁰ To the Giriyama the quality that a gradual process lends to the final decision contributes to the durability of its outcome.

The elders realise that they have failed to harmonise the wife with the norms and values involved in *kuelewana*, both as a principle of living in general and more particularly as a principle of marriage. This is poignantly voiced by one of the elders, who exclaims at the end of the meeting: “Is this the Giriyama way?”, and by the assistant chief when lecturing the wife on good spousal behaviour. The elders’ lack of confidence in the reunification of husband and wife is underlined by the wife’s feeble handshake and the failure to compile a written record of the case.

One specific value that the elders recognise as being denied by the wife during the court case, and one which is essential for peace-making peace, is ‘openness’ in the two senses of being honest and being open to other people’s views. Lack of openness, of which the elders and the audience suspect the wife, is considered detrimental to a successful conclusion of the process. As was pointed out in the discussion of *kuelewana* as a decision-making process, openness expresses the spirit of *kuelewana*. In withholding information and lying about the identity of the baby’s father the wife’s behaviour contradicts this spirit. Her unwillingness to take the women’s advice in the women’s-only consultation is another illustration of her lack of openness.

As for the procedural character of this particular case, we observe that it proceeds according to Giriyama rules until the assistant chief intervenes. Instead of leaving the case to be finalised by the elders, the assistant chief takes the lead and determines the outcome. He announces the judgment, lectures the wife, and neglects his role as a clerk. As a result there is no written record of the outcome, nor a signed agreement by the complainant and the defendant.

Probably the assistant chief’s judgment is what the elders had in mind. Still, ‘being right’ is not a salient element in the present judicial context. What counts is whether the case is handled according to the norms for Giriyama decision making. Taking over the role of the elders, the assistant chief uses his authority as a government administrator to force a conclusion. Thus he ignores a salient element of the Giriyama understanding of decision making, which is that everybody present should be involved and that the final decision is the natural outcome of this process. In the final analysis the assistant chief excludes the elders and the audience, the complainant and the defendant from the decision-making process. As a result – and by definition in the Giriyama context – the judgment is considered to lack durability.

10 The Giriyama ‘organic’ understanding of how to end a conflict is the main reason why I opt for the term ‘peace-making’ rather than ‘conflict resolution’, thus highlighting that restoration of peace among conflicting parties is not only social but also psychological.

Discussion

From the discussion we conclude that the court session is determined by the norms and values that are expressive of *kuelewana* as a conceptual framework of peaceful coexistence, as well as of *kuelewana* in the applied form of decision making. The court meeting evaluates the marital situation as *k'ondo*. All the people present realise that this is a volatile situation, endangering communal welfare. Therefore they try to transform it into one that can give rise to *kuelewana* between husband and wife and, by extension, among community members. They ask the complainant and defendant questions, discuss possible solutions and voice their personal impressions.

Presiding over the court, the elders give ample opportunity for the complainant, the defendant, the audience and the assistant chief to express their ideas and suggestions. Clearly both the elders and the audience enact *kuelewana* in the discussions. Their aim is to reach consensus among all the actors. However, after the women's-only consultation they realise that this is not going to happen, for the defendant persists in expressing herself in a way that defies Giriyama norms of spousal behaviour. Thus the wife impedes a transformation from *k'ondo* to *kuelewana* between husband and wife.

This is not a situation which a council of elders can resolve at this point. If the assistant chief had not stepped in, they would probably have adjourned the case to a later date. This would have given them an opportunity for informal mediation and would have given the couple time to rethink matters. The assistant chief interprets the discussion as a deadlock and takes recourse to his other role, that of a government administrator with formal authority over the sub-location. From the Giriyama perspective he demonstrates bad leadership, because he abandons the communal decision-making process.

The assistant chief's authoritarian behaviour is a blow in the face of the Giriyama present at the meeting. They were discussing the case along the lines of *kuelewana* and looking for ways to establish a course of action that would promote *kuelewana* between husband and wife. The people present identified with the process, judging by the involvement of the women and the expressions of 'thinking along the same lines' by one of the council elders. This makes the behaviour of the assistant chief all the more inappropriate. The remark made by one of the elders about the wife's behaviour during the court case, "Is this the Giriyama way?", would also apply to the assistant chief's behaviour.

What we have said implies that the Giriyama actually identify with Tezo judicial practice, and that they feel badly shaken when their Giriyama decision-making framework falls apart. Considering the conceptual elements at play in this instance of Tezo judicial practice, we conclude that the key terms of Giriyama justice (*kuelewana*, *k'ondo* and *kilongozi*) are essential structuring elements of the present court case. It was demonstrated that the Western concepts of guilt and punishment are not salient. Ironically, the one salient

Western element incorporated into the Tezo judicial framework – a written record of the outcome of the case – is completely overlooked.

Conclusion

These findings demonstrate that the Tezo grassroots court is a judicial model in which the indigenous and the foreign system potentially complement each other for the benefit of all parties involved, but that it is still in its infancy. The judicial discourse of the Giriama is allowed by the hegemonic judicial discourse of the Kenyan state, which sets the rules and marks the boundaries of authority. Still, the Kenyan administration takes care not to interfere with Giriama participation in the Tezo grassroots courts to the extent that the Giriama withhold their cooperation. After all, the Kenyan government benefits from this alternative type of court as a ‘cheap’ and relatively effective way of administering justice. As for the Giriama, the councils of elders gain strength and trust with each case they manage ‘naturally’. A side effect is no doubt a growing awareness of deviations in the judicial process.

Hence the ‘Tezo variant’ may be considered a positive development for the Giriama people. In terms of socio-cultural identification it is a great improvement on the Kenyan police courts, which previously heard many of the cases now presented to the Tezo grassroots courts. Following Western notions of justice, the police court focuses on guilt and punishment, thus imposing Western salient judicial concepts which lack salience among the Giriama. The Tezo court, on the other hand, applies Giriama central concepts of justice, aiming at re-harmonising the complainant and the defendant with the larger community.

Being officially institutionalised in the Kenyan judicial system, the Tezo grassroots courts have formal status. Moreover, the formal administrative characteristics of the Tezo judicial framework mean that the court’s status seems safeguarded for the future. If the roles of the Kenyan representative and the Giriama council of elders are retained as distinct but valid entities, the Tezo courts could prove to be a valuable innovation for both the Giriama people and the Kenyan judicial system.

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***Gacaca* and post-genocide reconstruction in Rwanda**

Anne N. Kubai

Introduction

The 1994 genocide was a milestone in the history of Rwanda. In the aftermath of the horrific massacres the country's economy, infrastructure, administrative and judicial systems, and social fabric crumbled. Hundreds of thousands of people fled to refugee camps in neighbouring countries,¹ while hundreds of thousands of others were detained in detention facilities across the country. During the genocide it was not only directly targeted individuals that suffered: the violence impacted on broader identity systems and social relations. It was genocide of unimaginable horror that is said to have set new standards of human brutality.

After the genocide the population was roughly divided into three broad categories: the returnees, that is, a large proportion of refugees that returned from exile; those who never left the country during the genocide; and finally, the *genocidaires*, that is, those accused of perpetrating the genocide – nearly 200 000 of them held in prisons in August/September 1994, who were yet to be brought to justice. The trauma resulting from the detention of such a large number of people lingered on and no doubt had repercussions for the entire society. In addition the situation has for quite some time been characterised by demographic shifts affecting significant proportions of the population. Resettlement² and demobilisation of former combatants, re-integration and rehabilitation needs in many parts of the country; and a huge loss of human resources continue to complicate the recovery from the polarising effects of years of

1 The fear of reprisals and other effects of genocide forced more than 2 million refugees to leave Rwanda and seek asylum in neighbouring countries: Congo, Tanzania, Uganda, Burundi. See Halvorsen (1999).

2 Some 3.2 million Rwandan refugees have returned home and UNHCR is actively promoting the repatriation of thousands of Rwandans who are still living as refugees in fourteen African countries. More recently, in 2007, thousands of refugees in Tanzania were repatriated amidst allegations of forced repatriation; while in June 2009 several thousand refugees still in Uganda were reported to be opposed to repatriation. During the current Congo crisis scores of those who have been living in Congo are returning to Rwanda. Many in the latter category are demobilised and re-integrated.

deeply entrenched distrust between communities culminating in the 1994 genocide.

In post-genocide Rwanda, therefore, communities must be mobilised and reshaped with a view to social, political and economic reconstruction. Peace without development is not durable; hence development initiatives have to be sensitive to the post-genocide situation, in which justice, trauma healing and reconciliation are crucial for the reconstruction of the country and its society. Thus the greatest immediate problem facing Rwanda is how to address these apparently enormous challenges. In search of viable solutions to these problems Rwanda has turned to an indigenous cultural resource, *Gacaca*, which embodies the principles of justice, truth-telling, forgiveness and reconciliation. For our purpose Ellis and Ter Haar offer a starting point for future debates on development in Africa in their brilliant article entitled "Religion and development in Africa". They observe:

First, that neither economic growth nor even state-building should be thought of as goals in themselves, although both are crucial aspects of a better future for Africans. Any development enterprise must begin by considering how people's full range of resources, including their spiritual or religious resources, can be used for their general well-being. Religious resources do not consist only of networks of people who relate to each other through religious practice or adherence. Religious resources can be considered under four headings: ideas; practices; organizations or institutions; and experiences. It is quite feasible to think of development in the future in terms of spiritual empowerment, in a similar sense as has been considered in regard, for example, to women's empowerment (Ellis & Ter Haar 2004:2).

The Commission for Africa (2005:130), too, picks up the debate on the role of cultural resources in the development of the continent and urges that culture should

become an inherent component of all development strategies – not just in terms of cultural products, but also in defining the terms of the development debate and the actions that follow. Culture becomes a way of working as well as an end in itself... [A] culturally determined sense of shared identity and responsibility is needed to underpin effective local, national and international governance...

This is a notion that seems to be gaining currency in post-conflict societies: South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission was the first to break the ground, but *Gacaca*'s novelty lies in its cultural roots and its transformation so as to facilitate social, political and economic reconstruction of the nation after the horrific genocide. The developmental context in Rwanda is inextricably linked up with, if not dependent on, the processes of justice, healing and reconciliation.

It is against this backdrop that this chapter examines the role of *Gacaca* in the justice, reconciliation and peace process, which is considered crucial not only for the social transformation of Rwandan society but also for its economic development. The chapter surveys the question of tapping into the indigenous spiritual resource of *Gacaca* to deal with the inherently contradictory demands of justice and reconciliation in post genocide Rwanda. It takes as its starting point the unequivocal belief of the Rwandan people in the value of this particular traditional justice mechanism for bringing together the different groups, victims and perpetrators in reconciliation and justice. It gives a brief definition of what *Gacaca* is, how it has been innovatively applied to the rather unusual situation, in which victims and perpetrators live side by side with no choice but to find ways and means of reconciling themselves to their individual circumstances and to each other. We argue that though one finds traditional courts in countries like Ghana and Botswana, Rwanda's *Gacaca*, by combining the restorative and retributive types of justice, differs in important respects and its novelty and ingenuity are so far unparalleled on the continent.

Challenges of the survivor/victim-perpetrator dyad

Among the major challenges still facing Rwanda a decade and a half after the genocide are justice and reconciliation; and the reconstruction of a broken social fabric. Justice is important for survivors and there is need to show that a new moral order, in which there is no fear and mistrust, has been created. Perpetrators are also wounded and cannot easily admit to guilt and shame for their actions. Thus healing and reconciliation are difficult:

- ▶ How do we acknowledge the pain and suffering of survivors and at the same time dispose of the Tutsi identity of the victims and the Hutu identity of the perpetrators?
- ▶ How do we identify the perpetrators, who are also members of the community living side by side with their victims, punish them and at the same time bring about reconciliation?

The process involves large sections of the population and the crucial step, on which the entire project hinges, consists in compiling a list of victims and a list of genocide suspects and sorting the latter into categories based on the gravity of their crimes. For instance, at the end of October 2006 the National Service for *Gacaca* Courts reported that there were 766 489 identified suspects, 72 539 of them in the first category, 397 103 in the second and 296 847 in the third.³

3 For details, see Staff Reporter 2007.

From an observer's point of view the dilemma is that identifying the survivors, mainly Tutsi, and large numbers of mainly Hutu perpetrators entails a risk of driving the wedge between these two groups even deeper. To cite an example, a member of the parliamentary standing committee on security was reported to have said: "If only something can rid us of survivors we can be peaceful; they are merely a handful, the continued existence of survivors is a stumbling block to the attainment of peace."⁴ This statement provoked a country-wide reaction; it was considered to be a manifestation of 'genocidal ideology' that was found by the senate select committee to be pervasive in Rwanda.⁵

Still, reconciliation must be achieved and justice seen to be done. Yet the very nature of reconciliation poses a further problem. Reconciliation is inherently complicated by its many layers: national, inter-community and intra-community levels, plus individuals, who have to reconcile themselves to a life indelibly marked by genocide. Certainly such multifaceted reconciliation requires a multi-dimensional approach in order to address all these layers simultaneously, which is no mean task by any standard. Aid workers and diplomats note the desirability of 'justice' and 'development' in post-conflict societies, but the dispassionate technical jargon used by outsiders can obscure the complexity of the Rwandan case. It was in response to these challenges of justice and reconciliation in post-genocide Rwandan society that the government advocated a modified *Gacaca* traditional justice system. South Africa is said to have given a new meaning to truth commissions, but Rwandans are making a previously unknown experiment: "*Gacaca* is unprecedented; it is the only way Rwanda found that would quicken genocide trials, and it remains the only appropriate system for the case of Rwanda."⁶

What is Gacaca?

Traditionally Gacaca fulfilled four important functions: it brought together the offender and the offended; it addressed the conflict; it sought the truth and it reconciled the parties (Rutikanga 2003). The elders and community leaders in the traditional social setting would sit on the soft green grass that is found across Rwanda to hear, discuss and resolve conflicts between groups or individuals. They would listen to both parties and arbitrate; depending on the nature of the conflict they would adjudicate in a way that would ensure not

4 *The New Times*, 5 November 2005, quoting a member of parliament who was accused of a scathing attack on genocide survivors during an official tour of Butare.

5 See Senate Commission Report, Kigali, 2006.

6 See President Kagame, Speech 15 August 2006.

only that justice was done, but also that the conflicting parties were reconciled. This was done as fairly and as democratically as possible, following fixed rules and procedures that were known to the community, which was a safeguard against miscarriages of justice as a result of partiality or incompetence on the part of the adjudicators.

In a bold move the government enacted the Genocide Statute in 1996 that put in place the *Gacaca* process in order to expedite the trials of perpetrators of genocide. The re-organised and formalised *Gacaca* aims to fulfil similar functions as it did in the traditional society, but in a totally different situation after the horrific genocide:

- ▶ To reveal the truth about genocide
- ▶ To expedite trials of genocide suspects
- ▶ To eradicate the culture of impunity among Rwandans
- ▶ To foster reconciliation
- ▶ To do justice to victims and perpetrators

About 11 000 Gacaca courts were established throughout the country and about 260 000 court officials were identified and recruited. They are not legal experts, neither are they salaried by government – all they get is free education for their children as an incentive to community service. Traditionally these were people of integrity known as *inyangamugayo*, ‘those who hate evil’. They were trustworthy members of the community elected on the basis of moral integrity rather than political or economic status. Thus the new Gacaca system combines the traditional participatory model of justice and modern legal precepts in order to deliver justice to victims and the huge number of accused persons who have been identified as perpetrators of genocide. These courts are also envisioned as a key restorative mechanism, a means to contribute to the process of national reconciliation in post-genocide Rwanda.

The 1996 Organic Law on the organisation of the prosecution of offences constituting crimes against humanity (Genocide Act) differentiated between four categories of offenders liable to prosecution:

- ▶ Category one for leaders of genocide, notorious killers, rapists and those who perpetrated acts of sexual torture.
- ▶ Category two for murderers and accomplices.
- ▶ Category three for those who committed murder without intent to kill.
- ▶ Category four for those who damaged property.

In terms of the *Gacaca* Act of 2000 offenders in categories two, three and four who confessed to crimes of genocide were eligible for commuted sentences following the provisions of the act. Pursuant to Organic Law 16/2004 of

19/6/2004,⁷ the system was restructured with the result that district and provincial *Gacaca* courts were eliminated; category four was done away with; and the other categories were expanded. Even more important was the amendment that empowered *Gacaca* courts to try category one crimes and hand down prison sentences of up to 30 years. Article 39 of this act empowered *Gacaca* with a wide range of “competences similar to those of ordinary courts, to try the accused persons, on the basis of testimonies against or for, and other evidences that may be provided”.⁸

This restructuring also made provision for rape victims, estimated to number over 250 000 (Human Rights Watch 2004:6), to get redress. The head of the *Gacaca* courts was quoted as saying:

In spite of many challenges, notably in terms of insuring the security of both defendants and survivors, the year 2006 has marked a decisive step for the semi-traditional Rwandan *Gacaca* courts in charge of judging the majority of the suspects of the 1994 Genocide (Staff Reporter 2007).

In January 2007 the chairperson of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Political and Good Governance “noted that the amendment for [sic] 2006 Organic Law, which establishes organisational structure, competence and functioning of *Gacaca* courts was necessary to match their tasks with justice that unites and reconciles” (Staff reporter 2007). It was further affirmed that “[j]ustice that reconciles is not all about imposing heavy penalties to [sic] those proven guilty, but disciplining them in an educative manner ... the modified Organic Law on *Gacaca* courts will balance political and justice needs” (Staff reporter 2007). The courts were restructured at each level: where the judges were fourteen they were reduced to nine, and where they were nine they were reduced to five. Thus *Gacaca*, though based on the principles of the traditional justice system, was adjusted to deal with crimes of genocide, which are not only different from the intra-community and interpersonal conflicts of traditional society, but also on a larger scale and more complex in nature.

Gacaca as both a restorative and a retributive mechanism

Most of the literature on what is seen as an emerging form of politicised religion in the public sphere in Africa focuses on Islam and Christianity. However, there is growing recognition of the numerous ways in which indigenous ideas and institutions relate to and influence politics and open up possibilities of reformulating the agenda of social, political and economic reconstruc-

7 For a description of the structure and functions of the *Gacaca* courts, see Organic Law No. 16/2004 adopted by parliament on 19 June 2004, which spells out the organisation, competence and functioning of *Gacaca* courts.

8 See Article 39, Organic Law No. 16/2004.

tion in post-conflict African societies. Ellis and Ter Haar (2003) suggest that there is a need to direct more attention to understanding religious thought in Africa and the way it continues to influence African political structures. Following this suggestion, it is instructive to interrogate the very notion of tapping into indigenous cultural resources such as *Gacaca* to facilitate the process of social and political reconstruction in Rwanda – in other words, to bring about the much talked about development and democratisation. African indigenous spirituality continues to infuse the African political arena with its own dynamics.

Here we note the significance of kinship and ritual as part of the moral and ethical foundation of society. Gordon and Gordon (2001:4) observe, “African cultures remain vibrant and are playing a leading role in the efforts to cope with and assess the forces affecting African societies.” The centrality of religion in the African public space cannot be overemphasised. It is aptly summed up by Kalu (2003:1-2):

In Africa, the political realm is sacralized or enchanted and politics is a religious matter precisely because it is a moral performance...The worldview in African communities is charismatic as gods operate in the sky, land, water and ancestral world. They destroy the boundaries between the profane and sacred; sacralize reality and gives religious value to everyday activities. Religion, culture and ethnicity become the organizing frameworks of human lives and the modern public space is constantly villigized through the use of cultic elements acquired from the primal sector of the culture.

We can argue that efforts to enhance the viability and visibility of indigenous institutions in Rwanda represent a new form of reconstruction ideology. Is it a paradigm shift or a pragmatic, selective reinvention of cultural institutions to make them instruments of democratisation without re-traditionalising or ‘religion-ising’ the modern public sphere? *Gacaca* and the cultural elements associated with it represent an unequivocal intersection of indigenous spirituality and political development in post-genocide Rwanda. It could also fit well into the African scenario that Ellis (2003:470) describes:

It may be that, as the colonial period fades into history, a growing number of countries once colonized by Europe, or obliged to adopt institutions of governance in imitation of European models, will adopt institutions and codes of behaviour that have roots in their own precolonial history.

The logic of this argument is straightforward enough, and the underlying sentiments are certainly understandable and commendable. But what is striking is the almost complete lack of interest among its proponents in its theoretical and philosophical basis; as well as the casualness with which culture-specific

African approaches are assumed to provide an entirely different, potential foundation for sustainable development of the large continent.

The ancient *Gacaca*, which was meant to resolve traditional community and individual conflicts, would clearly be too simplistic to deal with the complexity and magnitude of genocide and crimes against humanity. Hence, with an evidently strong political will to bring about justice and reconciliation, government turned to Rwandan culture for inspiration and, without departing from the spirit of the traditional *Gacaca*, it reinvented and formalised⁹ the *Gacaca* justice system.

It should be remembered that one of the root causes of the genocide lies in the historical development of Rwanda: myths, changing socio-political institutions and, not least, the advent of colonialism, which played havoc with indigenous culture. In the second half of the 19th century, the idea of God-given Tutsi superiority was gaining prominence as a result of various forces in society. Psychological images which treated “Hutu and Tutsi as radically and unchangeably different in their history and in their personal intellectual and moral attributes” (Urvin 1998:30) gradually became a reality that influenced daily life. In addition, when Europeans came to the region, the presence of an elaborate monarchical system in Rwanda was attributed to the invasion by the mobile Hamitic conquerors and rulers (Tutsi), who were believed to have descended from “a superior of humanity, those of ‘semi-Caucasian’ stock” (Chrétien 2003:50). Much was made of physical features of the different ‘races’ (Prunier 1995:5) and to the Hamites were attributed ‘finer features’ (angular faces, aquiline noses and tallness), though with a brown skin, and of course, much higher intelligence than the ‘Negroes’. The differentiated social categories and formations were understood to be racial. The Europeans saw abuses of power but not the people’s motives for supporting the aristocracy (Chrétien 2003:201). Hence they not only implemented ill-informed reforms which accentuated existing social inequalities, but the Belgian colonial administrators and missionaries also politicised and reinforced the social hierarchies already existing in precolonial Rwandan society, effectively resulting in the redefinition and reconstruction of social identities in the country.

Eventually the colonial administrators and missionaries succeeded in turning legend into reality as this myth came to play an important role in the formulation of the Tutsi alien identity. Thus the Belgian regime breathed life into the Hamitic myth, laying the political foundation of future Rwandan public institutions: education, administration and even taxation came to be organised around racial identity. In so doing they manufactured a ‘social time bomb’

9 *Gacaca* jurisdiction with 11 000 tribunals countrywide was inaugurated in June 2002.

from the local raw material of traditionally differentiated social categories. Ultimately 'Hutu power' became the rallying cry of the 1994 genocide.

Indigenous social institutions can be used to inspire processes that lead to the creation of a new national narrative. Uvin (2003:119) observes that "the practice of Gacaca may well be able to respect key conditions of fair trial and due process, but in an original, locally appropriate form, and not in the usual western-style form". We may add that any political settlement with the tag of international approval or one imported from outside Rwanda was bound to prove inadequate and most unlikely to alter the way in which people regard each other. It is common knowledge that Rwandan society is characterised by deeply ingrained mutual distrust between the identity groups. Finding a form of international restorative justice that can address the core of this mistrust is difficult if not impossible. There are two models of transitional justice: in one,

full priority is given to prosecution. The tribunal is the gold standard ... More attention goes to the suspect than to the victim. The duty to prosecute is a stronger argument that the many contingencies the local context creates... At the opposite extreme ... the centre of gravity moves from the courtroom to the hearing, from the judge to local civil society leader, from fixation on individual guilt to the search for societal patterns of atrocities, from legal retaliation to ritual reconciliation, from internationally driven retributive impulses to the full acknowledgement of the opportunities the local context offers (Huysse 2008:5).

Huysse's assessment is truer for Rwanda than it might be for many other post-conflict situations. Evidently the desire for personal revenge would undermine any agreement reached by politicians. Therefore the reorganisation of *Gacaca* justice draws inspiration from the belief that the indigenous spiritual resources can be tapped for social and economic reconstruction even in the modern-day technological era.

It is also based on its pragmatic value, in that the killing happened at the community, individual and family levels. To address the nature of the atrocities the approach must be anchored in those same levels. It can also be seen as an application of the same psychology of community involvement in trying, punishing and vindicating its own members, a process which is not only morally appropriate but also the only one appropriate to the peculiar nature of the crimes of the Rwandan genocide and of post-genocide society, in which victims and perpetrators must live side by side as if the horrors of 1994 never happened. Apparently only Rwandans could solve the problems which led them to kill each other with unprecedented vengefulness; in other words, responsibility for finding the solution must remain with the people who were involved in the conflict. By involving the community members on each hill in this amazingly hilly country (as was the old practice) in dispensing justice, *Gacaca* offers a profoundly participatory form of justice that promotes democratic decision making and hence restores fractured social ties (Hansen

2005). It is understandable, therefore, that the main ideas of the reorganised *Gacaca* hinge on core Rwandan values: propriety of behaviour, the place of the spoken word, control of emotions, relationships and respect for authority.

“Truth can pass through a fireplace and does not burn” (“Ukuri guca muziko ntigushye”)

The heading of this section is borrowed from a Kinyarwanda proverb about the resilience of truth; it suggests that truth cannot be destroyed even in the direst circumstances. Another saying is *“ukuri kuratinda ntiguhera”*, meaning that truth may take a long time to be revealed but can never die. It is this belief in the power of truth that inspires Rwandan society to make truth-telling one of the pillars of *Gacaca*. However, these sayings also indicate that traditionally truth was understood to be fraught with inherent contradictions: it can go through fire and not be destroyed. This is strong imagery expressing belief in the indestructibility of truth.

Here we explore the Rwandan traditional understanding of the importance of telling or revealing the truth. To quote president Kagame yet again, the importance of truth-telling for the healing of the nation is as follows:

Genocide has become part of our history so we need to accept it and be able to learn from it. With the Genocide, Rwandans lost their value. There is nobody who is going to give back to us this value but ourselves. It is this need that should drive us into speaking the truth, pardoning those who wronged us and be able to unite as Rwandans there by regaining the lost value.¹⁰

In view of the significance assigned to confessions and truth-telling about the genocide, several questions come to mind: What is truth? Is there only one truth to be told in Rwanda? “What is considered truth and justice by one group and what makes them feel secure, may make another group in society feel insecure and their ideas about truth and justice repressed” (Soerensen 2007:12). Does knowing the truth bring about the desired forgiveness and reconciliation?

Traditionally *Gacaca* hearings did not demand confessions – indeed, the term *‘kuzimura’*, which means to reveal (a secret), has negative connotations. In Rwanda, as elsewhere in Africa, the formation of blood relationships was a common practice and blood-brothers would swear an oath to protect each and not to reveal a brother’s secrets, whatever they may be. This obligation would have posed a challenge to *Gacaca*’s emphasis on full confessions, but “the *Gacaca* law contains a politically astutely designed set of incentives to encourage popular participation and acceptance” (Uvin 2003:118). Confession

¹⁰ This statement was attributed to president Kagame when he addressed the mourners on 7 April 2006 during the burial of the remains of 139 people, part of more than 45 000 people who perished in the area in 1994.

was embedded in the *Gacaca* act, and most of those interviewed confirmed that the concept of *kuemera*, that is 'to admit what one has done', or *kuirega*, 'to accuse oneself', was introduced into the post-genocide *Gacaca*. In the old *Gacaca* the focus was on how to move on and therefore confession was unnecessary. For serious crimes or in cases of irreparable damage detailed explanations were required, but not in the form of confession. The emphasis was on *kuiyunga*, reconciliation of two parties when something 'bad' had happened to cause 'separation'. The process focused on effecting reconciliation and the disputing parties were obliged to be reconciled by *Gacaca* or to respect its means of resolution. Confession, therefore, is one of the most innovative aspects of the new *Gacaca*.

For post-genocide *Gacaca* telling the truth is a serious matter and the implications of naming the crimes of genocide and its perpetrators make it even more complicated. But the problem with truth is that it does not always bring peace and the possibility of repercussions is almost always present. Hearing or telling the truth often brings back vivid memories of violence, results in re-traumatisation and can arouse feelings of hatred. Minow (1998) adds that truth-telling falls between vengeance and forgiveness; and it is also well known that truth is relative, elusive and complex (Lerche 2000). Rwandans are aware of this and that may explain why, though truth-telling and confession are mandatory, there is a tendency to use euphemisms for killing during the genocide. I encountered such euphemisms during interviews that I conducted in prisons and during the *Gacaca* trials, where it was repeatedly said simply that 'people died'. The interviewees usually spoke in this indirect manner. It is also common to hear statements such as '*Runaka yitaby'Imana aziz'abagizibanabi*', which literally means 'so and so has answered God's call at the hands of cruel people'. This shows that Rwanda has difficulty confronting its past. To address this challenge, it is clearly stipulated that for a confession to be accepted, one has to give details of how the victims died and name the cruel people responsible for the death of particular victims – in other words, tell the whole truth. Under these provisions, if someone confesses before being denounced, he or she is entitled to a substantial reduction of the sentence to be served either in prison or in terms of community service.

Truth and justice are inextricably linked in the *Gacaca* process. It is not just a matter of telling 'the truth and nothing but the truth', as is the oath in conventional law courts. The emphasis is on telling the whole truth, and everyone is obliged to tell the whole truth of what they know about genocide events. Thus confession becomes a moral as well as a legal obligation.

Asking for forgiveness or offering an apology is another important element of confession. When a perpetrator confesses, he or she has to offer a sincere apology or ask for forgiveness. In the spirit of traditional *Gacaca*, as we said above, the parties are obliged to be reconciled, and therefore the victim is not

expected to reject the apology. My informants say that in traditional practice it would be construed as humiliating for a man to beg for forgiveness, and therefore there was no obligation to do so. Thus demanding an apology from the perpetrators is another key innovative element of post-genocide *Gacaca*.

Tapping into indigenous spiritual resources for 'sustainable peace'

Certainly, the application of the *Gacaca* justice system is an unprecedented socio-legal experiment in its modus operandi, size and scope. Though it was put in place to serve two main purposes – justice and reconciliation – *Gacaca* is neither a Truth and Reconciliation Commission nor is it a criminal tribunal; it combines the functions of both and goes beyond them in seeking justice that is both restorative and retributive. By suggesting that “in initiating the *Gacaca* process, Rwanda follows a path similar to many countries emerging from internal conflict today”; and raising “questions about the design of Truth commissions” on the basis of her study of psychological health risks of truth-telling in the *Gacaca* process, Brouneus (2008:57) assumes that *Gacaca*, too, is a truth commission. It is not. *Gacaca* is unique in several important respects. Daly (2002:378) aptly captures its uniqueness and offers the following clarification:

Gacaca is a distinctly local tradition. It resembles processes that developed over centuries throughout Africa, but the particular form of local justice known as *gacaca* seems to be distinctly Rwandan. This sends the salutary message that the tools necessary to rebuild Rwandan society inhere in its indigenous culture.

Evidently, *Gacaca* derives its merits and unique strength from the familiar realm of culture as a conflict resolution mechanism and justice system that is deeply rooted in tradition, governed by rules and regulations familiar to society, and state involvement. It is also located at local village level where everyone knows everyone else, and therefore benefits by the reservoir of eyewitness accounts of both victims and perpetrators and the participation of the community as a whole. Though the open nature of *Gacaca* trials has occasionally led to intimidation of witnesses, exposure to trauma and re-traumatisation, insecurity and shame for both victim and perpetrator, it has so far proved to be the most viable means of promoting public action as the community tries its own members for crimes of genocide and addresses the issues of justice and reconciliation in order to live together as neighbours and families, with victims and perpetrators going to the same churches, marketplaces and schools in this small country.

The character of *Gacaca*, its challenges and prospects have been subjects of intense debate, which has generated a substantial literature across disciplines, fraught with all manner of criticism. The human rights and international law critics of *Gacaca* argue that it does not conform to ‘international standards’ of restorative justice. Hansen (2005:4) articulates this criticism thus:

Perhaps one of the most serious concerns brought forth by the international community is the possibility that the goals of justice are incompatible with the rehabilitation of communities and the reconciliation of community members. In this view of justice certain goals, such as reinforcing Rwandan social norms, deterrence of further ethnic violence in Rwanda, and re-establishing a moral order in a devastated Rwandan society, could be compromised. By emphasizing relationship building and community re-integration in the *Gacaca* tribunals, these other goals of justice could well be compromised.

This criticism loses sight of the fact the most urgent need for Rwandans is to find some mechanism that makes it possible to speak the unspeakable truths about the horrors of genocide and find ways of rebuilding community relationships so that people – perpetrators and victims – can live together once again as members of the same communities. This is an extraordinary situation which requires extraordinary procedures. Hansen (2005:4) wonders whether it “is fair to apply traditional international human rights standards for legal processes where culture has created a unique response to Rwanda’s devastation”.

Although Oomen (2006:13) argues that *Gacaca* encompasses different types of justice (*retributive, restorative, promotion of national unity, truth and distributive*), she also doubts “whether the *Gacaca* will succeed in assigning individual blame, and emphasising individual accountability”. Among those who speak from a psychological point of view, Brounéus (2008:58) subscribes to Mendeloff’s (2004) assertion that the claims of the efficacy of truth-telling and truth-seeking mechanisms for reconciliation are based on faith rather than empirical evidence, and therefore “there is a need to restrain the enthusiasm for these mechanisms”. In the same vein Waldman (2007:93) writes:

Victim-offender encounters, truth-telling, and moves toward apology and reconciliation are appealing in the abstract; but data suggests that victims whose distress levels remain high and who continue to suffer the psychological fallout of intense trauma may be unable to benefit from such interactions. Victims of serious crime and violation may need more tangible help – psychological counseling and assistance with the material basics of life – before they can be expected to dispense the spiritual balm and experience the psychological release that restorative theorists envision.

An analysis of this thesis is beyond the scope of this chapter. The point to note is that it is post-conflict realities that should determine the choice of social reconstruction mechanisms, for in many cases the contexts differ, not least

culturally and historically. From this perspective the choice of *Gacaca* was determined by the realities of Rwanda.

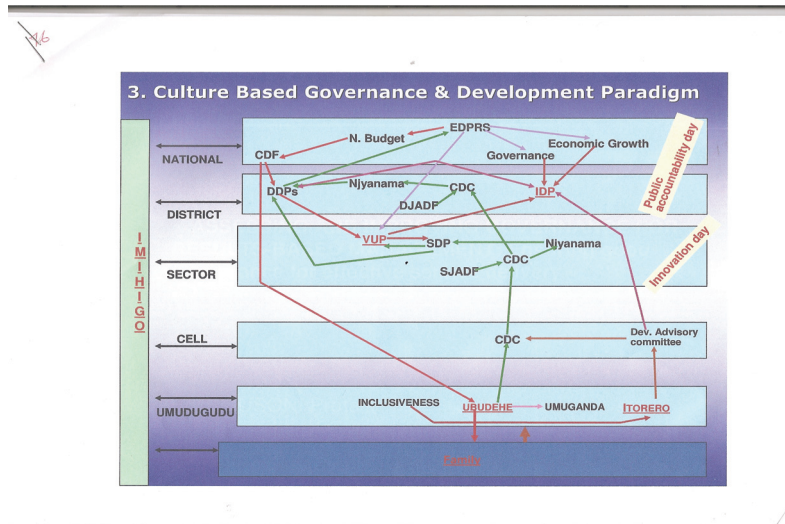
Here we illustrate how *Gacaca* utilises various concepts drawn from indigenous spirituality to address the enormous challenges of post-genocide justice and reconciliation. One of the institutions that work closely with *Gacaca* is the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission (NURC) legally established in 1999. The evaluation and impact assessment report on the activities of the commission points out that “NURC has contributed tremendously towards promoting culture as a tool of reconciliation” by incorporating “cultural concepts such as *Ingando*, solidarity camps, peace, *Abakangurambaga*,¹¹ *Inyangamugayo*, *ubudehe*,¹² *Ubusabane*.” The report further notes that the

use of culture to achieve justice that is reconciliatory and restorative is at the heart of the transitional justice debate in several African countries today. Culture makes justice more accessible and participatory, thus helping to build greater ownership, confidence and legitimacy. Rwanda is regularly cited as an example in this regard (Staff Reporter 2005:6).

Here we use *Itorero* and *Ingando* to illustrate how these cultural concepts are now being streamlined in government development and governance programmes. The Ministry of Local Government, Good Governance, Community Development and Social Affairs developed the Rwanda Decentralisation Implementation Programme (DIP) 2008- 2012 which is an integral part of the Government’s national development strategy as articulated in Vision 2020 and the Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy (EDPRS). One of the five objectives of the National Decentralisation Policy (NDP) adopted in May 2000 is “developing sustainable economic planning and management capacity at local levels that would serve as the engine for planning, people and resource mobilisation, and implementation of social, political and economic development to alleviate poverty”. In order to achieve this, the ministry has worked out an illustrative model of culture-based governance and development (Government of Rwanda 2007).

11 *Abakangurambaga* now refers to peace volunteers or community ‘mobilisers’ involved in unity and reconciliation activities.

12 *Ubudehe* refers to public labour and *ubusabane* refers to the notion of sharing.



This model is based on inclusiveness at *umudugudu* (village) level, in which the concepts of *Itorero* (cultural civic education), *Ubudehe* and *Umuganda* (public free labour) are embedded. On 19 November 2007 the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission, which cooperates closely with *Gacaca*, launched cultural education centres (*Itorero*) to provide a forum for various stakeholders to discuss the many problems facing the country. After the launch of the indigenous national education initiative (*itorero ry'igihugu*) at least 24 000 trainers were reported to have participated in training others in a number of national fields, including Rwandan culture at grassroots level. This cultural education initiative is aimed at promoting traditional culture and fostering unity and reconciliation among the masses. The president of NURC was quoted as saying:

Teachers and leaders are key stakeholders in social and economic development of our country, we want them to use the Rwandan culture to discuss and find solutions to national problems... *Itorero* for teachers was necessary since they are involved in training the young generation in the good practices that would help in moulding and brightening their future based on culture. It would give teachers a platform based on our culture to solve problems, promote national unity, instil discipline and fight genocide ideology in their respective schools (Staff reporter 2008).

The president of NURC argued that not only would *Itorero* permeate all administrative tiers from the lowest village level, sector and district up to the national level in order to enable all citizens to participate in finding their own solutions to their problems; but it will also promote government development programmes.

Another argument is that the use of *Ingando*, which is seen by its critics as a platform for indoctrination, is an important aspect of the process of changing

the Rwandan mindset. The term ‘*Ingando*’ derives from the verb *kugandika*, which means halting all activities in order to reflect on, and find solutions to, national challenges. In ancient Rwanda *Ingando* was organised by the military – when faced with national disasters, the king prepared and mobilised the population through *Ingando*. But NURC has revived and formally developed *Ingando* as a method of reintegrating and rebuilding communities. It should be noted, however, that the new *Ingando*, like *Gacaca*, has been re-invented and adapted to the current situation. The first to undergo *Ingando* training were demobilised ex-combatants, and then it was expanded to include community leaders, youth, survivors, released prisoners and pre-university students. *Ingando* is conducted throughout the country; it entails residential camps and involves 300-400 participants per programme for periods of three weeks to two months. The topics covered during this residential training include obligations and duties of leadership, human rights, and the history of Rwanda. The extent to which *Ingando* has contributed to changing the Rwanda mindset would be an interesting subject of inquiry, but judging by the intensity of involvement of groups from different social sectors and its countrywide coverage it is an important NURC activity.

In her analysis of the role of *Gacaca* in promoting civic culture and democracy Wierzinska (2004:1954) argues that *Gacaca* has the potential to

- (1) engender a culture of discourse in a society whose political culture is primarily characterized by its silence and compliance, (2) develop a practice of peaceful dispute resolution, and (3) ultimately provide fertile ground for the development of democracy in Rwanda.

There is no doubt, we venture to say, that the culturally based governance paradigm outlined above clearly demonstrates not only the potential of *Gacaca* for development, but also the government’s intention to pursue this path to social and political reconstruction (development) of Rwandan society. The model is built on the indigenous concepts of *Itorero* (cultural civic education) and *umuganda* (unpaid public work by all citizens).

Umuganda was *corvée* type labour dating back to the days of the kings of Rwanda, who extracted free forced labour from the citizenry. The same idea of obligation to do public work was used to mobilise the killers during the genocide. Many of those who were unwilling to participate in the killing were coerced to do *muganda*, to ‘work’. But now it is being positively linked to *imihigo*, the newly introduced performance contracts for public servants to create an efficient public service delivery system in Rwanda. The point is that a national policy championing the role of indigenous cultural institutions in development is gradually taking root in Rwanda.

Conclusion

The question is whether Rwandans can find solutions to their enormous post-genocide challenges of reconciliation, justice, social and economic reconstruction or development through *Gacaca*. The government's astute move to seek solutions in the indigenous spirituality embedded in *Gacaca* is to be commended. We have shown that Western-type justice would be hopelessly inadequate to deal with crimes of the nature of the Rwandan communal or popular genocide, for which it is not designed. Yet peace and security are inextricably linked with the question of justice, all of which are building blocks for the development of Rwanda. *Gacaca* serves well as a community-based justice mechanism that empowers communities to carry out restorative and retributive justice under the watchful eye of the state. Thus *Gacaca*'s two-pronged function brings the state and communities as well as victims and victimisers together as they all work towards common national goals.

In view of the historical developments that resulted in hardening the Tutsi-Hutu divide, where "widely shared psychocultural images [that] treat Tutsi and Hutu as radically and unchangeably different in their history and in their personal, intellectual and moral attributes" are the "basic building blocks of society" (Uvin 1998:30), a cultural approach is proving to be more appropriate in addressing the effects of the genocide that was ultimately the product of those very cultural images. Here we are not merely arguing for a cultural solution to a cultural problem; it is inevitable that for Rwanda to make social and economic progress, its mindset or psyche must change. Apparently internal processes that are familiar to the masses are more readily acceptable, and that is why the re-invented *Gacaca* enables communities to speak the unspeakable truths about their relationships and, rather painfully, come to realise that the dehumanisation of one group into cockroaches that need to be exterminated is a crime against humanity, of which a large part of the population is guilty. This is the situation that they have no choice but to face and resolve. The government of Rwanda, in its search for a solution, understood the perils of following the example of the South African TRC and looked back to Rwanda's own cultural heritage for inspiration. Externally designed mechanisms unfamiliar to the Rwandan mentality and culture would most likely have remained alien and distant, as the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) has proved to be. To underscore this point: the ICTR is financed at a staggering cost of billions of dollars and has tried only 35 *genocidaires* in a period of fifteen years; while *Gacaca* has tried over 700 000 genocide suspects in a period of three years with meagre resources.

It is common knowledge that good governance is the foundation of economic development; and misrule or 'bad' governance has been blamed for the failure of African states and the abject poverty in which the majority of

African peoples continue to live, and for the raging conflicts which have been the hallmark of the continent for nearly three decades. Conflicts rooted in social injustice result in destruction of already poor systems, further diminish the chances of economic development and drive the society into greater depths of poverty as they fail to meet their basic needs. Needless to say, a healthy society is the foundation of the human resources that are crucial for the development of any nation. Through justice and reconciliation, then, *Gacaca* aims to reconstruct the fractured social fabric, which, we emphasise, is the 'software' of economic development. Without social justice Rwandans cannot eradicate poverty – in other words, bring about economic development.

Gacaca's modus operandi, which hinges on community participation, is its greatest asset and there lies its potential for democratisation. As mentioned above, increased citizen participation, institutional decentralisation and accountability of government officials to local communities, as illustrated in the MINALOC plan to utilise traditional concepts, can create conditions that ameliorate situations of poverty and disempowerment. We conclude, therefore, that, in spite of possible logistic and other challenges, the government's choice of a culture-based governance and development paradigm is judicious. The choice of this model must have been made in full awareness of its appropriateness and potential; hence the government is making efforts to have it streamlined in its development programmes.

The goal of *Gacaca* is to promote justice and reconciliation by providing a platform for victims to express themselves, encouraging acknowledgement of guilt and apologies from the perpetrators, and facilitating the coming together of victims and perpetrators 'on the grass'. Thus it engages the people directly in the justice and reconciliation process. A restorative justice approach is predicated on the assumption that in a conflict situation both victims and offenders have been hurt, and therefore the accent is on reconciliation of the parties and healing the wounds caused by the atrocities. Thus it seeks to rebuild social relations and make it possible for both victim and perpetrator to live in the community without hatred, fear or bitterness. *Gacaca* represents a unique model. By putting the emphasis on confession, admission of guilt, apology, reparation and reintegration it combines restorative and retributive forms of justice in a unique blend of indigenous spirituality and Western legal precepts. With the introduction of the concept of confession *Gacaca* not only relieved the prisons of the financial burden of keeping tens of thousands of prisoners, but basically changed government policy on prisoners. This is an important outcome, and though further research is necessary to assess its contribution to justice and reconciliation, we are of the view that *Gacaca*'s novelty is so far unrivalled. As mentioned above, the extraordinary situation of post-genocide Rwanda requires extraordinary mechanisms and we have demonstrated that *Gacaca* is one such mechanism. It cannot be overemphasised that in the face of

current social and political realities, *Gacaca* is Rwanda's best hope and most pragmatic option on the path towards democracy, sustainable peace and development.

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Exploring the place of traditional justice in post-conflict Uganda

Komakech Lyandro

Introduction

The growing complexity and constant evolution of conflict dynamics in northern Uganda have provoked numerous and diverse explanations of its apparent intractability. Most recently, the impasse in the Juba peace process has raised further doubts about the prospects of a durable peace in the foreseeable future. However, efforts to implement the agenda items so far agreed in Juba are underway despite the interruption of the peace talks. The implementation of these efforts raises vital questions about how justice should operate in order to accommodate the need for both accountability and reconciliation. Non-formal judicial mechanisms, and traditional justice in particular, have received much attention in the context of the different transitional justice policies contemplated in Agenda Item no. 3 of the Juba peace talks¹ and the fourth strategic objective of the Peace Recovery and Development Plan (PRDP),² and are now being discussed by the Justice, Law and Order Sector (JLOS). As a key requirement of the framework for accountability and reconciliation, the agreement obliges the parties to promote – after necessary modifications – the traditional justice mechanisms practised in areas affected by conflict (clause 3.1). In response to these imperatives, coupled with donor pressure, JLOS formed a Transitional Justice Working Group for Uganda, which has five subcommittees: prosecutions, traditional justice, integrated approaches, truth-telling and funding. The subcommittees are engaged in designing a transitional justice policy suitable for Uganda. While the subject of traditional justice has been in the limelight recently,³ most of the research conducted to date has not been sufficiently differentiated to provide adequate guidance and inform the aforementioned policy shifts.

1 Clause 2.1 of Agenda Item no. 3 enjoins the government of Uganda (GoU) and the LRA rebels to “promote national legal arrangements, consisting of formal and non-formal institutions and measures for ensuring justice and reconciliation with respect to the conflict”.

2 See PRDP (2007), strategic objective 4: Peace building and reconciliation

3 Cf. Hovil & Quinn (2005); Roco Wat I Acholi (2005); Hovil & Okello (2007). Most of these focus on the pros and cons of implementing various judicial practices but say little about principles that could be enshrined in policy

This paper is based on preliminary findings of a study of traditional justice conducted by the Beyond Juba project⁴ on 4-17 February 2008, and again on 10-28 August 2008 in Lango, Acholi and Teso subregions.⁵ The paper is part of a broader project to examine the role played by traditional justice across Uganda.⁶ The findings presented here were obtained in a qualitative study involving 171 one-on-one interviews and 34 focus group meetings.⁷ Interviewees comprised government officials, representatives of various NGOs, humanitarian staff, local councillors, traditional leaders, representatives of JLOS (police, magistrates, state attorneys, prison officials, etc.) and ordinary individuals found in villages, towns and various IDP (Internally Displaced Persons) camps. It should be emphasised that the findings are preliminary and merely indicate major trends emerging from the interviews. Opinions on the importance of traditional justice and its underlying structure varied greatly from respondent to respondent, possibly reflecting the controversy surrounding the practice of traditional justice in Uganda. Discrepancies in the importance attached to traditional justice and in the degree of individual familiarity with such practices may be linked to the nature and level of exposure to violence and to the duration of conflict in the respective areas, or it may indicate differences in the relative prevalence of traditional justice in the respective districts.

While many of the questions concerned the prevalence of traditional justice practices in resolving everyday crimes and disputes, the underlying issue remains whether these same principles can be extrapolated to form the backbone of a national reconciliation process aimed at addressing the legacy of violence left by Uganda's many conflicts. Some traditional practices may be viable and desirable in a local setting, but may not be easily incorporated into a

4 The Beyond Juba project is a transitional justice project of the Human Rights Peace Centre (HURIPEC) and the Refugee Law project, all of the Faculty of Law at Makerere University (see www.beyondjuba.org).

5 In eastern Uganda the study was conducted in the districts of Amuria, Soroti, Kumi, Katakwi and Pallisa.

6 The research team of Lyandro Komakech, Lead Researcher, Nsamba A Morris, Benard Kasozi Okot, Stephen Oola, Jackee Batanda, Angella Nabwowe Kasule, Paulina Wyrzykowski, Steven Petric and Laura Jobson. The paper was written by Lyandro Komakech with input from Moses Chrispus Okello, Paulina Wyrzykowski and Dr. Chris Dolan. Special thanks to Livingstone Tenywa who provided logistical support to the research team in the different parts of the country.

7 The research was made possible with funding from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) and the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA). MOFA and SIDA fund the Beyond Juba, which is a transitional justice project of the Refugee Law Project (RLP) and the Human Rights and Peace Centre (HURIPEC), all part of the Faculty of Law – Makerere University. On behalf of her partner organisations, the Refugee Law Project is grateful to the National Council of Science and Technology (NCST) for granting them permission to undertake research in Uganda.

national system. Hence the findings should be viewed through the lens of a prospective transitional process to determine their potential for resolving specific conflict related issues.

Background to this study

While tensions between local conceptions of justice and those imposed from outside have existed in Uganda since colonial times, the current debate on the role of traditional justice in dealing with atrocities committed by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and other actors in the course of the conflict was reignited in 2003 by the involvement of the International Criminal Court (ICC) in northern Uganda. Although a particular area of concern has been the role of traditional practices in reconciliation, the debate so far has focused primarily on what traditional justice looks like and how it compares with the 'formal' judicial system. Specifically, the discussion centres on the extent to which traditional justice practices may or may not be compatible with Uganda's obligations under domestic and international law, in particular that of holding accountable perpetrators of grave human rights violations. The arguments against employing traditional justice mechanisms revolve around the concern that they may inadvertently promote impunity for those who have committed gross human rights abuses in the course of conflict.

Even though the arguments for and against the application of traditional justice may be valid in their own right, resolving these tensions requires recognition that international law, domestic law and traditional justice practices are constantly in flux, and that accountability can take various forms depending on the context. Rather than seeing them as mutually exclusive alternatives, research suggests that different forms of law, in particular formal domestic law and traditional justice, do in fact complement each other. Indeed, the considerable overlap and interaction between traditional and formal justice uncovered in the course of the current study would suggest that the values and interests underlying the two systems are not as incompatible as some might suggest. Thus the existence of such *complementarity* has crucial implications for how international law bodies approach future conflicts in areas where traditional law practices continue to operate.

For complementarity to be recognised, however, the different legal systems must first be intelligible to one another. One means of achieving this could be to extract the underlying principles of traditional justice and examine their relevance today. Attempts at a theoretical level to differentiate between traditional and 'formal' justice practices based on restorative and retributive models are influenced in reality by people's motives and the choice of either traditional or formal judicial mechanisms for the pursuit of accountability. In

such a situation a fundamental question is how to extract useful elements of both of these systems. With this in mind, we need to determine whether it is feasible to codify traditional justice in a single system, and to determine how desirable it is to formalise the traditional sector and bring it into the judicial mainstream.

Although it is difficult to speculate about what could have happened had the conflict not taken place, both the formal and the traditional judicial system in Uganda have been greatly influenced by its persistence. It is commonly acknowledged that the formal judicial system throughout the country is severely overloaded, which may partly account for the number of cases being referred back to the Local Councils (LCs) or traditional leaders for settlement.⁸ This crisis is particularly acute in northern Uganda, where twenty years of conflict has weakened the justice infrastructure. In addition northern communities may be suspicious of accessing a legal system that has failed to offer them protection in the past. In these circumstances traditional justice mechanisms and formal justice may supplement each other in order to counteract weaknesses. Whilst tradition should not be romanticised, its importance to the transitional justice process must not be underestimated. The question of whether and how to codify the traditional judicial system therefore remains crucial in Uganda.

Government, civil society and cultural leaders are beginning to see traditional justice practices as key mechanisms in the pursuit of accountability and reconciliation in northern Uganda in the aftermath of the complicated conflict that has plagued the region for over a quarter of a century. Besides, the role of traditional justice was formally recognised in clauses 3.1 and 5.3 of agenda item 3 of the Juba Peace Agreement (see Juba Peace Agreement 2007);⁹ however, their role remains unclear, with many questions left unanswered. Several of these questions were raised at the Third National Justice Law and Order Sector Forum held on 30 July-31 August 2008, which considered the types of abuses traditional practices could redress; how much – if at all – they should be adapted for contemporary application; the institutional frameworks they might be amenable to; and whether they should be backed by some sort of formal documentation.

8 Focus group discussion with five people, Lemule parish, Amuru Township, 25/09/08.

9 See the Agreement on Accountability and Reconciliation between the Government of the Republic of Uganda and the Lord's Resistance Army/Movement, Juba, 2007.

Overview of selected literature

The ICC's involvement in northern Uganda "has brought to the fore an important debate on seemingly oppositional approaches to justice: local restorative approaches versus international retributive approaches" (Baines 2007:96). The argument has centred on whether the Lord's Resistance Army/Movement should be dealt with by Western liberal judicial institutions, which put the emphasis on retribution, or whether traditional justice mechanisms that emphasise restoration and reconciliation should be applied. In retributive justice punishment is aimed neither at repairing the damage that offenders did to their victims, nor at rehabilitating offenders and restoring their relationship with the victims and their community. "Punishment seems to be geared to try to break and rupture their connection to the larger society – not by just putting up all manner of physical, social and emotional barriers, but by making offenders think that the only consequences of their acts they need to think about, are the punitive consequences for themselves. They do not have to confront the consequences [for] the victims and the community. The desire for retribution is the desire for vengeance; getting even, putting the world back in balance" (Robert 1990:41).

Justice and reconciliation are perennial themes, in the sense of fundamental goals, of transitional justice approaches. In post-conflict societies, for instance, shared experience of promoting peace through justice and reconciliation is gaining increasing international currency (Pankhurst 1999:239). It is widely held that societies making a transition from a period of violent conflict, civil war and/or severe political repression and authoritarianism to a better present and future of accountable governance, respect for human rights, justice, human security and national unity must embark on a journey of reconciliation (Boraine 2004). This is because reconciliation is a major factor in preventing recurrence of violence and ensuring continued democratisation. In this sense reconciliation seems to be the ultimate goal of transitional justice. Such an understanding has often diluted transitional justice processes and outcomes. The concepts of justice and reconciliation have often been linked as constituting transitional justice outcomes, whereas actually they are distinct.

Transitional justice is premised on a belief that the demand for justice is important but not absolute: instead criminal justice must be balanced with the need for peace, reconciliation, democracy, equitable development and the rule of law. Transitional justice therefore represents an attempt to pursue justice with a keen eye on sustainable national reconciliation. Thus there is a link between transitional justice processes and reconciliation. The truth, however, is that because of the contested nature of reconciliation, the reconciliation goal of

transitional justice processes has often been subsumed under that of justice, sometimes resulting in false reconciliation.¹⁰

Clearly defined, justice in itself is an important concept cutting across both the traditional and the contemporary context. In the 6th edition of the Concise Law Dictionary (Osborne 1976), Burke gives an excellent definition of justice, to the effect that the offender needs justice as much as the victim. In transitional justice, reconciliation and traditional justice are an important component to secure national reconciliation and durable peace. The current debate is on whether local justice mechanisms and conflict resolution play a role in resolving the complex conflicts in present-day Uganda. Uganda needs to learn from the experiences of countries like Sierra Leone, Liberia and South Africa that have been grappling with issues of reconciliation in the recent past. It faces critical challenges from international legal actors and the regime of international law. Besides, factors like the geo-politically complex conflict context, proliferation of actors, and fluid political commitments have always made it difficult if not impossible to conduct debates on national reconciliation in a consistent and transparent manner.

While it is commonly recognised that a national reconciliation process in Uganda is overdue,¹¹ a real roadmap towards national unity in Uganda remains the million dollar question. Any durable solution should take account of Uganda's turbulent history. However, the national reconciliation process should avoid a one-size-fits-all approach. Doing this effectively is the major problem. Notwithstanding current efforts to initiate a national reconciliation process,¹² most reconciliation projects have focused on the northern Uganda conflict. This skews the debate and fails to resolve the national conflict.

There is a substantial literature on the role of traditional justice mechanisms in conflict resolution in Uganda, including their strength and order of priority. Numerous reports consider whether initiatives to end the ongoing conflict

10 The term 'false reconciliation' in this paper is synonymous with Ignatieff's (1996) use of the term as expatiated by Mendez (1997) and Lerche (2000). The tension between justice and reconciliation, represented by the conditions of knowledge of truth and granting of amnesty, is a subject of concern in the reconciliation debate. These authors warn against the emphasis on truth and, sometimes, amnesty for perpetrators of human rights abuses commonly found in the truth commission approach to transitional justice processes, pointing out that the notion that 'truth' and denial of 'justice' always lead to reconciliation is a misconception. In other words, reconciliation via truth acknowledgment and granting of amnesty must not be construed as justice served.

11 The government of Uganda itself has supported a move toward reconciliation. See e.g. Issues Paper on the Development of a Conflict Resolution and Peace building Policy for the Government of Uganda (NUPI, 2006).

12 See e.g. the work of NUPI.

should precede the launch of a reconciliation process.¹³ A review of the literature reveals that there are still gaps as far as understanding traditional justice mechanisms is concerned. This is because in many instances traditional institutions served both to exacerbate conflict and to resolve it. The fact is, we know too little about how traditional justice mechanisms operate and their ability to eradicate conflict permanently. Although the continued use of traditional mechanisms of mediation is indicative of their resilience and relevance to national reconciliation, a proper grasp of their efficacy is lacking.¹⁴ The question, therefore, is whether to codify traditional Ugandan justice practices into law or to acknowledge their key principles in formal legislation.

A cardinal question facing Uganda as it emerges from civil conflict is how to deal with the perpetrators of past human rights violations while maintaining the fragile social harmony in the various regions. How should they be held accountable? What justice should be meted out – retributive or restorative? What is the best formula for combating the culture of impunity that has characterised Uganda's civil conflicts right from the Buganda crisis of 1966? How do we sequence justice and peace? One undervalued conflict management resource is traditional justice. This is a gap that requires in-depth scrutiny to determine if it can play a constructive role in addressing Uganda's large-scale violent conflicts.

In Uganda today there is much controversy about the roles of traditional justice practices and internationally based judicial systems that are retributive in nature. The focus at present is on the impact of indictments issued by The Hague-based ICC against the top leadership of the rebel LRA. The LRA leadership's reluctance to sign the Juba final peace agreement emanates from the issue of international justice. The main challenge is how to ensure that the War Crimes division¹⁵ implements the LRA indictments effectively, besides rescuing the peace process from getting derailed in the process.

Agenda item no. 3 suggests strong consensus that traditional justice mechanisms that are applied in communities affected by the conflict should be promoted, with necessary modifications, as key elements of the framework for accountability and reconciliation.¹⁶

13 See e.g. Lucy Hovil & Joanna R. Quinn, *Peace first, justice later: Traditional justice in Northern Uganda*, RLP Working Paper no. 17, July 2005.

14 See paper compiled by Moses Chrispus Okello, *National reconciliation in Uganda, a literature overview*.

15 See annexure to the Agreement on Accountability and Reconciliation – Juba, 19 February 2008; Agreement on Accountability and Reconciliation between the Government of the Republic of Uganda and the Lord's Resistance Army/Movement, Juba, Sudan, 29 June 2007.

16 See Agreement on Accountability and Reconciliation between the Government of the Republic of Uganda and the Lord's Resistance Army/Movement, Juba, Sudan, 29 June 2007.

It should be noted, however, that the current emphasis on local justice mechanisms does not address the needs of the country as a whole, whether these concern the North-South divide or tensions between East and West. Equally, we recognise that international justice mechanisms such as the ICC are structurally incapable of dealing with any but the most visible perpetrators of abuses: while they address a particular dimension of impunity, they are not suited to dealing with the wider psychosocial and political consequences of decades of conflict. Hence it is necessary to explore important principles in the various traditional justice practices with a view to codifying them in Ugandan national law. This will have serious implications for the practice of international law. Codifying these principles also requires political goodwill and pragmatism on the part of government. What is needed is to create a balance between a national reconciliation that fosters unity and diverse local traditional processes that encourage social healing.

Literature on transitional justice in Africa reveals a growing interest in and attraction to cultural and traditional approaches to reconciliation, conceptualised in restorative terms. These traditional approaches represent alternative judicial ways of promoting transitional justice and a reconciliation process. Noteworthy among neo-traditional, community based strategies for promoting reconciliation are the Gacaca system in Rwanda¹⁷ and the Acholi culture, values and institutions, such as *mato oput*, *kayo cuk*, *ailuc* and *tonu ci koka* in northern Uganda. These approaches are beginning to be seen as complementary to such judicial responses as international criminal tribunals, which are regarded sceptically as Western legal system alien to African core values as well as problematic to the victims and communities they are meant to serve in that they do not resonate with these people's sense of justice.

In her study of Mozambique Hayner (2001:161-162) highlights comparable forms of community based reconciliation differing from conventional forms of transitional justice. She notes that, after a prolonged and costly war (almost one million civilians killed), both the political elites, soldiers and victims 'tactically' agreed not to delve into the past but to find reconciliation by talking to one another and living together. Instead of instituting formal transitional justice mechanisms to address the past, a traditional community healing process (involving traditional healers) was promoted to heal wounds, facilitate reintegration of soldiers into communities and perform ceremonial cleansing in order to set the stage for reconciliation between individuals (victims and perpetrators) and also between individuals (perpetrators) and their returning communities (Hayner 2001: 186-195).

According to Thomas Harlacher et al. (2006) people looking for ways to ease their suffering typically request and practise traditional rites along with

17 See Anne Kubai's contribution to this volume and Molenaar (2005).

other approaches. These authors emphasise that traditional rites should be seen as one avenue of help and healing among others, rather than as an argument to disqualify other potentially helpful approaches.

After extensive field research into traditional justice and reconciliation efforts in northern Uganda the Refugee Law Project (Hovil & Quinn 2005) asserts that peace needs to be secured before justice can be decided on and implemented. This partly explains the apparent contradictions. Besides, it considers the distinction between restorative and retributive aspects of justice to be false.

Dennis Pain (1997) argues that armed conflict was eroding Acholi culture and what is needed is a community based approach drawing on Acholi values and institutions. He highlights a ceremony known as *mato oput* (bitter root or juice). Conducted by elders, it requires the wrong-doer to admit responsibility, ask for forgiveness, and agree to pay compensation. Dennis Pain confuses two ceremonies: *mato oput*, which is between wrong-doers and those they have harmed, and the bending of the spears (*gomo tong*), which is performed to seal the resolution of conflict between clans or other groups. The report concludes that a blanket amnesty was needed, but would not be sufficient. Finally, it does not sketch a clear way forward in the sense of an alternative or complementary approach.

Hamber and Kelly (2004) define reconciliation as “the convergence of multiple processes that move a society to restoring fractured relationships and/or building new relationships in the context of violence”. These authors outline five elements of their definition: the roles of different actors (political leaders, civil society leaders, religious leaders) in facilitating the process; the target audiences (victims, perpetrators and bystanders); levels of interaction, both micro and macro (individual, grassroots, political and inter-group); and the fact that reconciliation is timeless; and can draw on a variety of tools, such as truth commissions, trials, apology and forgiveness.

In his independent report Tim Allen (2005) examines the current ICC investigations and possible prosecutions, and assesses the risks to children – those still in captivity (i.e. living and perhaps fighting with the LRA), and those formerly abducted. The report seeks to clarify how the actions of the ICC are likely to affect national, regional and local reconciliation and the entire peace building process. This explains its impact on the recent Juba peace talks. The report further describes and reflects on aspects of the war itself and on the experiences of people in the displacement camps. One thing that emerges is that the attitudes of people in the displacement camps were by no means as homogeneous as their representatives and advocates have tended to suggest, as many informants were much more willing to support punishment of LRA senior commanders than has been supposed. This poses a dilemma regarding the approach to adopt.

The report also deals with the main criticisms of ICC intervention in northern Uganda. Essentially these are the following: it is biased; it will exacerbate the violence; it will endanger vulnerable groups (especially witnesses and children); it is spoiling the peace process by undermining amnesty and the ceasefire; and it ignores and dis-empowers local justice procedures. The report ends by noting specific issues that need attention, including the need to plan seriously for the post-war situation and proper consideration of how the ICC might be assisted without compromising legitimate concerns, notably child protection.

Part II of the latest report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (2007) indicates significant variance in formulations of transitional justice options among and within sub-regions. Thus it points out the complexity of local perceptions of justice by individuals and communities in the various regions of Uganda.

The latest report released by Human Rights Focus (2007) emphasises that the Acholi community themselves are leading the process of return, rehabilitation, justice and reconciliation and that there should be minimum intervention by external actors. But it does not explicitly define the framework of intervention and tends to ignore government's role in the whole process. The report does not speak out adequately on traditional justice and how it can be applied.

A detailed report by the Refugee Law Project (Hovil & Okello 2007) maintain that there is a justice vacuum on West Nile and that traditional justice mechanism are being subsumed under formal national structures. The report emphasises that informal justice and local council structures are seen by communities as playing a critical role in the administration of justice, yet it is often unclear how they do or should interact with formal mechanisms (Hovil & Okello 2007:3).

A new report by the Beyond Juba project (Lyandro & Sheff 2009) emphasises that traditional justice has both national and local relevance, and could help to deal with both the legacies of major conflicts in the region and day-to-day criminal cases: This requires understanding of changes in the multidimensional nature of conflicts and their links with the regime. The report further asserts that traditional practices will have to play a multifaceted role in both the transitional justice process in Uganda and in future reforms of the broader legal system. Finally the report states that rather than attempting to codify the specific practices of different ethnic groups, legal reform should focus on how to capture the fundamental principles shared across the different regions of northern Uganda and beyond.

Key findings

Interaction between traditional and formal justice

A degree of interaction between formal and informal (including traditional) justice mechanisms was observed. Respondents in this field study advanced a number of reasons for this, including the acknowledged shortcomings of both systems, the lack of effective enforcement mechanisms for informal legal decisions, the difficulties and delays in accessing justice through the formal courts and the inability of the formal judicial system to compensate victims.

Cases involving defilement were handled in a number of ways, including reporting them to the police, traditional leaders and LCs. It appeared that the age of the survivor influenced the community's preferences. In a number of instances cases were brought to the attention of the formal judicial system partly to ensure compliance with an agreement arrived at through informal negotiation.

The formal courts have also on a number of occasions referred cases, particularly land conflicts, to traditional courts.¹⁸ On the whole the choice of formal or informal legal process appears to depend on the outcome desired by the parties. It was acknowledged that in cases where two parties to a dispute will continue to live in the same community, the non-adversarial nature of the traditional judicial system makes it the preferred choice.

Some respondents expressed concern that the informal judicial system no longer functions as well as it did in the past, since it relies on strong communal ties and shared values, both of which have been affected by the conflict. The view was expressed that nowadays some people prefer to access the formal judicial system, which approaches justice from an individualistic and retributive angle, rather than the informal system in which they would have to negotiate as members of a group or community. Those same people may be disappointed, however, when a formal verdict in their favour fails to concern itself with restitution¹⁹ and offers few tangible benefits to the victim.

A sophisticated interplay was also noted between psychological and judicial factors. The same causal factors affecting psychological well-being (unemployment, dependence on outside assistance, lack of basic necessities including food, alcoholism, domestic violence, etc.) are also likely to cause the person to come into conflict with the judicial system. Respondents often stress the inability of the formal judicial system to deal adequately with issues like domestic abuse,²⁰ which they believe stem in part from the conflict.

18 Laws of Uganda, the Land Act, chapter 227, 1998.

19 The Penal Code Act, chapter 120, section 129, 1950.

20 Interview with a judicial official, Gulu town, 13/02/08.

Parallels between traditional and formal justice

Respondents indicated that in both formal and traditional justice both parties have the opportunity to state their case, and this was important. However, respondents often qualified this statement by admitting that in both the traditional and the formal process, parties marginalised by the system (for instance, sexual assault survivors) sometimes have difficulty to be heard. Those who are able to access either system face similar procedural problems, which may need to be addressed in both the traditional justice and formal judicial systems.

Respondents commenting on both the formal and the informal context stressed the need to uphold impartiality as an important procedural right. A number of factors appeared to influence the principle of impartiality. In the formal judicial system corruption and delay in resolving cases were seen as a major concern, whereas in the traditional judicial system gender and ethnic biases were seen as challenges. Many respondents were uncertain how either the formal or the informal judicial system works, and many expressed concern over the outcome of cases (partial justice). These procedural problems with both systems highlight a common underlying commitment to principles of fair process.

Both systems appear to afford some avenues of appeal. Whereas there was no consensus on how this mechanism operates or on its effectiveness, some respondents indicated that the traditional judicial system was hierarchical, which in principle allows appeals to successively higher levels. Failing this, some dissatisfied parties use a number of mechanisms, including resorting to the formal judicial system, although this seems to attract criticism from the community. In the formal judicial system appeals are curtailed by such pragmatic constraints as a person's access to resources and delays in the system. In other words, both systems pose problems when it comes to appeals.

Accountability was viewed as important in regard to both the traditional and the formal judicial system. In the traditional context respondents indicated that accountability and closure for infractions was achieved in a number of ways, which included truth telling, reparations and, eventually, apology. While some of these mechanisms also exist in the formal judicial system, respondents describing formal justice pinpointed individual culpability as the primary form of accountability.

Religion and traditional justice

While indigenous religious beliefs were at times interwoven with traditional justice practices in the Acholi region, and to some extent in Teso, this was not the case in the Lango region, where Western religion appeared to have profoundly altered or in some cases entirely eliminated some traditional justice practices. Foreign religion often conflicted with traditional practices, primarily when it came to notions of cleansing, and particularly animal sacrifice. Other

principal elements of traditional justice, including truth-telling, compensation and reconciliation, appear to dovetail well with foreign religious beliefs and practices.

In Acholi the principles of indigenous and foreign religious practices, in addition to being compatible, appear to be consciously linked. Respondents, particularly those with strong religious beliefs, often chose to emphasise points of commonality in the two value systems and their practices, and tended to de-emphasise potential issues of conflict. Common use of the word ‘covenant’ when describing traditional reconciliation practices indicated underlying complementarity between indigenous and foreign religion that spanned both concept and language. In Lango, however, certain traditional practices were either rarely performed or at least viewed with disapproval, because they were considered to conflict with foreign as opposed to indigenous religious values. One respondent closely connected to the Lango cultural leadership explained that in the past a person’s return to the community after a prolonged absence would have warranted a ritual where the family would have slaughtered a sheep and the returnee would have been made to step on an egg, because “that was the traditional way, it was to fight evil spirits. Now if the church or the mosque can fight the evil spirits, then you don’t need [those practices]”.²¹

Implications for the peace process

The majority of interviewees expressed a preference for local accountability mechanisms. One explanation offered for this is the (apparent) pro-government bias of key international actors (notably the ICC), which is also evident in the twin-track accountability mechanisms proposed in Agenda Item no. 3. While this accountability mechanism endorses partial truth, it also constitutes a possible explanation for the rejection of the ICC by an overwhelming number of respondents.

Views on the importance of traditional justice appear to vary between districts, at times tempered by respondents’ differing religious backgrounds. In Lango districts, for example, we found greater emphasis on the use of Christian procedures of forgiveness, while in Acholi districts traditional mechanisms appear to have considerable support, suggesting complications in any future cross-ethnic accountability process. Conversations with traditional and spiritual leaders seem to indicate that such differences are not irreconcilable.

Respondents often spoke about psychosocial well-being, not only in the context of reparations but also associated with reconciliation and accountability.

Some respondents feared that accountability could not be achieved easily and stressed that peace should be prioritised.

21 Focus group discussion with four cultural leaders, Lira town, 11/11/08

Traditional justice principles

According to the study in northern Uganda traditional justice practices are built on restorative lines and premised on the following principles:

- ▶ Trust: offenders and people affected must fully trust the mediating parties as a result of confidence building.
- ▶ Voluntary process: this entails parties' willingness to confess.
- ▶ Truth: this involves in-depth truth-telling in which everyone talks about what happened in the past.
- ▶ Compensation/reparation: this is based on the understanding that human blood is not spilled for nothing and is usually paid for in the form of livestock,
- ▶ Restoration: this involves creating an enabling environment where people live because of others and everyone looks to society for healing. Acholi justice propounds that one's personal actions/accountability extends to an entire clan as a shared responsibility.

Conclusions and recommendations

To sum up, while both the informal and the formal judicial system were found to be imperfect at present, many respondents indicated that traditional justice in particular was better able to accommodate the complexities involved in everyday conflicts provided the community could achieve some measure of cohesion and stability. This finding was even more marked when respondents were asked to comment on the peace process. Almost without exception they indicated either traditional justice or Christian forgiveness as the preferred alternative to international justice. Diane Orentlicher (2004), the United Nations independent expert on combating impunity, recently wrote: "Given the extraordinary range of national experiences and cultures, how could anyone imagine there to be a universally relevant formula for transitional justice?" The growing demand for local forms of accountability in Uganda may be evidence of the need to develop a complementary justice framework that integrates formal and traditional justice processes as a means to national reconciliation. Further investigation is needed to determine to what extent these preliminary findings reflect a genuine preference for these mechanisms and to what extent they show pragmatic concern to bring about peace, which includes a decision whether or not to codify traditional justice mechanisms.

Present debates on local conceptions of justice centre on mass violations of human rights. Therefore the main challenge facing traditional justice is to guarantee basic international human rights standards and to deal with disputes that involve mass crimes with due regard to the rights of victims, witnesses and perpetrators. While traditional justice mechanisms in Uganda have been

functioning for a long time, not much is known about them and they are handed down orally from generation to generation. Is traditional justice one of the solutions to peace building in northern Uganda?

Government actors should improve the infrastructure, including traditional leadership structures, in order to restore stability to the community, and they should implement the fourth pillar of the PRDP that emphasises reconciliation. They should work with counterparts across Uganda to develop a local accountability process capable of addressing cross-ethnic conflict, taking into account that tradition and religion appear to play somewhat different roles but are compatible.

Government actors should offer strategic support to traditional courts by providing compensation funds to facilitate various traditional ceremonies. This will enhance reconciliation among communities affected by conflict. Traditional structures should be supported by the government to facilitate their further development, thus enabling them to act as a bridge between the two justice processes.

Local government should be encouraged to pass by-laws that recognise the principles of traditional justice and the government of Uganda should take an interest in traditional justice mechanisms, which represent indigenous paradigms and reflect the local community's understandings of justice. This may be particularly true in cases requiring great flexibility in view of personal circumstances (e.g. cases in which criminal and mental health or other psychosocial issues intersect).

Last but not least, traditional leaders should continue to improve and apply traditional justice mechanisms in order to further the reintegration, resettlement and reconciliation of communities affected by war in Uganda.

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Traditional Amerindian health care in the Ecuadorian highlands

Jos Demon

Introduction

Traditional health care can be studied from different perspectives, such as those of medicine, anthropology and religious studies. It has changed, moreover, through contact with modern medicine. Thus traditional health is a complex phenomenon, even more so if studied in relation to sustainable development, which is the theme of this book. This article comprises two parts. The first describes the main characteristics of traditional Amerindian health care in the highlands, its history and modern manifestations. I devote some attention to the changes in traditional Andean health care as a result of modernity. This brings us to the second part: a critical examination of Indian health care in the social context of the Indian revival in Ecuador. In the second part I discuss the relation between traditional health and sustainable development, in line with the principal questions raised in the introduction to this book.

Traditional Andean health care

Terms like ‘traditional’ or ‘ancestral’ Indian health care or medicine are unsatisfactory. This health care is not traditional or ancestral in the sense of being something of the past. It is a dynamic force in present-day Ecuadorian society that is adapting to modernisation and globalisation. The adjective ‘Indian’ not convincing either, because a considerable proportion of beliefs and practices regarding traditional health care pertains to the shared heritage of those who define themselves as Indian and *Mestizo*¹ populations in the Andean countries. The reason to keep using terms like ‘traditional’ and ‘(Amer)indian’ is that they denote an apparent continuity with pre-Columbian health care or medicine. To emphasise the common heritage of *Mestizos* and Indians concerning traditional health care and religion I will vary the concept of

¹ *Mestizo* (lit. ‘mixed’) is the name applied to the majority of the current Ecuadorian population, which has a mixed Indian and European cultural background although many of its representatives continue, paradoxically, to deny their Indian heritage.

‘traditional Indian health care and religion’ with ‘traditional Andean health care and religion’.

I start by exposing the difficulties arising from the history of traditional medicine in Latin American countries like Ecuador. On that basis I differentiate between three areas in traditional Indian Andean health care, namely those of health maintenance and intervention regulated by the ‘hot-cold’ complex; sicknesses relating to cosmology; and those relating to the use of mysterious powers. There is a fourth area of illnesses that traditional popular wisdom has ascribed to the ‘white people’, that is the Western world. I will not comment on this area, because it would distract us from our essential argument.

History

It has been common practice to study the Indian background of traditional health care in Latin America without regard to European influences, in particular those from the Iberian peninsula. This is what Carmen Muñoz Bernand (1986) criticises in her investigation of the community of Pindilig in the southern province of Cañar, Ecuador in 1978. She stresses the need to study the Spanish influence on Indian mentalities in order to reconstruct the periods of acculturation in communities like Pindilig. The author puts the finger on the right spot, because even now, three decades after her research, we know almost nothing about the impact of traditional European health care on Latin American population. Towards the end of the Middle Ages Portuguese and Spanish colonists carried their own popular conceptions of health to the New Continent. These conceptions of health were permeated with religious beliefs about bliss and well-being, God and the saints, magic and witchcraft, which, in a more comparative perspective, are very similar to Indian representations of health.

Let me illustrate the historical complexity with an example of the first area or field of traditional health care, namely that of healing practices based on the opposition between hot and cold. Following the North American anthropologist George M. Foster, various students of traditional medicine (e.g. Sowell and Muñoz Bernand, investigating the Andean region) argued that the Iberians introduced the European ‘doctrine of humours’ into Latin America, along with many other innovations, and that a popular version of this doctrine diffused among the Indian and *Mestizo* populations. The health system based on the existence of the four humours, ascribed to the Greek Hippocrates and elaborated by Galen of Pergamum and Arab science, was introduced into medieval philosophy and consolidated itself as a medical system in the Iberian peninsula around 1500 (Sowell 2001:11-22). Excess or deficit of these four humours or fluids and lack of equilibrium between them explained sicknesses. According to the theory of George M. Foster (1994) an Iberian version of the doctrine of humours spread throughout Latin America.

There is another – and in my opinion better – explanation of the health system based on equilibrium of hot and cold, namely that it derives from Indian tradition. The widespread diffusion of the hot-cold complex throughout Latin America, particularly among the Amerindian population, would suggest an Amerindian origin of this phenomenon. That does not exclude the possibility that European conceptions did have an impact on the health conceptions of the *Mestizo* and Indian populations. Hence we should think in terms of mutual exchange between Indian and Mediterranean ideas on religion and health,² also observable in other fields such as knowledge about flora and fauna, agriculture and technology.

Traditional medicine regulated by the hot and cold complex

A first complex of diseases covers those that are related to the polarity of hot and cold. Irrespective of the debate on its European or Indian roots, we may be surprised by its wide diffusion in Latin America (Hahold 1988; Hofer 1995; Vokral 1991; Wörrle 2002). We encounter the hot-cold complex in most publications dealing with Indian health care in the Ecuadorian Andes. The principle of a balance between the two extremes is usually applied at the basic level of the preparation of food and meals, as well as in the selection of plants and their use in beverages and medicines. Men and women – and it is important to distinguish between the sexes as well as between individuals' specific hot-cold characteristics – should maintain a bodily equilibrium between elements that qualify as hot and cold. When eating supposedly hot food, such as *cuy* (Andean guinea pig), it should be served with potatoes and beverages that qualify as cold.³ Cold or hot drinks and remedies should compensate for the person's excessive exposure to extreme hot or cold ambiances like sun or cold water, which may result in chronic illness.

The criteria used to classify food crops, herbs, plants, animals and even persons as hot, cold or temperate refer to their 'real' or 'thermal' temperature in Celsius or Fahrenheit. At the same time they are determined by notions about their origin, taste, colour and modes of preparation. Finally they are also classified according to the effects they produce when consumed or applied to the body (Hahold 1988; Wörrle 2002:239; Foster 1994:17-38). Wörrle (2002:240, 241) says that his informants in the vicinity of Otavalo and Ilumán distinguish between outer body parts like lungs, nose, eyes, muscles and bones that are apt to be affected by cold. Internal parts of the body like the kidneys, the gall-bladder and the heart are considered to be susceptible to excessive

2 In this article I do not dwell on another debate that focuses on the impact of African conceptions of health on Ecuador.

3 Clearly food is a basic area in health care studies. I will not dwell on this subject, but see Vokral (1991) and Weismantel (1988).

heat. The stomach and the intestines, in this interpretation, are intermediary organs that can be affected by both hot and cold illnesses.

Diseases relating to cosmology

Many traditional diseases fall outside the system of hot-cold equilibrium. The ones I describe here also differ from diseases relating to the use of mysterious powers in beneficial or harmful ways (usually referred to as magic, sorcery and bewitchment in anthropological literature) that I explore below. Bernard Wörrle (2002) does not assign an overall name to this category of diseases, while Carmen Muñoz Bernand (1986) calls them ‘ancient diseases’ or ‘diseases of the countryside’ as opposed to modern ‘diseases from God’ introduced by the ‘whites’. I refer to them as diseases relating to cosmology for the simple reason that all of them derive from Indian and *Mestizo* images relating to their natural habitat. Mountains, lakes, waterholes, little brooks cascading from the mountains, caves, rocks, marshes, lightning and the rainbow, animals and birds, even wind and odours, are interpreted in terms of cosmological schemes that are not easy to understand from a modern Western, scientific, rational perspective. We should consider, however, that populations in Europe shared their lives with similar ‘emanations’ of nature until just 60 years ago.

These cosmological schemes feature phenomena described as ‘winds’ (*aires*) that are contaminated with filth, the negative consequences of evil behaviour or sin, or with the putrefaction of disease and death associated with it, that will cause the disorder called ‘foul air’ (*mal aire*) or other related diseases. (Muñoz Bernand 1986:138, 139; McKee 1988:223, 57, 58, 158-163; Wörrle 2002:204-211). In the Indian conception odours, breath and emanations are connected with illness as carriers of death or death itself, and with the filth or harm caused by malevolent magic and bewitchment. One aspect of this representation of disease as foul air is that it may cling (*a-pegar*) to people and gradually possess and injure them. Therefore eggs, guinea pigs or frogs that ‘absorb’ the illness during ‘cleansing’ rituals (*limpieza*) should be thrown into the river, or one should take other precautions to prevent it from clinging to other persons (Wörrle 2002:124, 125; Muñoz Bernand 1986:56-65, 69).

In the Kichwa’s representation of their habitat one might stumble on spirits, the inhabitants or owners of specific places like caves, rocks and waterholes that are very powerful and can take possession of ‘the soul’ of people, especially ‘weak’ persons like children and the old and sickly. This happens when a child or an adult suffers from ‘fright’, which might be occasioned by things as diverse as falling or seeing something extraordinary. In such moments the person’s ‘soul’ is apt to stray, and in cases of severe shock it might not return to its body at all. The symptoms of this traditional illness of ‘soul loss’ known as ‘fright’ (*espanto* or *susto*) are that the affected person is constantly sleepy, shows no initiative and lacks appetite; if they do not recover their souls

within ten days or so, they will die. Normally even an Indian or *Mestizo* mother knows how 'to call in' the soul of her child after soul loss, but it's much more difficult if one of the aforementioned spirits was disturbed and has taken possession of the sick person's soul. Then one needs to resort to a *yachac* or shaman, the specialist who knows how to prepare an offering to appease the spirit, as that it might release the captive soul from the spirit's dominion.

In the Kichwa universe the *cuychic o cuichic*, the rainbow – which we need to differentiate into a white and a coloured rainbow – can cause a man to fall ill and a woman to fall pregnant as to, later, give birth to a deformed child, in other versions, to little baby pigs, or an ugly bundle that contains frogs, serpents and insects. The rural population fears 'the heavy territories' in the upper mountains, because that is where *Urcutayta* and his wife *Urcumama* live, who are considered to be the rightful owners of the mountains as well as the original owners of all animals and wild plants. These powerful spirits can fall in love with young people and may oblige them to live with and work for them. Those elected by the owners of the mountain will be transformed into traditional healers, that is shamans or *yachai* (in the Kichwa language), and will thenceforth act as intermediaries between the owners or spirits of the mountain and the members of their Indian highland communities. Now and then being struck by lightning will launch a man or woman on an apprenticeship in healing and divining, thus becoming a shaman (Botero 1992:91; Muñoz Bernand 1986:33, 34; cf. Rösing 1990).

In certain caves, people say, the *mamahuaaca* or cave mother waits to devour children, innocent 'spotless' children that were sacrificed to her regularly in pre-Columbian days, a practice that has continued in clandestine forms to our times. If you can gain access to the secret passageway, you may arrive at the treasure inside the mountain, the domain of the *supay or aya*, 'devils' that may make you rich but at the fearful price of losing your soul. There are other dangerous creatures, the *chuzalungus* or *chuzalongos* that may be encountered in mountains, lakes and caves, who seduce and kill women with their unusually large penises, and who may drive a person mad. They are represented as a kind of dwarf wearing a sombrero and that is how they survive in national folklore, where they are referred to as hat-bearers (*sombrerones*: Muñoz Bernand 1986:137-171; Wörrle 2002:140-247; Botero 1992:83-147; Aguiló 1992:221-304). What is surprising about these beliefs is the remarkable consistency in cosmological conceptions about the habitat in the Indian populations in regions as diverse as Cañar, Chimborazo and Imbabura provinces, stretching from the southern to the northern Ecuadorian highlands. These Kichwa beliefs are, moreover, quite similar to those of other Indian populations in the Andes (cf. e.g. the descriptions of Bastien 1978; Koss-Chioino 2003; Rösing 1990) and even Indians of regions as far away as Mesoamerica (e.g. Albores 1997; Medina Hernandez 2001; Madsen 1960 if we study them from the older

comparative perspective of the Sciences of Religion, represented by scholars like Mircea Eliade.

These similarities between cosmological representations in Mesoamerica and the Andean regions should not blind us to the fact that they constitute the complex of traditional Andean health beliefs most affected by contemporary cultural change. Like the habitat that inspires them, *huacas* (holy places like mountains, lakes and caves), dwarfs, the rainbow and lightning appear to diminish in size and influence every day under permanent siege from the globalising world around them. Their chances of survival are weakening because of the disappearance of the peasant culture that cherished and protected them for many centuries. I will return to the changes brought about by the impact of the modern world and its consequences for traditional medicine.

Beneficial and harmful mysterious powers

The third area of traditional Andean health care relates to the use of mysterious powers described as magic, sorcery and bewitchment. The presence of human desire, envy and resentment seems to be the principal motive for bewitchment and magic. The two really ‘informed men’ Carmen Muñoz Bernand⁴ met in Cañar province – the ‘white’ healer (*curandero*) of the town of Soria, Don Vicente, and Don Manuel, the ‘native healer’ of Pindilig – didn’t believe in the ‘harm’ or ‘injury’ (*el daño*) that people inflict on each other until they experienced it for themselves. They began their careers as healers after being attacked by mysterious powers, a frightening experience that can be considered one of the pathways to initiation as a healer. It may also be interpreted as a sort of activation or reactivation of a vocation experience the healers already had in their youth (cf. Wörrle 2002:231). Both healers noticed that something had penetrated their knees; and in the beginning both were afflicted with pain and afterwards consumed by the uncanny magic animal that had entered their bodies. There are various methods to achieve bewitchment but this one seems to correspond to the magic that manipulates the footprints left by the person who will transform him or herself in the future victim.

The most common supposition in Pindilig was that magic injury might be caused by food or drink. The ‘damaged’ (*maleado*) morsels of food and drink and the manipulation of the footprints are instrumental as to introduce little magic animals or insects into a person’s body, which increase their malevolent activity as the bewitched one withers away. They are weird, aberrant animals identified as little snakes, lizards, toads and insects ‘full of tusk hair’. The

⁴ More elaborate studies of bewitchment and magic may be found in Muñoz Bernand (1986) and Wörrle (2002). I confine myself to these two authors in this section, taking the lucid exposition of Muñoz Bernand (1986:73-132) as a starting point.

magic spell (*hechizo*) or bewitchment (*brujeo, embrujeo*) is identified by diffuse symptoms. Apart from supposedly swollen body parts, affected by the malevolent beasts, the process of magic is symbolised by the ancient Indian image of a body that dries up, withers away and dies like a plant without water. Once in a while the process ends in partial victory of the magic disease when the affected person loses control over or vitality in one or several organs and ends up handicapped or incapacitated (*sucho, lisiado*). If it cannot be arrested or countered, death is the usual outcome of bewitchment. It is significant that the terms for 'healing' and 'medicine' (*jampina, jampik; curar, curación*) in Pindilig, in the overall cultural context of Kichwa-speaking Indians, as among other Indian populations in the Amazon (Langdon & Baer 1992), are used for both, the healing procedure and the act of bewitching or inflicting harm on another being. This is a logical consequence of the belief that to cure oneself from magic spells one has to return the evil to the person responsible for it. There exists a third solution that consist of directing the evil to another, innocent, person or an animal (Muñoz Bernand 1986:90) that, initially, does not have anything to do with the sickness or the bewitchment.

No Western doctor can cure such a disease. You have to consult an 'informed' man or woman to stop or, to be more precise, to counter, 'curve' or 'bend' the injury (*dar la vuelta al mal*) back towards the one that sent it. These informed ones might live outside the region; in Pindilig there was an obvious link to the famous Indian shamans in the quite distant centre-north-eastern region of Santo Domingo de los Colorados. To stop the charm is not as easy as it is to describe it. It entails a fearsome struggle by the invoked healer with the witch, or healer – I'll be back on this dualism – who provoked the injury so as to extract the little beasts or insects from the body. The ritual healing might cause the death of either the healer or the witch who cast the evil magic (Muñoz Bernand 1986:81, 84, 93, 94). It is not only health in our Western sense that is targeted by bewitchment, for the magic injury also affects the crops and cultivated fields, the cattle, the prosperity and profits of shops and businesses, et cetera of the bewitched family. We also need to insist on the word 'family', as afflicted persons, in the Andean context, cannot easily be separated from the family they belong to or from its economy, reinforcing the belief that any injury to the person's family, crops, livestock or business will debilitate the person.

An interesting insight by Muñoz Bernand (1986:123-135) is that she inverts the apparent roles played by the persons involved in witchcraft, proposing instead that no 'victim' is completely innocent in the envious game of witchcraft. The persons who present themselves as victims of magic might be ambitious and selfish individuals who have broken the elementary rules of reciprocity that govern life in their family and community. In this inverted perspective the witch acts in some ways as a judge and punisher, who re-

establishes the equilibrium of social relations in the family or the community threatened by the individualism or egoism of the transgressor. To re-establish the social balance it is necessary that the transgressors compensate for their selfishness by sharing their material advantages and benefits with the wider, extended, family. If they do not satisfy the rightful ethical demands of their close family and relatives, they will be bewitched. No one can publicly boast of this form of hidden vengeance for fear of reprisals and retaliation.

This is also the reason, argues Muñoz Bernand, why peasants have such fear of being rich and evade every kind of praise. A peasant family tends to hide its wealth and achievements so as to escape the envy of their social environment and its consequences, bewitchment being one of the most outstanding (cf. Wörrle 2002:230). Muñoz Bernand sheds new lights on the ethics of reciprocity by interpreting magic and witchcraft as retaliation for disturbing the social equilibrium so laboriously established in the perspective of the Andean Amerindian ideal of reciprocity. Bernhard Wörrle (2002:223-238) expands on her reflections and reminds us of the theory of ‘the image of limited good’ proposed by anthropologist George M. Foster – the same scholar mentioned above in relation to the system of Hippocratic humours – as a basic idea or intuition of peasant societies (cf. Muñoz Bernand 1986:132). The German author cites Foster to emphasise the first syllogism of this imagery: “If ‘good’ exists in limited quantities, if it is impossible to extend it and if the system is closed, one must conclude that an individual or a family cannot improve its situation as at the cost of others” (Foster 1965:296). The interpretations of Muñoz Bernand and Wörrle relate witchcraft to the logic of equality that is supposed to characterise peasant societies. They coincide, at an elementary level, with theories concerning institutional and cultural defence mechanisms of peasant societies proposed by anthropologists like Foster, Eric Wolf and James C. Scott.

In Muñoz Bernand’s opinion the reason for the recent increase in witchcraft in Pindilig could be the avalanche of societal changes that confronted this community in the late 1970s. The peasant community was breaking down and to defend its ideals of reciprocity – and consolidate the image of a limited good – it intensified its recourse to witchcraft in an unprecedented way. A good test of this line of interpretation of magic and witchcraft in terms of the image of limited good, then, would be to establish the occurrence of witchcraft in contexts other than peasant society. With 65% of the Ecuadorian and Latin American population already living in urban contexts while the exodus from the countryside continues unabated, the city would be an excellent place to explore witchcraft and theories that relate it to envy and equality.

In conclusion a brief comment on this immense transfer of the peasant population to the cities and its relation to traditional health practices. Various investigations, including my own in Quito, confirm that magic and witchcraft

continue to flourish in the cities as they do in the countryside.⁵ This apparently contradicts my conclusion above about the decline of cosmological representations under siege from the modern world. One might argue that magic and witchcraft might continue or even increase while cosmological representations decline in their confrontation with modern education and the rational Western worldview. But this is not as obvious a solution as it appears, because magic and witchcraft are performed by invoking the old Andean cosmological world and its actors, as indicated above. So, logically, the decline of cosmology should have repercussions in the field of magic and witchcraft. A similar contradiction might be seen between the extensive use of medicinal herbs in a city like Quito and the apparent loss of knowledge about their application according to the principles of hot and cold. These contradictions invite anthropologists and religious scholars to conduct further research into the complex field of traditional health and its transformations in Andean and Latin American cities.

Indian renaissance in Ecuador

To answer the questions raised in the introduction to this book we now turn a critical eye on Indian health care in the socio-historical context of the Indian revival in Ecuador.

The interest in indigenous spirituality is part of the renaissance of Indian society and culture in Ecuador. This is not an isolated phenomenon, as it coincides with indigenous or ethnic revival throughout Latin America and on almost every continent in the world. The revival of ethnic identity in an era of economic neo-liberalism and the socio-cultural trend known as globalisation is one of the remarkable contradictions of our modern world. To comprehend current interest in Indian religion and Indian health care in Ecuador we need to explore recent history, more particularly the unexpected appearance of the Indian population on its political and cultural scene. An interesting aspect of recent Ecuadorian history is that the precarious, deteriorating economic situation of the Indian and *Mestizo* peasants – reflecting the overall elimination of peasantry in the developing world – has been offset by the successful cultural and political regeneration of the Indian population. This paradox can only be explained with reference to the social context of the Indian population, its internal and external migration, and the intervention of international allies of an Indian ‘renaissance’.

⁵ It's interesting to see how traditional health care and shamanism established themselves as integral parts of daily *Mestizo* life in the cities on the northern coast of Peru (cf. Sharon 1980; Joralemon & Sharon 1993).

Traditional health care and sustainable development

In the Andean countries, as in most of the developing world, neo-liberal prescriptions resulted in a gradual retreat by the state from economic policy, the collapse of the social welfare system and depopulation of the countryside. In Ecuador we observe pauperisation of the peasantry. State investment is reserved for productive agricultural enterprises concentrated on the coast; the measures and principles that guided earlier land reform have been reversed long ago. Plantation crops like bananas, soya beans, palm oil, exotic fruits, cocoa and flowers and ocean harvests like tunny and shrimps that benefit the wealthy elite – a blend of landowners, industrialists and exporters – are exported, while basic foods are increasingly imported. The production of traditional Ecuadorian cereals like wheat, barley and corn, the core of the former hacienda economy in the highlands, has dropped dramatically in the last forty years. Food cultivated by large-scale production units beyond the national borders, like onions, carrots, red beets and potatoes imported from Peru and fruit like apples and pears from Chile, are sold in regional Ecuadorian markets in the highlands.

In recent years there has been a debate, accompanied by protests and blockades by the Indian movement, on whether Ecuador should sign the Free Trade Treaty with the United States. The reality is that the free market has already arrived; it has gradually established itself under neo-liberal rule over the past twenty-five years. Sociologists and economists refer to the end of peasant societies: Latin American peasants farming on less than five hectares will not be able to survive, for they cannot compete in the organisational structure of the new agricultural and stock breeding industries. Recent developments in agriculture in Chile and Mexico are considered examples of this looming tragedy: the end of the peasantry (Kay 2001; Kay 2005). The deterioration of living conditions in the Ecuadorian countryside triggered large scale migration to the cities and international migration, particularly to the United States, Spain and Italy. Sixty-five percent of the Ecuadorian population now lives in urban areas and one can reasonably assume that this will soon reach 70%, in keeping with the overall Latin American trend. It is further estimated that two million Ecuadorians have emigrated, which corresponds to 15 to 16% of the entire population of twelve to thirteen million and is even more significant if measured in terms of the productive population (Herrera et al. 2005; Salman & Zomers 2002).

As in other Latin American countries with significant Indian representation, the Indian population in Ecuador is hit hardest by this eclipse of peasant society; today probably 70% of the income of Indians in the highlands derives

from non-agricultural activities.⁶ There is increasing dependence on income from migrants, work on the coastal plantations and in small commerce, construction and services in the households of wealthier families in the cities. The most creative and daring have left the country to join the Ecuadorian colonies in the United States, Spain and northern Italy. Economically the Indian peasants have transformed themselves into semi-proletarians; and meanwhile their unfavourable living conditions relative to the rest of the population do not improve (Larrea Maldonado et al., 2006, 2007).

Kichwa migrants from the highlands that still reside in Ecuador usually maintain their lands in their provinces of origin, where women and children have replaced men in traditional subsistence farming of agricultural crops, milk cows and other animals. Most of their income, however, comes from the migrant men who work on the sugar and fruit plantations on the coast and in the new greenhouses in the northern highlands that produce and export flowers. Another contingent of Kichwa that might number 300 to 400.000 now resides and works almost permanently in the big and intermediate cities, providing hard, underpaid labour in temporary construction jobs, working as porters in marketplaces, or selling merchandise like fruit, fabrics, sunglasses, mobile telephone cases, cigarettes and sweets in the streets or in small popular establishments. There are no exact figures, but I conjecture that the contingent of highland Indians who actually live in the capital Quito has risen to 100.000 in a total population of two million. The harbour city of Guayaquil that shelters about two and a half million people accounts for another substantial concentration of Kichwa highland migrants, although it seems to be smaller than the population in Quito. Indians who embark on the adventure of international migration seem to be short of what would correspond to their representation in the migration of overall population in Ecuador (Indian population is estimated as 13% of overall population by Larrea Maldonado et al., 2007). It's the Indian population of the southern provinces that has been particularly responsive to this more spectacular, more dangerous and more lucrative type of migration (Torres, 2008)

The Indian renaissance

Ecuador has acquired a certain fame for harbouring the most active and self-conscious Indian movement in the whole of Latin America. Since 1990 the politically active wing of the Indian movement, headed by the *Confederación Nacional de Indígenas del Ecuador* (CONAIE), has successfully entered the national stage and imposed some of its claims on the central government. To enforce their demands members of Indian communities organised several

⁶ Personal communication, Luciano Martínez, rural sociologist, FLACSO, Quito, May 2006; Compare: Martínez, L., 2000, "Estudio introductorio".

nationwide blockades to paralyse the central highland roads, especially the Pan-American Highway – a direct attack on national business interests, notably the exporting elite on the coast concentrated around the most populous city of Ecuador, the harbour of Guayaquil. Although this Indian struggle has not achieved spectacular results in economic terms – as mentioned above – its social, political and cultural impact can be considered revolutionary (Guerrero Cazar & Ospina Peralta 2003).

The Indian movement's success in organising their people is attributable to newly established contacts with the *Mestizo* and 'white' populations and these groups' rejection of racism and discrimination against the Indian population for supposedly representing retardation and ignorance in Ecuadorian and Latin American society, both past and present. It is only since the 1950s that we may speak of an 'Indian' identity representing a collective consciousness that eventually developed into a new social movement. In former times the Indian populations found themselves dispersed in isolated settlements and contacts were obstructed by local sympathies, including ambivalent loyalty to the hacienda elite and the *Mestizo* from the main towns (*cabeceras*), which seriously handicapped internal social communication and recognition of experience in terms of class or race consciousness (Burgos 1997; Lentz 1997; Guerrero 1991, 2000). During the era of exploitation, repression and racial segregation the Indian population had no way to escape from their humiliating conditions other than denying their origins and identifying with the mixed *Mestizo* population.

This solution to 'the Indian problem' is still popular today, as the last 2001 census suggests: only 6% identified themselves as Indian, whereas we may surmise the percentage of Indians to be 13 to 20% on the basis of language and cultural characteristics (Larrea Maldonado et al. 2006, 2007). These percentages are very problematic and vary according to the definition of 'Indian'. The traditional solution of avoiding anti-Indian discrimination and exclusion by identifying with the *Mestizo*, politicised by past Ecuadorian governments, has recently been complemented by a new strategy, which promotes pride in Indian identity and is critical of *Mestizo* and occidental culture. The pioneers of this affirmative strategy are intellectuals who, while born Indian, managed to break into academic education and institutional careers formerly reserved for 'whites', and finally convinced themselves of the dignity and importance of remaining 'Indian' (Guerrero Cazar & Ospina Peralta 2003:115-166).

Currents of Evangelical and Pentecostal Protestantism account for one third or more of the actual Indian population in Ecuador. Conversion to Protestantism may be interpreted as another escape route from anti-Indian discrimination and exclusion. Kichwa converts to the dominant Evangelical faith, which spread among the poor populations in the countryside and the

cities, only appreciate small parts of their former Kichwa cultural heritage and condemn community celebrations associated with Catholic saints, traditional life cycle and agricultural rituals, and traditional Andean healing practices as superstition. Indian converts to Protestantism transformed their churches into a highly effective mutual aid network, where members may expect moral support but also acquire credit, legal aid and practical advice for their commercial enterprises. The Protestants were more successful at the economic level, for instance in obtaining grants and facilities from government, but they lacked interest in cultural regeneration (Andrade 2004:215-323).

Both the Catholic and Protestant Indian population have received substantial moral, ideological and financial support from international contacts. A considerable part of this support was mediated by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that have flooded into Ecuador over the past 35 years, a phenomenon reflecting the developmental orientation of the majority of Third World nations. The Indian and Afro-American populations have been privileged by special programmes of International Financial Institutions (IFI) such as the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB in Spanish) and the Andean Community for Development (CAF: *Comunidad Andina de Fomento*), and have been the principal target of non-state development projects launched by private organisations that finance international cooperation, especially from Western Europe and Canada. The extensive foreign investment in Ecuador's Indian countryside, mediated by the IFI and NGOs (Segarra 2004; Consejo de Desarrollo de Nacionalidades y Pueblos del Ecuador 2002), didn't pay off. Living conditions of the rural population kept deteriorating relative to those of urbanites. Indicators like employment, nutrition, health, education and services like water and electricity may be half or one third of the average for the cities. The main cause of their limited results is the absence of a state that regulates and coordinates national economic policy, or at least national agrarian policy, that might have protected the vulnerable layers of its population (Bretón Solo de Zaldivar 2001; Cameron & North 2003; Martínez Valle 2000).

The international alliances, however, had a resounding impact on the political and cultural dimensions of Indian identity. The Indian movement's political and cultural strength stemmed from genuine liberation from white and *Mestizo* domination. But it would not have exercised the influence it has without the financial, moral and ideological support of the IFI and a host of independent international foundations that have been investing in Indian development, education and organisation over the past four decades. The focus on indigenous cultures in Latin America stems from the intention to soften the effects of neo-liberal politics on those populations most affected by it and is reflected in the reform of the IFI's neo-liberal policy in the 1990s. At the same

time it indicates greater appreciation of cultural identity as an overall phenomenon that seems to emanate from Western culture.

It's not pure nostalgia that engenders these attitudes towards traditional cultures, as they express anxiety about Western liberal culture, condemn its exploitation of nature and resources and suspect it of being the cause of worldwide social inequality. These tendencies call for further research, for example by exploring the observation that appreciation of local cultures has been facilitated by and is constructed on expanding modern knowledge and global interaction (Robertson 1995:25-44). This international climate favoured the 'renaissance' of indigenous cultures; we can speak of a kind of synergy between globalisation and the revival of 'ethnicity'. It is in line with tendencies of ethnic cultural regeneration or 'ethno-genesis' all over the world in recent decades and with a renewed interest among Latin American Indians and Afro-Americans in their own identities. Ethnicity has been an overall concern and strategy of Indian peoples, be it in the Amazonian rainforests, in Mexican Oaxaca or Chiapas, in the *Mapuche* districts in Chile, or in national or international migration, for it offered them new opportunities to escape from their subordinate position in closed racist societies and to improve their economic and societal status (Baud et al. 1996).

Institutions like the United Nations and the International Labour Organisation (ILO) established international codes for the treatment of indigenous populations – in particular the UN Draft Declaration on Indigenous Rights and the ILO convention 169 adopted in 1989 – and these have been incorporated in constitutional reform in Latin America over the past twenty years. The ILO convention requires recognition of some form of 'self-rule' or 'internal self-determination' of indigenous peoples in the form of distinctive administrative structures and judicial systems, as well as respect for indigenous traditions such as religion and healing. The inclusion of these international policies in national constitutions created ambivalence in judicial codes in Latin America and triggered fierce debate and speculation about what these legitimate rights of Indian people to territory, jurisdiction and cultural tradition might entail (Assies et al. 2000).

In Ecuador the innovations promoted by the ILO convention were included in the 1998 constitution and the debate centres on issues like the Indian aspirations to claim and govern traditional territories, to determine their own development, to administer their customary justice and to preserve and fortify their cultural tradition. The rather revolutionary constitutional text, which has been confirmed in the new constitution of 2008, serves the Indian cause and has caused ministerial conflicts, especially in the Ecuadorian Amazon where oil interests override the legislation on Indians and ecology. In the highlands the legal controversy about Indian rights coincides with a debate on decentralisation of state policies and the virtual absence of police authority and

trustworthy justice in the countryside, which has given rise to Indian and *Mestizo* vigilante groups that (claim to) mete out justice on behalf of peasant communities (Garcia & Sandoval 2007.). The 1998 constitution had another important effect: it repealed the prohibitions that had applied to traditional Indian and Afro-American religious ceremonies and rites and traditional healing practices for centuries. Since its proclamation the state has recognised numerous new organisations of traditional healers (e.g. *yachac* or *curanderos*, the traditional shamans) and midwives. This occurred without major deliberation, depending on these new associations' contacts in administrative circles, and has raised questions about who is to determine the integrity of those who present themselves as traditional healers.

We conclude that the revival of Indian religion and health care shares in the general renaissance of Indian culture. It is difficult to assess its contribution to the overall 'reinvention' of Indian cultural tradition, but it does play an important role in the definition of Indian identity. Indian movements in defence of Andean tradition, the CONAIE in particular, pay special attention to religion and health care so as to protect it against invasion by *Mestizos* and charlatans. And religious specialists, particularly shamans, are major actors, not only in healing practices and religious ceremonies but also in defining the politics of the Indian movement. In the Indian movement's conception Andean religion and its specialists are essential, for they should guide it in defining its identity and its future.

Andean traditional health care and spirituality

In the first part of this article we showed that traditional Andean health care is intimately intertwined with religious or spiritual notions, particularly as regards its cosmology and use of mysterious powers. I furthermore proposed that 'traditional medicine' in Ecuador cannot be seen as purely indigenous. We need to take into account that a large part of colonial history and many religious and health conceptions of European origin have been incorporated into Andean religion and health care. We also emphasised that *Mestizos* and Indians share the same popular health traditions, not only among rural populations but also in the cities. The claim that a distinctly Indian traditional health care exists is part of a wider, fallacious conviction about the feasibility of a clear division between the Indian and *Mestizo* populations. Identifying oneself as an Indian or a *Mestizo* is a personal decision to aspire to a particular lifestyle and ideology that hinges on acceptance or denial of the indigenous Indian background. It may reflect convictions and decisions on what individuals, families and communities aspire to be, but it cannot erase the common cultural and religious heritage that has been forged since colonial times.

This raises a further problem regarding the definition of spirituality. In Western usage the term 'spirituality' expresses conscious appropriation of religious contents and practices by an individual (i.e. it has a 'personal' subjective dimension) or group which has successfully integrated religion with their particular lifestyle. It also includes courage and willingness to experiment, to seek new spiritual dimensions of our reality, which accords with the definition in the introduction to this volume, namely spirituality as a 'quest'. My definition emphasises two elements: conscious appropriation and integration of religious contents and practices with a particular lifestyle, and the courage to experiment on the religious level as exemplified by the great mystics. When I argue that traditional Andean health care is intimately intertwined with religious conceptions I do not mean the kind of religion that entails conscious appropriation of spirituality. The Indian and *Mestizo* population of the Andes do not consciously appropriate their religion as is the case with spirituality; hence I prefer to use the term religion.⁷ Andean religion and health care depend on age-old oral and nonverbal transmission that may prove very fragile in its current confrontation with Western rational and scientific thought.

Andeans are born to and educated in these religious conceptions that retain their primordial connection with notions of health. Only religious and health experts – particularly the most experienced among them, the shamans – may be said to appropriate and experiment with existing traditional knowledge, sometimes at the risk of losing their lives, as when a shaman must confront a powerful colleague in healing a patient, or when he or she goes too far in exploring religious reality and its not always benevolent spirits. Not even the shamans control events, as they have to negotiate with the spirit world to obtain support for their healing or casting of spells, which, as noted already, may be considered two sides of the same coin. The famous monograph on shamanism by Mircea Eliade (1994) is entitled ancient *techniques* of ecstasy, a title that aptly expresses the successful shaman's dependence on his dexterity in exploring, moving among and negotiating with the outer (or inner?) 'spirit' world. In a sense this is comparable with the experiments of the great mystics of the Christian and Islamic traditions. But for the ordinary people traditional Andean religion and health care represent a system in which they are involved from childhood; they normally do not have the option to get out, even if they would like to. They are often terrified of what happens or might happen to

7 In the context of this article about traditional health care we also need to note that traditional Indian religion is not confined to health practices in the Western sense, as it includes rites of passage, ceremonies marking the agricultural cycle and the weather, celebrations in honour of saints (usually identified with nature spirits) and the system of political responsibility through which a family gains respect and authority in the Indian community.

them when confronted with the cosmological spirits or the mischief of witchcraft that, as we saw, is a never ending vicious circle. This fear partly explains conversion to the Pentecostal and Evangelical variants of Protestantism in recent times.

When I speak of health care, then, the term is misleading. Traditional Andean religion is not only directed to healing: it also causes, and is used to cause, harm and sickness that not infrequently lead to the death of the person, who is attacked by magic or affected by the cosmological spirits. It is far from perfect, in a comparative religious or ideological sense, and cannot easily be qualified as a liberating force for those who believe in its ideas and are involved in its practices. We should be cautious, therefore, about qualifying it as spirituality, and even more so about idealising it, as happens when it is described as 'integral', 'cosmic' or 'holistic'. There does exist a variant of Indian religion and health care that we might define as 'spirituality' or, more precisely, as a 'spiritualisation' of traditional Indian health care and religion. Andean religion and health care are invoked as benevolent forces by the Indian movement in Ecuador and in other Amerindian contexts. In this discourse Indian religion and health care are presented from their positive side – which they undoubtedly possess- in the form of intimacy with and respect for nature, invoking its spirits and manifestations, when using medicinal plants, for example.

The emancipation of the Indian population in a country like Ecuador after ages of exploitation and repression revived all these aspects of Indian identity, as it is the first time that they can be expressed freely without fear of reprisals from state and church authorities. The recognition of the existence and value of traditional health care and other 'indigenous ancestral rites' in article 84 of the 1998 constitution, recently affirmed and extended in that of 2008, and its supervision by the state in article 44, raise interesting questions. How have the associations of traditional medical specialists like the Indian midwives and *yachai* or shamans evolved since the recognition of some of them by the ministries of public health and social welfare? And who can and should supervise and authorise the medical practice of these midwives and shamans? These questions are vital for the definition of health care strategies by the ministry of health and for the Indian movement. We should also note new experiments in integral health care by local governments, NGOs and health centres like *Jambi Huasi* in Otavalo and the Andean hospital in Riobamba that combine Western biomedicine and alternative medicine with traditional health practices (cf. Wörrle 2002:348-352).

We should study how traditional health care aligns itself with Western biomedicine and how it responds to the incursion of Western alternative medicine and its ideological allies like anthroposophy and the New Age movement. There we may encounter a series of publications that tend to

confuse Andean concepts of health with concepts derived from European anthroposophy, theosophy and New Age (e.g. Tatzo & Rodriguez 1998; Serrano Pérez n.d., 1999). These publications influence public opinion as well as the Indian movement's reconstruction of Andean religion and health care. Terms like 'integral', 'cosmic' and 'holistic' are used by representatives of these trends, who invoke traditional Indian religion to justify their own 'quests' for a new kind of medicine and a new kind of religion or spirituality. This incursion of alternative traditions from the West and alternative medical health care from the West and the East into the study and the practice of traditional Andean health care is assuming proportions that justify an anthropological or medical study in itself. It clearly merits investigation from the overall perspective of the impact of globalisation on traditional Indian religion and health care.

The future of indigenous spiritualities

Urbanisation, permanent migration, and migration to the United States and Europe have led to profound changes in peasant society and in the Indian population and their traditional habitat and lifestyle. We should ask how they change Andean culture, and how they might modify Andean concepts of religion and health care. Different opinions about the repercussions of these transformations are to be found in some, fundamental, works cited in this article. Carmen Muñoz Bernand (1986) emphasises her impression of the disarticulation of the foundations of Indian and peasant culture in the Pindilig community in 1978. Bernhard Wörrle (2002), on the other hand, paints a picture of an intrepid, dynamic Indian culture in the Ilumán and Otavalo region in the northern province of Imbabura, registered in 2000, where traditional conceptions of health care are being revitalised through contact with global culture. From a forgotten place in the southern province of Cañar, where the people could not find an answer as how to defend themselves from overall contempt of the Indian race, we switch to a context where Indian identity and shamanism are sold as tourist packages. We are in dire need of more detailed investigation about the impact of recent changes on the traditional health care of the abandoned communities in the Ecuadorian countryside as well as its transformation in the new contexts of migration to the coast, the cities and abroad.

The future of a new 'Andean spirituality' or the spiritualisation of Andean religion and health practices, which I described above, is still unsure. A philosopher like Paul Ricoeur and a theologian like Edward Schillebeeckx expressed the view that Christianity – and we might add current Islam in the West – confronts the challenge of reaching a new kind of religious synthesis after the criticism of modern times forced it to abandon its primal naivety. Andean religion, liberated from 500 years of occidental persecution and

Christian ideological repression, faces a similar challenge. Indian religion and Indian health practices survive because neither state nor Catholic Church authority, nor Western biomedicine, have been able to eradicate or replace their broad influence and benefits in the daily life of the Andean population. Interestingly, the influence of traditional Andean religion and health care does not disappear with the current eclipse of peasant society and its corollary of urbanisation and migration. Traditional Andean conceptions of health maintain their influence in the cities and even among migrants to the United States, Spain and Italy, and these conceptions are not restricted to the Indian population; they are also widespread among the *Mestizo* population.

But we might expect a serious undermining of cosmological conceptions as Indians and *Mestizos* absorb the influence of Western education and science, and this might trigger a chain reaction eroding other dimensions of Andean religion and health care such as magic and the hot-cold complex. Poverty, lack of education and illiteracy, which were always widespread in the Andean countryside, may be considered the best companions for traditional religion and health care. European precedents predict that traditional religion and health care will disappear with the advance of literacy and education. In England and the Netherlands, for example, popular religion, magic and traditional health practices steadily declined from approximately 1700 to their extinction after the Second World War.⁸

The recent invocation of traditional indigenous culture by the Indian movement CONAIE and its international allies tends to present this culture as an alternative to the neo-liberal and, more generally, occidental developmental models imposed on Third World countries, and as an alternative to the Western culture and lifestyle associated with the destruction of nature and social cohesion. This discourse is widespread in New Age popularisation of indigenous traditions such as shamanism and has entered the vocabulary of Christian churches. Lately various Christian theologians have joined in this positive evaluation of indigenous traditions, inspired by the Asian church's commitment to interreligious dialogue as a possible solution to social and intercultural problems. Although I acknowledge and would defend the value of indigenous cultures and religion as alternatives to the human conduct and the current predominance of a devastating occidental lifestyle, I think this theological orientation has been overly ingenuous in its evaluation of these phenomena.

Whilst I count myself among the admirers of traditional Indian culture and religion, I do not see how the present 'spiritualisation' of Andean religious

⁸ I suggest revising the interesting literature on these phenomena by the English school of history of medicine, the contributions of Roy Porter e.g., and Dutch historians like Gijswijt-Hofstra and Frijhoff (cf. Demon 2008).

traditions by the Indian movement and its Western allies can result in the regeneration of Andean religion and health care. The reinterpretation of Andean tradition by the representatives of alternative medicine, anthroposophy and New Age is fallacious. On the other hand, the Indian movement's failure to confront the negative aspects of Andean religion and health care may be considered a real impediment to defending, purifying and reforming these traditions. The reform of religious traditions, however, may still surprise us, as it does not always conform to rational predictions like the ones I have thought suitable for inclusion in this article. The best counter- example we have is the phenomenal revival of Indian religion and health care in Bolivia stimulated by the government of president Evo Morales.

Indigenous spirituality and Christianity

Christianity owes Amerindian religion a historical debt. The Catholic Church and Protestant churches have condemned it, have persecuted it as idolatry and consistently denied that it might contain anything of value. This influences whatever kind of attitude Christians want to adopt towards the current renaissance of Amerindian religion. There are several problems, let's say pitfalls, in the new dialogue that is now being undertaken. Firstly there is outright and total condemnation of indigenous tradition by Evangelical and Pentecostal Protestantism that eschews any kind of interaction between the two religions. The Catholic strategy is to incorporate certain elements of Amerindian culture into the periphery of Catholic ritual and ceremony, while denying the existence of what may be considered an original, autonomous Amerindian religion and perpetuating the repressive measures of the colonial past. The aforementioned approach of some theologians to idealise indigenous religion might be excusable, as it expresses concern to revise Christian history and the repressive ideological violence implied in churches' condemnation of non-Christian religions. But in the end it represents another fallacy, as it impedes realistic dialogue with indigenous religion.

Christian theologians should take care to incorporate the existing knowledge about indigenous culture and religion into the two dimensions of cultural and political reality reflected in this article. On the one hand they should acknowledge the insight of archaeologists, historians, cultural anthropologists and scholars of religion into Amerindian culture. There is an impressive corpus of historical and anthropological literature on Amerindian culture that should be used to expand and deepen our knowledge of the past, and that should counteract the kind of simplifications presented by New Age popularisations of Amerindian religion. On the other hand theologians need to incorporate the critical perspectives of the social sciences and erstwhile Latin American liberation theology – in Paul Ricoeur's sense of a hermeneutics of suspicion –

so as to appreciate what may be the 'liberating' perspective of traditions like that represented by 'traditional Indian' religion and health care.

I expressed my scepticism about the way this religious tradition is being abused by trends like alternative medicine, anthroposophy and New Age and the way it is interpreted in the Indian movement. At the same time I believe that scholars of religion and theologians can help greatly to clarify and purify existing knowledge about Amerindian religion. Their insight might be useful in the same way that archaeologists, historians and anthropologists of the last six decades have moved mountains to restore the facts of Amerindian tradition to the benefit of the living memory and future projection of these cultures.

Conclusion

Traditional religion and health care cannot be said to have any direct influence on the economic development of Ecuadorian society. On the other hand it might be argued that it is an important component of the political and cultural revival of Amerindian society in Ecuador. In this sense we could affirm that it has been an important factor in the emancipation of the Indian population, which has contributed to a more just and equal society – a contribution that we would classify under the heading of sustainable development. It is interesting to see that the influence of traditional Andean religion and health care does not disappear with the current eclipse of peasant society and its corollaries of urbanisation and migration. But let me reiterate: I do not see how the current 'spiritualisation' of Andean religious traditions by the Indian movement and its Western allies can resuscitate Andean religion and health care.

I suggest one should take into account that the Third World theologians mentioned in the introduction to this volume consider indigenous tradition not as an existing religion but as a source of spirituality – one that may help to confront existing inequalities between rich and poor and the depletion of natural resources characteristic of occidental liberalism and capitalism. A detailed scientific examination and critique of existing Andean religion and health care and its relation to sustainable development can stand in its own right, but may miss the point in the dialogue with Third World theologians, whose main interest is the construction of alternative society.

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Winti: Afro-Surinamese spirituality and health care

Joop Vernooij

Introduction

Till 1975 Suriname was a Dutch colony. Its original indigenous population, formerly called Indians (Amerindians), was divided into various groups such as the Kaliña, Lokonon, Trio, Wayana and Akuriyo. In the mid-17th century English and Dutch colonisers started importing slaves from West Africa. The descendants of the slaves, who interbred with Europeans, became known as the Creole people. When large numbers of slaves fled to the Amazonian jungle they became the Maroons (Dutch: Marrons). After the abolition of slavery in 1863 emancipated slaves were employed after serving a ten-year apprenticeship. The Dutch Surinamese government also contracted labourers from China, British India (now India), Dutch East India (now Indonesia) and other parts of the Caribbean region. Consequently the small population of Suriname (500.000) has had a long experience of multi- and inter-ethnicity.

In this article we focus on the Creoles. This group has only existed for a couple of centuries. It has a rich cultural heritage. The slaves created a creolised culture and religion, which evolved a new language, Sranantongo, that contributed to their identity. When talking about the Creoles it is difficult to use English terminology, because translation of Sranantongo (or Sranan) terms always entails a loss of essential meaning and aspects. Nevertheless, while not a native speaker of Sranan, in all modesty I can still offer some insight into the culture and religion of these people, in particular in relation to their health care practices (*Winti*). For the purpose of the theme of this book I think the Creoles are a more interesting group in Surinamese society than the original (Amerindian) indigenous people.

Indigenous spirituality

In this article we use the term 'indigenous' in a different sense than the one given in the general introduction to this book. Indigenous people are those who created and maintained themselves in the shadow of a dominant culture, with a strong ethnic identity and a distinctive language and philosophy of life. In

terms of this definition the indigenous peoples not only include the original Amerindians and Maroons (Marrons), also called *Bosnegers* (Nduyka, Saramacca, Paramacca, Kwinti, Matuwai and Boni), the runaways from the former plantations who live in the interior with their own languages, traditions, leadership (the paramount is the *granman*) and territory. We also apply the term to the Creoles (in Roman Catholic Church documents called *Incolae*, in Dutch *Inboorlingen* or natives), because they have common characteristics.

We pay special attention to *Winti*, the medico-religious complex of the Creoles that developed in the course of two or three centuries but which is very much alive today. The Creoles are former slaves who worked on the plantations and in European households. They are of mixed origin and were freed after the abolition of slavery on 1 July 1863 (and a ten-year apprenticeship). They are Christians, but many practise the religion from the days of slavery, while developing new insights as a result of dynamic encounters or confrontations with other religions and cosmologies. During the era of slavery the only domains where they could be themselves were religion, language and culture. These formed the basis of Creole identity in the midst of other religions, languages and cultures.

We define 'spirituality' as a way of life with a background or foreground of belief. It includes the notion of transcendence, a theory and practice of relating to unseen powers, normally but not necessarily based on religious texts, rituals and experiences, emanating from within the individual or group. It is sometimes led by charismatic persons but is always based on common experience and a shared lifestyle. Spirituality is not necessarily religious, but in Suriname medicine and health care are an integral part of it.

The peoples of Suriname, mostly newcomers, discovered and developed many preventive and curative methods of health care, not only physical but also mental, spiritual and psycho-social. The use of traditional knowledge of herbs and indigenous rituals is widespread in Suriname and sometimes conflicts with imported, more scientific European and internationally accepted methods of health care.¹

In the Netherlands, the former colonising country to which a fair number of Creoles migrated after Suriname became an independent state, an icon of Creole spirituality is the statue of mother earth, *Mamaysa*, at Grubbehoeve (Bijlmer, Amsterdam). Strictly speaking *Mamaysa* is invisible and can't be captured in a material statue. But for the Surinamese in Amsterdam it is a metaphor for visible and invisible life. The sources of this spirituality are Afro-Surinamese traditions, the Christian heritage and other religions which the Creoles encountered.

1 For the indigenous peoples of Suriname the liver is the centre of life, not the heart. That makes an important difference.

Creole religious culture

The unique Surinamese noun 'Creoles' (*creollo/criollo* in Spanish/Portuguese) refers to Afro-Surinamese people, born or rooted in Suriname, in contrast to the indigenous people (Amerindians) and those whose original home was Africa, Asia or Europe. During the first half of the 20th century the Creoles were the dominant group in Suriname, fighting for their own identity among the indigenous people, Europeans, Jews and, after the abolition of slavery, the Hindustanis, Chinese, Javanese, Lebanese and so on. The colonial administrators and the missionaries, both Protestant and Roman Catholic, abhorred and denigrated the culture (and colour!) of the slaves. European civilisation and Christian belief were the standards in colonial times. Nevertheless the Surinamese-born slaves and their descendants (Creoles) created a new lifestyle, religion and language as a means of survival. They have produced a framework for a society in which diversity is more important than monolithic structures. Nobody has a monopoly position in Suriname. Everybody is engaged in a struggle to regain the self that was lost during the dehumanising era of slavery. Although the scars are still visible, the Creoles shaped a balanced, ongoing harmony. They exercise control in the fields of politics, the economy and religion.

This is the public but also hidden background from which the relation between indigenous spirituality and health care is to be interpreted: the construction of social cohesion in a society in which various ethnic, linguistic and religious groups are always in competition. The political leaders adopted a policy of fraternity in order to avoid quarrels and clashes. They more or less succeeded. But their policy of avoiding conflict also gave rise to slumbering tensions waiting for final solutions. In their striving for emancipation the Creoles opted for exclusiveness, with a window left open for other groups and cultures.

In general the Creoles are Christian, the Hindustanis are Hindu or Muslim, and the Javanese are Muslim. But thousands of Hindustanis and Javanese are Christians, as are Chinese, Amerindians, Lebanese and Maroons. The seventh census (2004) in Suriname produced the following data on religion. The total population is 492.829, of whom 458.948 have Surinamese nationality; 40.5% are Christian (185.857 Surinamese, together with foreigners totalling 200,744); 20% are Hindu (98.240) and 13.5% are Muslim (66.307). The number of adherents of traditional religions (especially Maroons) is 16.291; 21.785 don't believe in God. The indigenous people are predominantly Christian (82%, 14.858), with Creoles accounting for 77% (66.924), Maroons for 60% (43.203), Javanese for 14% (10.393) and Hindustanis for 6% (8.754).² The Roman

2 *De Ware Tijd*, 9 September 2005.

Catholic Church has about 100.000 members, the Moravians 75.000. However, intermarriage created a situation of interreligious affiliation between families and groups.

In the latter half of the 20th century nationalism intensified, as happened in all societies in the Amazonian region and in other parts of the world. This strengthened the need for self-organisation with a view to group emancipation. As a socio-cultural and medico-religious phenomenon, *Winti* is not unique or peculiar to Suriname. Other minority groups have their own folk traditions alongside the formal religious and government institutions. Most Surinamese opt for one of the following models of religious affiliation: complementariness in the sense of an amalgam of components in a dynamic adaptive process; compartmentalisation in the sense of respect for autonomous dimensions and elements, but always within a unitary framework of thoughts and ideals; and eclecticism in the sense of selecting religious elements from the whole spectrum, combining them all in a distinctive system.

There is quite a lot of natural mixing. Relatives and neighbours have their own religious luggage, which it is appropriate to share. People join in and share without much reflection, for the sake of fellowship and to avoid problems and debates. The Surinamese have a proverb, '*ala kerki bun*', meaning, all churches (religions) are good. Thus Suriname is an example of a country with an effective process of dialogue – effective to the extent that at least conflict is avoided in this relatively small and vulnerable society. Also the Creoles have a double affiliation. On the whole Christian church leaders tolerated the various types of syncretism, hybridism, compartmentalisation or complementariness. The same new, open attitude is seen in party politics, cultural groups, sport unions and business cartels. It is a way of life, created on Surinamese soil by the people themselves and deeply rooted in their traditions. However, it is also contested by some Christian churches, especially the Pentecostal and evangelical churches, who are more strict and exclusive (Bakaman 2005).

Origin and development of Winti

In his doctoral dissertation Wooding (1972) used the label *Winti* for the Afro-Surinamese religion for the first time. He conducted his study in the district of Para, which was a special region in the days of slavery. The slaves had to fell trees, but also had the time and opportunity to do their own things without strict, harsh control by owners and administrators. Stephen (1978, 1990, 1998, 2002, 2003, 2006), operating as a psychiatric nurse in another Surinamese district, Coronie, gained a lot of experience and is a public advocate of, for example, the healing value of trance. He argues for a multicultural approach to medicine in the Netherlands. Other publications concentrate on the experience

of *Winti*, using a narrative approach (Vernooij 2003). This shows that various scholars have different views of *Winti* and it is extremely difficult to systematise their knowledge, the more so as *Winti* is surrounded by a lot of secrecy.

The Creole concept of *Winti* should be distinguished from the Maroon concept of *Obiya*. Both are Surinamese creations on an African foundation, but with Muslim, Protestant and Roman Catholic influences. Adherents of *Winti* started quite recently to reflect and debate in public, publicising their thoughts, experiences and perspectives. *Obiya* has a more West African shape and fashion, especially with regard to its language, *Kromanti* (Pakosie 1998).

Basic to *Winti* is its view of humans and creation. *Anana* is the good and supreme creator, who made an orderly world. Order is the principal condition to maintain creation. The key notion is *sreka*, an orderly, ordered world. The *winti* (invisible entities associated with family, birthplace, time) are helpers of humans, admonishing them and showing compassion to restore the original order. People do their own things. Since they make mistakes, the second key notion is *kaseri*, the Sranantongo equivalent of the Jewish word 'kosher'. From the late 17th to the mid-19th century a lot of plantation owners and administrators were Sephardic and Askenazic Jews. *Kaseri* means to clean up one's life, to wash internally and externally, formally and informally. Washing is a biblical concept, but also a very practical one in tropical regions. The metaphor of cleanliness is focal in society and necessary for good human relations. After a bath you can receive guests in your home. It was customary for children, after their evening bath, to shake hands with guests and visitors (a new situation). These two key notions are crucial for harmonious, balanced living. Illness is disorder. It has a cause and everybody must restore order (*sreka*), using *kaseri* as a means or method.

Winti, the Surinamese religiosity of West African extraction, developed over two or three centuries on different plantations in the districts and in the capital of Paramaribo. *Winti* (lit. 'wind') is both singular and plural and can also refer to invisible entities in the earth, in people, in the atmosphere, in families, in trees and animals, in the waters and rivers, in dreams. Contacts with Jewish plantation and slave owners and administrators led to mutual influencing, as the concept of *kaseri* (kosher) shows. Slaves in the city of Paramaribo learned a lot about Christianity. But in the districts the people were quite isolated and had many opportunities to produce their own inventions.

After this first phase of development slaves from various West African peoples intermingled. Interestingly, the indigenous (Amerindian) peoples were given a place in the cosmology of the enslaved. The *ingiwinti* (*ingi* = Indian, thus 'Amerindian *winti*') came to live among them, followed later by the *kuliwinti* (*kuli* is an early name for East Indians, called Hindustanis), *snesiwinti* (*Snesi* = Chinese) and *jampanesiwinti* (*Jampanesi* = Javanese). But *Winti* adherents learned to speak about their own religious heritage as *afkodre*

(superstition, idolatry, from Dutch: *afgoderij*). They make a distinction between ancestors, baptised (*kabra*) and non-baptised (*profen*).

Winti was directly and closely linked with Creole culture and the new language, Sranantongo (in early times called Negro English). It became a source of resistance against the Christian churches of the colonisers and plantation owners. Proponents of *Winti* referred to *Winti* as *kulturu* (culture), hoping that the antagonists (e.g. church leaders) would not focus on its religious aspects. This was part of Creole emancipation.

Nowadays the attitude towards *Winti* from the Christian side is twofold. The old churches have become tolerant, but the new Pentecostal and evangelical groups resumed the fight against it. Groups of *Winti* adherents are launching a process of re-traditionalisation. Their identity is at stake. They want a place among the other religious blocks. It is expected that the quest for identity is important and decisive for further development of *Winti* in Suriname, as it is in the Netherlands where some 350.000 (first to third generation) ex-Surinamese are living.

***Winti* and indigenous medicine**

The World Health Organisation and the Pan American Health Organisation expect a demographic growth of 0.5% between 2004 and 2015. In 2004 the BBP was \$2.484; 5.3% of the national budget went to health care. In 2003 life expectancy was 65 (male) and 71 (female). Death before the age of five was 39 per 1.000. Healthy life expectancy at birth was 57 (male) and 61 (female). Probability of dying between the ages of 15 and 60 was 270 (male) and 171 (female) per 1.000. Health expenses per citizen were \$325 per annum. On the list of the *Human Development Report 2007-2008*, Suriname occupies the 85th place. In the whole region Barbados comes 31st, the Bahamas 49th, Dominica 71st, neighbouring Guyana 97th, Jamaica 101st and Haiti 146th. In 2004 Suriname occupied the 67th place on the list.³

Against this background *Winti* functions as a medico-religious system. Creole tradition identifies at least three different types of illness.⁴ First there is *nengre siki*: illness or sickness, deviation, curable only by elements of the indigenous heritage of the people of West Africa. Second there is *gado siki*: neither *nengre siki* experts nor official government experts can heal it, its origin is diffuse. Third there is *datra siki*: doctors, medical specialists trained in Western/European skills can cure these illnesses in polyclinics and hospitals.

³ *De Ware Tijd* (the Netherlands), 30 Nov.- 6 Dec. 2007, A4.

⁴ For the sake of convenience we use the nouns 'illness', 'disease' and 'sickness' interchangeably.

The medical faculty of the University of Suriname, which succeeded the medical school started in 1882, has a good reputation and a fair number of students. There are professional contacts with various indigenous medico-religious experts in the region and in Europe. Often ex-Surinamese overseas are willing to help. Leprosy is under control, as are malaria, filaria, bilharzia and elephantiasis. There are problems with diabetes, high blood pressure and hepatitis B. Current average life expectancy is 67 (males) and 72 (females). Medical services in the interior are improving.

An example of an indigenous medico-religious practice is *fyofyo*. It is a preventive measure accepted by (almost) all indigenous people in Suriname. When a newborn child does not grow, the diagnosis is that the baby's growth is stunted by disorders in the family during pregnancy. Perhaps a sister was jealous, perhaps the biological father refused to take responsibility, or the pregnancy was a problem to the family. Even a Western educated gynaecologist will ask a Catholic priest to bless the child and mother and to assist by bathing to stop the friction; he or she has to negotiate to keep peace. After the washing and blessing the problem actually is resolved. The practice signifies that one has to be very careful during pregnancy. The same applies when there has been a murder in the family. The vengeful spirit (*kunu*) demands satisfaction for generations. The lesson to be learnt from this is: it is good to live correctly without causing trouble in the family for generations.

Medico-religious practices are fully integrated with everyday life and belief. A well-known Christian mourning and burial hymn goes as follows:

Dresi mi yu, o mi Datra	Heal me, you, o my Doctor,
Yu mi datra dresi mi.	You, my doctor, heal me.
Teki brudu teki watra	Take blood and water,
Teki ala wasi mi.	Take all washing me.

This is hymn 17 in the ordinary hymnal for sung services and burials. It shows that God is perceived as the doctor, and the doctor is God. It uses biblical notions like purification, the metaphor of water, the passion of Christ. In short, it is a hymn adapted to the local context, probably composed by a Moravian minister.

An interesting proverb is '*Langa siki yagi bun kompe*' (prolonged illness drives away good friends). Illness is not a sign of normal life and causes a lot of problems for the sick person and the family. Illness, being disorder, is even disgraceful, especially for the elite. Another Sranantongo proverb is '*Ferberder siki no abi dresi*' (conceit and pride have no medicine). This is the most important ethical notion from the days of slavery. Nobody is better than anybody else, everybody is equal: *siki na trangaman t'tey* (even a strong man is bound by sickness). Illness is a leveller in the vulnerable context of power

(owners and slaves; Europeans and Africans; blacks and whites). In this framework health is part of social status.

In the framework of health care, people recognise various indigenous medico-religious experts. Different actors perform different functions at various stages or moments in the healing process. The *duman* performs *Winti* ceremonies. On New Year's Eve, in the centre of the capital of Paramaribo, a *duman* stands distributing *switi watra* (sweet water) for bathing at the end of the year. On the eve of an important birthday (*broko dey*) the *lukuman* (*luku* = look, seer, diviner) looks at the signs of the time, both personally and socially.⁵ The *bonuman* helps to heal (*bonu* = *bon* = *bun*). The *obiaman* is the religious expert. The *wintiman*, expert in cases of *Winti*, interprets facts and behavioural symptoms and knows the history of all adherents.

Apart from these experts or specialists, who make diagnoses or suggest therapy and who attract people from all ethnic groups, there is also 'everyday' or 'folk' expertise. All Creoles inherit the common sense legacy of previous centuries. Within the family every elder can instruct young people in the secrets of *Winti* (Allen 2007; Anema 2006; *Oso* 1999; Schoffemeer 1988).

The *lukuman* diagnoses the case on the basis of the history of the family, village, plantation or the individual person, always analysing it in a social and familial context. Sometimes a family party of 30 to 40 people has to travel as on a pilgrimage, even from the Netherlands to Suriname, to villages and plantations to restore the order that has been disrupted by the acts and thoughts of members or by people with bad intentions. Essentially it is the sick person who is responsible, not the *lukuman*, *duman* or *bonuman*. The sick person has to clean himself or herself, not via a redeemer or liberator. This is different from Christianity (Zaalman 2006).

Winti has any number of rituals and ceremonies. The most important elements of the rituals are cleaning the place with water, alcohol and talks or prayers and songs; bringing offerings like drinks and cloths; libations; live music; songs; baths; dances to induce trance and possession (*wintiprey*), regulated by the time of the day, the season (not during Advent and after New Year, not during Lent and not around Pentecost); using colours and special clothes from olden times; pleasing the *Winti* by wearing beautiful earrings, rings, bracelets, giving thanks; and asking for protection and guidance. Engaging in *Winti* is engaging in a positive ritual, not simply warding off bad things in life such as the destructive influence of other people who 'put' (i.e. inflict) sickness on you because they are jealous, with repercussions for the whole family. Some Creoles are sceptical about this mechanism, but according to most of them it is their tradition and a commonly accepted interpretation of disorder.

⁵ *De Ware Tijd* (The Netherlands), 4-10 Jan. 2008, A12.

Healing by Christian religious leaders is normal. An example is the *Zeister Zendings Genootschap*, sponsors of the Moravians in Suriname, which advertises solving problems through *helen* (healing), *helpen* (aid) and *geloof geven* (giving faith). People believe in the power of blessing, prayer and laying on of hands. Sometimes sick people start by visiting an official hospital or polyclinic, but sometimes that is a last resort. Usually they have a keen and accurate sense of the appropriate method or the right alternative.

Knowledge of *Winti* can't be monopolised by anybody, because traditions and heritages in the districts in Suriname differ (Chang 2007, 2008). Because this heritage is part of identity construction, *Winti* is predominantly a 'personal possession'. It is difficult for researchers to probe this world, which is deliberately closed to intruders in a form of self-marginalisation and secrecy. This poses a threat to the constructed identity. The experts usually do not share their knowledge. They are not open to research by medical students and doctors, who seek to professionalise so-called natural (Odany Jewa) or alternative health care. There is also commercialisation of *Winti* health care.

The Ministry of Health and the Faculty of Medicine of the University of Suriname are trying to open up the hidden worlds of *Winti*. They favour modern scientific approaches to medicine, but are sympathetic to and take seriously alternative health care practices like *Winti*, as well as the indigenous health care practices of other population groups such as the Hindustanis and Chinese, who have their own specialities. The self-correction (*sreka*) and self-purification (*kaseri*) aspects of alternative health care practices are valuable in present-day Surinamese society. They should also extend across ethnic boundaries. If *Winti* has healing powers, they should be available to all Surinamese and not reserved for Creoles only.

Diagnosing causes of illness

The phenomenon of illness (*gado siki* and *nengre siki*) is a focus of different philosophical and theological reflections in Creole cosmology. Intuition and tradition taught people about illness and enabled and prepared them to clean the atmosphere, making a new, harmonious creation. The basic assumption is that nobody can help the patient; it is his or her own responsibility to do the job. The aforementioned medico-religious experts can help the patient to diagnose the causes of the illness. These can be inside the person or among family members, villagers or people from the same former plantation. Tradition and intuition are the most important sources for reflecting on illness. Intuitive rationalising is the dominant approach. It includes thinking and feeling in context, living in relationship with others.

Illness has religious, cultural and social aspects. This is understandable. In early times the slaves had to devise their own medicines and medical practices, especially on plantations where they were isolated from the outside world. They coped with life's problems with their own system of rationalisation, concentrating on causation and follow-up. Most plantations ran their own medical clinics, normally with the help of local traditional experts. Interestingly, among the slaves in the capital of Paramaribo an excellent traditional 'theatre' was created, the *du*. It was a people's opera and took the form of a competition between the freed and wealthy co-wives (*sisi*) of slave owners from two plantations or slave houses. The cast included two important personages: the doctor, the *Zeelanti-datra* (referring to the white colonists' doctor from Zeeland, Holland) and *Aflaw*, a lady who faints at injustice: a special type or variant of illness (*Na Gowtu Du*, 1998, and *Na Dyamanti Du*, Paramaribo, 2003).⁶

In the quest for causes of illness the first thing to do is to research, analyse and diagnose visible anomalies in the life of the patient, located either in history or in self-created situations. Elders have a duty to train experts in these necessary skills. The medico-religious leader has to appoint a family member as a successor and he or she has to be trained.

We can distinguish between various clusters of causes of illness. There are external causes that disturb social relations through gossip or insinuations. A person can put a curse on an individual, a house or an enterprise. Or other people can 'put' sickness on you. There are also inner causes such as immature behaviour, revenge, jealousy, seduction. Next there are personal faults, revenge in the family because in past generations people had perpetrated horrible acts like murder or taking someone else's wife or husband.

In modern times a new cluster of causes of illness has been added to the list. These are socio-economic causes such as politics, poverty and family relations that can make people sick. There are also illnesses rooted in the history of slavery, still vividly recognisable in metaphors, songs and proverbs. We hasten to add that youths have a different perception of illness, which is not compatible with the traditional ones that are considered outdated. Traditional communities are often too narrow for the youths. The educational system in the family is normally conservative, sometimes even Spartan. The new generation is also oriented to personal freedom and growth in new situations.

Even Western educated medical experts seek help from the *bonuman*, Catholic priests and Protestant ministers to 'cleanse' by blessing, praying and reconciling talk. It is a normal procedure, accepted in the past and still effective today. The results of rationalisation are normally mixed with elements of social

6 Mireille Pinas. 2008, 'Na Biti Du', vroeger en nu. *De Wate Tijd* (the Netherlands), 20-26 June 2008, B6.

control and history, visible and known, reconstructing the past without a clear logical relation between cause and effect or consequences. Intuition plays an important role in this recognising process.

But the traditional healer's methods of diagnosing illnesses are difficult to understand for people not familiar with sources of knowledge such as intuitions and dreams. Modern lifestyles are not only based on ethnic heritage but include modern elements from all over the world. The medical market is global and diverse with specialisations in new forms of illness.

Present situation and future prospects

Modern and learned people are totally convinced of the value of herbs and other traditional methods. Alternative methods have become pretty normal (also cheaper, being local without an offshore component). For the people traditional methods mean the techniques of olden times, not only those of the indigenous population, the *piyay* (Plotkin 1994, 1997) but also of people from India, China and Indonesia (*ojha, kaum, dukun, wong pienter*). So tradition covers the broad spectrum of the entire Surinamese people.

New diseases like cancer, HIV/aids and hepatitis B need new approaches and methods.⁷ The Surinamese government has established links with China to promote traditional methods. China is helping Suriname to develop a research programme to explore well-known traditional methods and recognise their value. Research and science are necessary to re-evaluate the health systems and to launch new systems based on traditional and modern (Western, European, American) sources. The need to emphasise ethnic methods as a powerful force in identity construction is decreasing in the burgeoning new society, centring on the inclusion of other cultures, religions and languages on the premise of unity in diversity.

Society is zealous in exposing failures and fraud. When HIV/aids surfaced *bonuman* advertised that they could restore health and cure the disease, but so far without producing any results. The courts periodically convict so-called experts for abusing the credulity of people who may be grabbing at straws. Specialists at hospitals and the medical faculty of the University of Suriname feel a need for complementation and exchange of knowledge and methods of health. Everybody recognises the importance of the *bonuman* as either the first or the last resort in case of illness.

Another factor is professionalisation in the medical field. In this respect new relations between modern, scientific medical specialists and traditional experts

⁷ Wilfred Leeuwijn. 2008, Verontwaardiging over link medicinale planten en hiv/aids. *De Ware Tijd* (the Netherlands) 20-26 June 2008, 1.

are emerging. Rivalry and competition between them can be fruitful and can improve the quality of health care without anyone claiming a monopoly. Even the Pentecostal churches and the charismatic renewal in the Roman Catholic Church in Suriname are involved in healing by laying on hands, prayer and loosening the bonds of history. This is attractive to believers, living for brief spells in an invisible but for them real world.

In Dutch cities such as Amsterdam and Rotterdam, where many Surinamese live, *Winti* experts have a lot to do. Sometimes families travel to Suriname, especially to their birthplace and village, to satisfy their *winti*. Sometimes a *wintiman*, *bonuman* or *duman* from Suriname is asked to work for a short time in the Netherlands. Such frequent contact is effective. Surinamese are campaigning to have *Winti* treatment included in the public health service and insurance.

Circumstances in the Netherlands require a lot of adaptation. Places for ritual activity (in Suriname this is the backyard for *wintiprey*, or the original village) and the materials to be used are different. But these rituals are performed in the Netherlands, and here participants face new challenges which require adaptation. The Institute of Intercultural Psychiatry (IIP), Mikado, in the the Hague can help immigrants from different countries and cultures to find a better life in the Netherlands. The accumulation of knowledge by the IIP ensures quality and increasing exchange and purification of methods. The IIP applies academic standards, and that is the way to discover the value of traditional methods of healing, especially in the fields of psychology and mental illness.

Nowadays the spectrum of healing and health care is broadening to encompass other fields such as ecology, water, preservation of the Amazonian rainforest, industrial pollution, ecosystems, tourism, suicide and smoking so as to become fully holistic. In terms of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights good health is seen as a commodity for all. Thus the medical field is shifting to professionalisation and democratisation, with the accent on transparency and accountability, modern and secular methods, and adaptation to psychosomatic, psycho-geographic and ethno-somatic circumstances. The idea of better health for all also implies breaking down barriers of ethnic exclusiveness, apart from the fact that youngsters no longer accept the hidden worlds of the elders anyway (see above).

Conclusion

Restoring harmony on the basis of ancestral wisdom is characteristic of *Winti*. It can lead to healing in the sense of personal well-being, a peaceful society and integrity of creation. *Winti* has been able to reconcile tradition and modernity,

indigenous heritage and foreign influence through various adaptations in Suriname and the Netherlands. The continuous struggle for a better quality of life prevents fossilisation of health care methods by invoking a flexible and practical spirituality.

To answer the main question of this book: if indigenous knowledge contributes to sustainable development, in our case in the area of health and health care, we conclude that the Afro-Surinamese medico-religious complex known as *Winti* is beneficial, but is also insufficient in modern times. The present situation and future prospects demand crossing new boundaries. Suriname needs medical expertise other than that of the health care and cure of *nengre siki*. On the other hand the new health system in Suriname can lead to greater dependence on medical expertise from abroad, medical technology and offshore medicines, at the expense of generations of Surinamese knowledge. Thus the small Surinamese society faces a dilemma.

Professionalisation and democratisation of care and cure, opening up the barriers of secrecy and ethnicity that enclose *Winti*, can be a communitarian and emancipating force in a multi-ethnic and interreligious society such as Suriname, which can be compared to a market place or shopping mall. People always form coalitions, syncretise and learn from history. Everything is controversial and open to discussion, including identity and life perspectives in relation to other groups and the dominant Western culture. Most people have learnt from history to adapt their cosmology, at least under the influence of elements from outside, and are always struggling for identity and losing it to internal and external powers.

The complexities of a modern and globalising world ask for critical loyalty to *Winti*, from top to bottom, for individual and collective interest. But past experience shows that mental flexibility and spiritual creativity enabled the Creoles to adapt to new situations, which helped them to survive and emancipated them. That is a basis for hope for a better future.

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The Ngobe people of Panama and the Inter-American Development Bank

Jorge E. Castillo Guerra

Introduction

The indigenous peoples of Latin America have taken the initiative to rewrite their stories since 1992, the year commemorating the arrival of European colonists in the New World. Various indigenous peoples have entered the public arena and grown into new social and political actors. This is evident in relations with the state when indigenous peoples challenge the criteria that support state structures. In particular they question the monocultural notions of dominant groups. Indigenous peoples accuse national states of systematic disregard of all matters related to the ethnicity, culture, religion and rights of indigenous peoples. States in Latin America are organised in a way that reduces the indigenous sector to a category not accommodated by the state. The *criollo* group (descendants of settlers), however, has proclaimed itself a national prototype and proposes its own orientation as an ethnic, cultural and religious model to be copied by others (Stavehagen 2002; Walsh 2006)

An area where the impact of new forms of indigenous protest has become more visible is economics. Since 1992 there has been increased resistance by indigenous Latin American peoples against neo-liberal economic projects in local and national development. They protest against the privatisation of their land, imposed by the introduction of market forces into their communities and the depletion of natural resources.

As part of their strategy of resistance indigenous peoples use resources deriving from their identity and spirituality. Identity is linked to awareness of the importance of an indigenous self for the construction of their future. An example is the proposal in 1992 by Takir Mamani (Constantino Lima), an Aymara Amerindian leader, to use an indigenous name for the continent that European settlers called America. This idea stems from a meeting with elders and sages (*Saylas*) of the Kuna people (Panama), where an elder, who did not speak Spanish, declared:

“They did not have any right to usurp our own heritage because the grandparents of this region have transmitted from generation to generation that we have the privilege of receiving

a message and we have an obligation to convey to all the sisters and brothers of this continent (...) that the true name of our continent is *Abya Yala*" (Agreda 2007).¹

Abya Yala is a compound of *abya* (mother) and *yala* (earth), hence 'land of life-mother earth' and 'earth in its full maturity'. It is the name the Kuna people used to identify the continent. Mamani proposed *Abya Yala* as a new strategy for the reconstruction and defence of indigenous identity, because by using an indigenous name that identity is liberated from the power of the invaders. Moreover, according to indigenous groups the name is true to the facts, because today the continent is not only *latino* but also indigenous and Afro-American. Many indigenous and related groups have accepted Mamani's suggestion and the name *Abya Yala* is increasingly used (Monasterios 2003).

In regard to spirituality, we note that at a continental level indigenous peoples use it as a resource for self-defence and for demanding a different kind of relationship with the environment. In 1994 representatives of various nations came together for the first continental meeting of Afro-Latinos and Amerindians on Christian philosophy and theology. A golden thread running through the speeches is appreciation of their own spirituality:

"We're aware of the life wisdom that our Afro-Latin and Amerindian cultures and societies have. This wisdom comes from the cosmic harmonious relationships between nature and humans and between spiritual beings and human societies. These guarantee the continuity of our projects and visions of the lives and future of humanity" (Comisión Cordinadora 1994:276).

Maximiliano Ferrer of the Kuna people explained how indigenous spirituality is part of the lives of his people: "Our spirituality, our philosophy is our weapon for defending ourselves against neo-liberalism" (Ferrer 1994:173).

Anthropological and philosophical studies show that the link between Amerindians and their indigenous spirituality and resistance against the neo-liberal economy are rooted in a profound form of ethics, a cosmic sense. Thus human beings have a mutual, complementary (nature-human) responsibility for everything, because human beings are 'co-redeemers' of the universe. Hence the use of natural resources relates to the whole (*pachamama*) and their abuse has implications for the people themselves: *ecosofía* and *pachasofía* (Estermann 1998:143-189, 231; Kusch 1977) and *cosmosentimiento* (Wagua 1992).

In other words, indigenous people's concern for the environment differs from neo-liberal development ideology, because it seeks a balance between the significance of the earth for people and the significance of humans for the earth. In this sense the life of earth and the lives of people are interdependent.

1 The translations of cited texts from Spanish into English are by the author.

The survival of indigenous people is linked to care of their ecosystems. Furthermore, they propose their own cosmology and spirituality as an alternative to dominant development models, which are not sustainable. At the same time these scholars indicate that, besides developing an alternative, there are two requirements: the indigenous people's own methods of acquiring knowledge must be preserved; and their own cultures, spirituality, social organisation, et cetera must be reinforced (Kimberley Declaration 2002).

The problem is that usually studies of indigenous spirituality in *Abya Yala* do not go beyond determining its underlying vision, ethics or wisdom. Developments in Latin American liberation theology have triggered interest in Amerindian cultures and religions, for example *teología india* and *teología india-india*.² Liberation theologians have also established a programme of interreligious dialogue emanating from the religious pluralism in Latin America.³ The relation between indigenous spirituality and sustainable development in Latin America is not dealt with in this theology. That is remarkable, because for Amerindians that relationship is focal in their struggle against neo-liberalism. That is why this study seeks to determine how these spiritual visions translate into everyday life and survival strategies, and how they relate to the radical change brought by neo-liberal globalisation.

The study focuses on the contributions of *Abya Yala* indigenous spirituality to sustainable development from the perspective of the Ngobe people of Panama. By indigenous spirituality we mean the religious experience of people in historical continuity with societies before the European conquest and colonisation. The term 'indigenous people' refers to Amerindians (descendants of the original inhabitants of *Abya Yala*). Sustainable development is defined as the promotion of culture, the economy in balance with the ecosystem and society. Natural resources are not used faster than they can be replenished and the needs of present generations are satisfied with due regard to the needs of future generations.

2 *Teología india-india* is a theological reflection on the experience of faith in continuity with pre-Columbian spirituality or religion, and *teología india* is an Amerindian-Christian theology that reflects on the same study object from a Christian perspective. The distinction was introduced by Clodomiro L. Siller (1991) at the *Primer Encuentro Taller de Teología India* held in Mexico in 1990. Thematic and methodological varieties of *teología india* change according to the traditions and realities of indigenous peoples. Consequently one speaks of Zapotec, Aymara, Quechua, Kuna and other theologies. For a discussion of the two types of theology, see Fornet-Betancourt 2001: 139; Estermann 2006.

3 Cf. the series *Por los muchos caminos de Dios* for the significance of religious pluralism for Latin American liberation theology. The series is edited by J.M. Vigil, Luiza Tomita and M. Barros, published by Abya Yala, Quito, Ecuador. See also Vigil 2008.

Key questions in this study are the following: how does Amerindian spirituality contribute to sustainable development in *Abya Yala*? And what does that mean for development agencies?

Method

After studying the literature I did field research among the Chiriquí, Bocas del Toro and Kankintú in the Ngobe region (Ngobe-Buglé *comarca*) in Panama. Focus group discussions were not possible because of the people's highly reserved attitude towards outsiders. As an alternative I had interviews and discussions with scientists, development workers, teachers and missionaries who are or were active among the Ngobe people (May-July 2008). The results of these investigations provide a framework for analysing the policy of the principal development agencies in the Ngobe area. In particular we analyse the policy of the Inter-American Development Bank, using critical discourse analysis (CDA). This is an interdisciplinary method that arose from Norman Fairclough's poststructuralist approach to social and cultural theory. With the aid of CDA I hope to show the limitations of development based on a neo-liberal economic model.

This paper gives an inventory, analysis and conclusions based on the collected data. First I explain the present situation and history of the Ngobe people (sections 1-2), followed by a study of their spirituality and cosmology (section 3) and contributions to sustainable development (sections 3-4). Finally I analyse indigenous spirituality and sustainable development in the policy of the Inter-American Development Bank.

Present situation of the Ngobe people

The Ngobe people, formerly known as the *Guaymí* and *Ngawbere*, is the largest indigenous group in Panama living in the Veraguas, Chiriquí and Bocas del Toro provinces and in the Ngobe-Buglé *comarca*. This *comarca* was founded in 1997 in the western part of the Republic of Panama and at present has about 169.000 inhabitants, that is 60% of the indigenous population of the country (2000 census).⁴ Together with the Kuna, Emberá, Buglé, Wuaman, Naso and Bri-Bri, indigenous people constitute 10% of the total population of the country.

⁴ A *Comarca* is a semi-autonomous territory, in which a semi-autonomous socio-political organisation permits indigenous people to maintain their traditional way of life. The Panamanian *comarcas* have the status of provinces and cannot be compared with USA-style 'reservations'. The Ngobe, called *Guymis*, also live in Costa Rica near the Panamanian border.

The Ngobe-Buglé *comarca* is a territory comprising 6 989 km² and is administered by two systems of government. Formally the supreme authority is the general congress, followed by regional and local congresses. Parallel to this, the region is organised politically according to the structures of a Panamanian province under the authority of a provincial governor, together with representatives of groups of judges, mayors and councillors. Decision making is subject to continuous comparison between national and regional laws, which results in frequent tensions in local government.

The Ngobe population is remarkably youthful, 51% comprising children in the 0 to 14 years age group. The common form of organisation is patrilinear. They practise polygamy and symmetrical or sororal interchange is preferred, that is to say, men allow their brothers to marry their wives' sisters, while wives allow their brothers to marry their husbands' sisters (Young 1993b). This makes relations between two families closer. They also observe the levirate system: when a husband dies, his widow is inherited by one or more of his brothers or close relatives. Polygamy is regulated by the husband's labour capacity, which can secure him up to three wives. Marriages are traditionally arranged by the parents and in many cases there are childhood engagements. In that case the child remains with its parents until it reaches marriageable age. Divorce is known and as many men as women take the initiative. Families live in small villages and land is not inherited or distributed to individuals or single households, but stays in the hands of the whole family. The right to cultivate land is inherited by the male line, so when women marry they move to the husband's village. In cases where the husband does not have land, the father-in-law builds him a house near his own. Research by Reina Torres de Araúz (1999) shows that in that case the father-in-law benefits from the work of his own daughter and a new temporary labour force. The young husband will move to his own house as soon as he can. Traditionally men live bi-locally and change their place of abode according to their needs or harvests (Young 1993a). Bi-locality also takes the form of temporary migration as a result of labour on banana or coffee plantations or in horticulture in distant regions

Women in Ngobe communities occupy an asymmetrical position in relation to men. Traditionally they take care of domestic tasks and men monopolise relations with the outside world. My personal observations in the Kankintú region, the highlands of Chiriquí and San Lorenzo are that nowadays men still force their wives to isolate themselves from *sulias* (aliens). Oppression of women is evident to outsiders when people move from one place to another: women carry the heaviest loads in bags called *chácaras*, whereas the husbands walk in front of them, often carrying only a machete. The explanation given for this is that the man does not carry a load because he must be alert to attacks from wild animals. However, the same practice is also observed in towns and on paths free from these threats, which does not explain why the man does not

help with the loads. It should be noted, however, that in Ngobe tradition males' primary responsibility is to defend women and children in situations of danger. For example, when a boat is stuck on a sand bank at sea or on stones in a river it is the men that jump into the water and push the boat, whereas the women (*meris*) remain seated. Finally, female participation in the organisation of the *Comarca*, like women's level of schooling, is low in comparison with men. Luckily this situation is beginning to change through female contributions to the household economy, which is gradually increasing in the region. The outlook for the future is positive, affirms Bolívar Jaén, director of the National Institute of Professional Formation and Qualification for Human Development: Ngobe women "not only are fast to acquire knowledge, but do not have any difficulty at the time of learning tasks that by tradition have been masculine" (*La Prensa* 08.03.07). Migdalia Rodríguez, coordinator of the Training Centre of Panamanian Social Action (Ceaspa) corroborates this: "Our women are intelligent, good administrators, people in charge and they only hope to receive an opportunity to develop their abilities" (*La Prensa* 08.03.07).

Living standards are deplorable in the indigenous Ngobe areas, which have the highest levels of poverty in the country. Of the natives of the Ngobe-Buglé region, 93% earn an income below the price of the familial basic basket, whereas in urban zones the percentage is much lower at 11,1%; a Ngobe has a monthly income of \$60.00, whereas people in urban zones earn \$535,00.⁵ A Pan American Health Organization study in 2007 affirms that 60% of native Panamanians do not have access to health services and half the infantile population suffers from chronic under-nourishment (Pan American Health Organization 2007).

What explains such poverty in a country with one of the best economies in Latin America? One answer relates to the Ngobe social system, which is based on a network of remote, small communities. The wide dispersion of small villages does not allow government to provide adequate schooling and health services. Although government has constructed a network of educational and health centres, many Ngobe have to travel great distances (sometimes taking days) to the nearest health facility. Besides, according to Moreno (2007), the therapy offered is not popular, because it does not harmonise with their own natural medicine or their cosmology.

5 The familial basic basket is a metric unit used to calculate the monthly cost of basic food for a family of four. In September 2008 it was calculated at \$260.00. This means that the average indigenous family only has \$2.00 of the \$8.70 needed to cover their basic food needs. This calculation does not allow for inputs from subsistence agriculture, which would count as secondary sources of food. In any case the prices of manufactured foods are higher in indigenous zones than in urban zones. Cf. Ministerio de Economía y Finanzas de Panamá and Instituto de Nutrición de Centroamérica y Panamá.

Illiteracy in the Ngobe-Buglé region is as high as 45,9%, whereas the national average is 7% (one of the lowest of *Abya Yala*) and in urban zones it drops to 2,6%. Schools have a high dropout rate. Curricula are national and have not been restructured to accommodate the Ngobe language, local possibilities, traditions and expectations. In addition the 1975 and 1995 plans for bilingual or intercultural education (Montalván 1998) have not been realised, resulting in assimilation into the Spanish-speaking culture. For example, many adolescents communicate in *Ngobere* with their parents and adults and speak Spanish to other young people. This means that the educated population loses part of its indigenous language.

Present problems and challenges

More than ten years after the attainment of their own *Comarca* the Ngobe people encounter formidable obstacles to autonomy in fields ranging from production, nutrition and education to social organisation. Participation in decision making on earth-keeping is also severely restricted. In addition they have few physical and human resources to participate in the national economy and suffer unfair competition as a result of a dual production system – one for subsistence and another for the market economy and agro-export.

In a large part of the region the Ngobe are isolated because of deficient access roads. There are communities that travel up to five days to reach the nearest city. The government, NGOs and church institutions help to solve some of these problems. For example, in the Kankintú region we found Augustinian missionaries engaged in the construction of roads, canals and small bridges with financial aid from the Panamanian government and Spanish NGOs. Child feeding schemes have been introduced in school dining rooms and government has initiated a programme of bonus delivery that Panamanian indigenous groups can exchange for food. In 2008 the government launched the Network of Opportunities programme, giving a subsidy of \$50.00 per family to compensate for food shortages.

In recent decades the mineral veins of copper and gold in the Ngobe territory have become depleted. As mining is considered vital for the national economy, the Panamanian state disposes over the rights to that land. Natives are excluded from the negotiation tables and government does not clarify how the mining operations will benefit Ngobe communities. Consequently the state sells concessions to companies that expel the natives from their land and cause serious ecological damage, such as deforestation and water pollution. The same applies to hydroelectric and tourist projects operating in the region and areas inhabited by natives.

Many communities have identified these projects with the robbery and despoliation perpetrated by the Spaniards for 500 years. The Ngobe understand that unless they organise to defend their land, the *comarca* will become a farce.

In this context it must be emphasised that in their struggle to preserve their land the Ngobe are receiving increasing support from national and international environmentalist groups. In recent years the struggle for their land has generated consciousness of belonging to a people, thus strengthening the Ngobe's sense of identity and self-esteem.

A final challenge is the declaration of many indigenous areas as environmental protection zones. Consequently the National Authority of the Ambience (Anam) prohibits fishing, hunting, necessary tree felling for the construction of houses and boats, and cultivation of their traditional land. Anam, a government institution, is unaware that Indians over generations have ensured the sustainable protection of fauna and flora.

The government uses two measures, because it still applies a logic that prioritises plans considered to promote national progress over local aspirations. This is true of the La Pava hydroelectric station, for example, located in an environmental protection zone where Anam allows large-scale devastation and flooding of virgin forests.

History

In pre-Columbian times – before the arrival of the Spaniards – the Ngobe people occupied the western region of the Panama isthmus, inhabiting the Pacific and Caribbean coasts. In the republican era (since 1903) their territory has consisted of the provinces of Coclé, Veraguas, Chiriquí and Bocas del Toro. Archaeological investigations indicate that they relied on three basic activities: fishing, hunting and small-scale agriculture, combined with harvesting of bulbs and fruits. The familial structure was polygamous and the Ngobe lived in small villages, comprising five households and working on the family land. The villages were isolated from each other and there was no vestige of cities, which meant that organisation was local (Yung 1993:12-15). If there was any kind of feudal organisation, it would not have counted for much in the small villages. Young (1971) and Bort and Young (1982:2) characterise Ngobe social organisation as segmental, headless (*acéfala*), that is to say, without a clear form of leadership and with little possibility to influence other groups. Their relations were localised, based on kinship and social connections with other families through marriage ceremonies and rituals.

Findings by Bort and Young on the relative lack of Ngobe organisation reflect consensus among anthropologists and other researchers. However, stories collected by Roger Séptimo, the first Ngobe to publish and interpret narrations of his group, tells about tensions and fighting before the arrival of the Spaniards: “Long before the arrival of the Spaniards to our isthmus, the Guaymí maintained an arduous and almost permanent fight on this over their

land” (Séptimo & Joly 1986:44). They also fought for control and power over other tribes (Séptimo & Joly 1986:68-78). This implies that Ngobe tribes maintained an organisation for combat or self-defence that necessarily required support from their villages. This kind of mobilisation of warriors also features as a pre- and post-Columbian organisation against attacks by the Moskito Indians (Séptimo & Joly 1986:72-78). From the stories collected by Séptimo it appears that these military organisations were led by *sukias* (spiritual leaders). Séptimo’s stories suggest that anthropological theories on Ngobe leadership in the pre-Columbian era need further study, using oral Ngobe sources.

Colonial history

The invasion of Panama by the Spanish empire happened in stages, starting in 1501 during Christopher Columbus’s second voyage to the Caribbean coast of Bocas del Toro and Kuna Yala. We distinguish the first stage of the European invasion from the arrival of Vasco Núñez de Balboa in the South Sea (later Pacific Ocean) in 1513, whereafter the isthmus of Panama gained importance as a provisioning station and a port for new expeditions of conquest, and later as a zone of trade in gold, silver, slaves and manufactured goods from the old world.

The foundation of Natá de los Caballeros in the central part of Panama’s Pacific coast in 1550 marks a second phase in preparation for invasions and despoliation of the goods and territories of indigenous people. In particular the Spaniards were attracted by the auriferous veins in the region of Coclé and Veraguas. Along with mining came the hunting of indigenous Ngobe and their enslavement to do the heavy and dangerous work. According to a chronicle of the Jesuit Juan Velasco (1727-1792) a large percentage of Ngobe was killed in forced labour in the mines. The Ngobe resisted and there were wars and uprisings against their captivity and exploitation. The Spaniards reacted with a strategy of forcing them to live and work in *reducciones* (coastal land and strategic places in the Pacific zone), and so gradually managed to penetrate Ngobe territory. Once the mines of Santa Fe de Veraguas (1589) were depleted, a second colonising stage began. The Spaniards considered stock farming (cattle ranching) a new economic opportunity and thus invaded the rich land of Chiriquí (Sarsanedas 1977:11-16).

The third phase of invasion and colonisation took place after independence from Spain and union with Colombia (1821) with the arrival of new European settlers (German, French, Swiss), who were looking for suitable soil for coffee plantations in the volcanic valleys of Chiriquí. During this period (1892) American businessmen of the Znyder Brothers Banana Company also established the first banana plantations on the Atlantic coast.

On the Atlantic coast there was far less settler penetration. The forests of the Bocas del Toro region are dense, with few plains and a very humid climate. On

the coastline and islands thick mangrove forests abounded that were used as hideouts by pirates and buccaneers. The British took advantage of the small Spanish presence in the area to pursue a clandestine trade. However, none of these groups founded a colony of real importance. The Ngobe lived in dispersed villages on the islands and coastline of Bocas del Toro. From the 16th century onwards Mosquito Indians – also known as *Miskitos* – from Nicaragua intensified their incursions into the Atlantic zone to sack and destroy the small Ngobe villages and emerging Spanish settlements. Supported by British arms, the Miskitos dominated the bays of Bocas del Toro, to such an extent that that it became known as the Mosquito Coast and indigenous Ngobe, Bri-Bri and Teribes were forced to pay tribute to their king. The Miskitos used the area as a source of raw materials such as hawksbill (tortoise shell), fine woods and indigenous slaves to trade with the British. The Ngobe took refuge in the mountains, using mainly the Cricamola river as an escape route.

Repeated incursions by Miskito Indians prevented the Ngobe from returning to the coastal areas and Caribbean islands. According to Marin Araya (2004) black immigrants from San Andrés, Barbados and Corn Island settled on the deserted Bastimentos Island (called by the British Provision Island) from the 19th century onwards. Also through the British presence in this area Caribbean slaves of African origin were introduced and traded for those of British islands, especially Jamaica.

Once in the mountains the Ngobe dispersed and lost much of their medicinal and agricultural knowledge and techniques of ceramic and textile processing.

Once stripped of its richest territories by the natives of the Pacific and Atlantic slopes, the Ngobe were forced to live in the mountains on infertile land, constantly washed away by heavy rainfall. They did not possess sufficient agricultural knowledge to survive on such soil. Hunger, misery and labour shortages became a constant factor, especially for those living on the Pacific slopes, the more colonised part of the country. Even now the main economic activities in Chiriquí, Bocas del Toro and Veraguas are cattle ranching and coffee and banana production introduced by the colonists. Ironically, the Ngobe have returned to their ancient and fertile land as labour (manpower) with the lowest wages in the country and little labour law protection.

The history of the Ngobe people is very different from that of the Kuna on the north Atlantic in Panama. Because of their organisational ability the Kuna, unlike the Ngobe, could withstand the European invasions from the beginning, not by hiding in the jungle but by guarding their territories in Darién and Abya Yala. They made alliances with British pirates to defend themselves against the Spanish and made alliances with French and Scottish settlers to assure the transitory character of their presence in Darién. With the founding of Panama City in 1519 the Spanish colonists moved into the Pacific area. According to Linares (1987) the abandonment of the Darién area made it possible for the

Kuna to regain their territories and prevented the Spaniards from returning for decades. Like the Ngobe, the Kuna were the target of the *reducciones* system supported by Catholic missions, with the difference that the Kuna were able to expel the missionaries from their territories. After a history of failures the Spanish crown arranged to leave the forts and colonising companies of Darién in 1789 (Silva Prada 2004). From then on foreigners could enter only with the permission of the local people. Later, in 1925, the Kuna rose again to confront the attempts of farmers and transnational companies to locate in their territories. Finally, in 1938 with the establishment of the district of San Blas (the first Panamanian *comarca*, later called *Kuna Yala*), the Panamanian government recognised the autonomy of their territory.

Republican history

Between the 1930s and the 1960s the Ngobe were caught up in radical social and production transformation processes. During that period they had to face up to the limits of their traditional agriculture on poor soils, increasingly obvious as their own population grew. Data collected by Bort and Young (1985) and Linares (1987:30) show that in the 1930s it grew by about 27.000, in the 1950s by 43.000 and in the 1970s by about 54.000. All this growth had its impact on the environment and community development. As a result the rivers became contaminated with human waste and land use increased, causing over-grazing, erosion, soil exhaustion and food shortages. Wildlife, once a traditional protein source, began to disappear. Amerindians, especially in the regions of Chiriquí and Veraguas, have been forced to remain on soil not suitable for subsistence agriculture, let alone for commercial farming.

Traditionally the Ngobe economy was based on family production and exchange and donation of surpluses. Since the Spanish colonisation the Ngobe have lived in a closed community, which refused all contact with urban societies. With the crisis in food production the men were forced to leave their homes temporarily to seek new sources of income through agricultural work in society outside. Thus they gradually entered the money economy and introduced new customs and consumer goods into their communities. Studies of this period show that until the 1960s the Ngobe did not fully grasp the meaning of money (Bourgeois 1988:332).

Since 1968 the military government of general Omar Torrijos Herrera of the populist line developed a strategy to assimilate Panamanian Amerindians into the national economy and politics. Various communities are favoured with the construction of new roads, plans for education and health, public telephones, electricity and advice on agricultural production. However, this development is driven by the logic of so-called national progress, which has two major disadvantages. Its scope remains minimal, because it fails to incorporate the

majority of natives. In addition the Amerindian way of life is not considered a frame of reference for development projects.

One could ask why the Torrijos regime ignored the indigenous point of view, so crucial to its development policy. A detailed study shows that Torrijos's strategic mistakes do not derive solely from his populist ideology but from another ideology rooted in the very genesis of the present Republic of Panama. In her study Horton (2006) examines the background to the policy of national progress. It appears that from the start of the republican era (1903) Panamanian politics was marked by nationalist projects of racial and ethnic homogenisation. Hence governments of the elite of the country designed plans for assimilation into the national culture aimed at homogenising the nation through the exclusion of Afro-Panamanians and Amerindians. Both groups were expected to copy the patterns of the socio-cultural and linguistic *mestizo* group in the interior. The latter was considered to be the bearers of Hispanic culture and identity as a prototype for Panamanians. This monocultural model was based on profound racism, which even led to the so-called policy of *emblancamiento* ('hispanisation'), in line with countries such as Brazil, the French Antilles and the Central American republics.

The dictatorial Torrijos government, however, sought broad popular legitimacy and thus opened up political space for the promotion of indigenous organisations. Of great importance was the 1972 constitution, which proposed the promotion of indigenous participation in various fields of national life. Horton (2006:838) argues that with this new political approach the military elite introduced a new multicultural logic – a 'corporativistic' tendency – to consolidate its power. That is, while recognising indigenous rights and otherness, the political and economic decisions in the country were taken by a group that afterwards sought the support of the indigenous people. The Cerro Colorado mine project in the mountains of eastern Chiriquí is the best example of this policy: the Torrijist government launched a project and then wanted to impose it at all costs, to the extent of promising the Ngobe a *comarca* if they accepted it. The Ngobe successfully rejected this project with the support of civic and political organisations, especially the Catholic Church of Panama.

Christianity

A historical review must include an outline of the historical role of the Catholic Church. In his study of evangelisation in the Ngobe territories Sarsanedas argues that the Catholic Church and its missionaries were decisive in the conquest of the land. At the same time he points out that it played an ambivalent role. On the one hand evangelisation went hand in hand with colonisation: Christianising meant recruiting vassals for the crown. On the other hand missionaries defended the rights of Amerindians (Sarsanedas 1977:23-37). Consequently the Spanish government asked the church to attract

indigenous refugees in the mountains ‘through the Gospel’ to move to the closed areas, the *reducciones*. Here they were evangelised and forced by the *encomenderos* to do hard labour. According to Torres de Araúz (1972:33) the Ngobe in the *reducciones* – being the majority – absorbed Amerindians such as the *Doraces*, *Changuénas* (both now extinct) and *Bri-Bri*. For a report on the situation of the Ngobe people during the colonial era we have the testimony of bishop Antonio de Calderon based on his visit to Veraguas (Panama) in 1604:

“If the bishop of Chiapas [Bartolomé de las Casa] were alive now, he may have written another book. He was hurt to see how they were exploited by the Spaniards, who have changed into true mules without addressing their more human needs (...) He would accuse the commissioners of the administration of the Royal Audience of remissness in dealing with these problems and a lack of concern about implementing the actual ordinances for the betterment of the Aboriginal population” (Dussel 1996:174).

Evangelism in the Ngobe area cost much time and effort and from the 17th century onwards the church began to lose interest.

In the early 20th century the church resumed evangelisation and founded the dioceses of David and Veraguas and the Apostolic Prelature of Bocas del Toro (Castillo Guerra). At first the parishes were served by missionaries from Spain, the USA and Italy. In general pastoral care in indigenous areas has been innovated following the impulses generated by Vatican II and the Medellín Conference of Latin American Bishops. Lay leadership has been pivotal in the pastoral care of Amerindians, working in networks of catechists and proclaiming the word. Indigenous pastoral work did not generate indigenous priests among the Ngobe and there were few local priests who decided to work among Amerindians.

The Panamanian Episcopal Conference has a bishop in charge of the representation of indigenous people, a National Coordinating Committee of Indigenous Pastoral Work and a research centre for indigenous themes (*Acción Cultural Ngöbe*). Since 1981 national meetings have been held regularly, dedicated to the theme of mission and Christianity in the Panamanian indigenous perspective. The encounters discussed vital projects for communities. By way of illustration, the first meeting in 1981 discussed Ngobe participation in the struggle for a *comarca* and the development of the Cerro Colorado mine project and Tabasará Teribe-Changuinola hydroelectric projects (Fernandez et al. 1993:17-18). Today these meetings discuss the consequences of neo-liberal projects (the Puebla-Panama plan) for Amerindian communities.

Panamanian pastoral workers have published a rich and valuable literature on myths, Christianity and theology from the Ngobe perspective. Today that material requires systematic reflection and presentation. Unfortunately it remains absent from sacerdotal training programmes in Panama. Instead monocultural theology is still privileged, which does not consider the Ngobe as

part of religious reality. Prospective Panamanian Catholic leaders do not learn any indigenous language during their training period. Thus there is a disparity between indigenous pastoral and theological training curricula.

In Bocas del Toro Protestant churches such as the Baptists and Methodists were introduced through the immigration of blacks from the west of England. Through missionary work and influence they are scattered in indigenous communities on banana plantations. In the mid-1970s Evangelical churches started their mission among Ngobe communities. Today they are numerous and have many temples. They work with local religious leaders and the missionaries destined for the area do courses to learn the Ngobe language.

Mama Chi: religious renewal

Mama Chi began as religious movement for renewal of social, cultural and political life in the early 1960s. It originated from visions and conversations that a Ngobe woman had with the Virgin Mary and Jesus Christ, who gave her advice to communicate to her people. Here are some examples from the compilation of prohibitions published by Quintero (1988:83-84).

“Stay apart from Latinos. Do not buy wire or zinc. Do not register children in the Civil Registry. Do not attend school. Do not marry Latinos (...)”

Other prohibitions have to do with custom and ritual celebrations:

“Do not hold the *Balsería*, *Chicherías* (...), do not marry without parental consent, (...) speak your own language, *Ngobere*.”

The religion of Mama Chi emerges as a reinterpretation of Ngobe religion using Christian elements. According to Quintero this is an indigenous religion, because both its theology and its worldview are indigenous. The religious rules arose in a context of Ngobe impoverishment after the people had been robbed of their land by cattle dealers in the Chiriquí region. They also suffered under various types of oppression on the banana and coffee plantations, where they were forced to look for work. Internally the Ngobe passed through a process of decay of their traditions and the religious and social leadership of their shamans (*sukias*).

Mama Chi has become a movement of social reactivation, proposing moral conduct and social projects that reinforce indigenous identity. For example, the prohibition of alcohol was meant to correct the conduct of workers on the banana and coffee plantations. These moral, cultural and religious reforms had a major impact on communities, particularly the prohibition of the rites of the *Chichería* and *Balsería*.

Mama Chi contributed to social structuring by incorporating a leadership based on democratically elected *caciques* in an attempt to restore the traditional culture. It strongly supported the struggle for a Ngobe *comarca*. Their religious leaders became social and pedagogic leaders who promoted the social, cultural and political autonomy of the Ngobe. According to Bort and Young (1985:8) Mama Chi helped the Ngobe to transcend their traditional patterns of family organisation and form a collective group. Thus through Mama Chi a new trans-territorial Ngobe identity was born and they began to perceive themselves as a people.

In education Mama Chi rejects the culture and education of *sulias* (Latinos and foreigners). As an alternative it introduced its own system of education in *Ngobere* and in the late 1970s they introduced their own writing system.

Although located in an inaccessible area without communications, this religion grew rapidly. Ngobe from different communities converged on the same places to work and so spread Mama Chi. In the 1960s the government identified them as a political movement. The military government of general Torrijos tried to use them to establish a political base among the Ngobe. After a boom period in its first twenty years the movement is showing signs of stagnation.

Concerning relations with other religions, on the whole the Catholic Church has no institutional links with Mama Chi. Nevertheless many members of Catholic communities attend Mama Chi ceremonies or live in the midst of them. The Evangelical churches and the Baha'i faith forbid their members to participate in the cult.

Spirituality and cosmology

Not many investigations have been conducted into the spirituality and worldview of the Ngobe people, but missionaries and social researchers, supported by the Catholic Church, have done pioneering research into Ngobe religion and traditions. In our study we highlight the work of Blas Quintero, director of the Cultural Action Ngobe research institute (Acun).

There are no findings indicating that the Ngobe ever developed a writing system. Their history and traditions have been transmitted orally. In particular the historical memory is conveyed by the *sukia*, who qualify after a long period of learning which begins in childhood. During this period they learn sacred songs known as *ka* and classical Ngobere, a language reserved for ritual use.

The Ngobe people have a rich oral tradition, as is apparent from the collections of Roger Séptimo (Séptimo & Joly 1986) and the *Equipo Misionero* (missionary team) of Kankintú (1998). Their stories tell about past events, as

well as explanations of the origin of the world, relations with God, spiritual forces, demons and rituals.

For the Ngobe there is a supreme being called *Ngöbö*, whom they perceive as a universal God, the creator of all that exists and present in human life. Quintero (1996) reproduces the sacred song “God of *toleros* gods” to illustrate Ngobe monotheism. The text of the hymn refers to the supreme God, above other gods that in Ngobe thought can well be understood as spirits. This sacred *ka* also tells about the attributes of *Ngöbö* and presents him as one that creates order and preserves, advises, loves and guides human beings.

In their creation stories the Ngobe recognise God as the one who established order on a dark earth, without life, sun, moon and air. Later *Ngöbö* created the human being, *gnöbe*, who bears his name. Human beings take care of creation and take from it the things necessary to live. They understand that creation was meant for the benefit and care of all. *Ngöbö* maintained close contact with the early Ngobe. He approached and even lived with them. In due course, when the Ngobe became numerous, they began to forget *Ngöbö*. This relates to the entrance of the evil into the world as a result of human disobedience. Since then *Ngöbö* has communicated with the Ngobe through the *sukias*.

The *sukias*, also known as *sugüüás*, are the keepers of oral tradition (Quintero:1996 and interview on July 2008) and spiritual intermediaries (Torres de Araúz 1999:324). They are chosen in childhood and receive a special education. As adults they live an isolated life in remote areas. Those who specialise as singers undergo a training period of seven years. *Sukia* songs have therapeutic properties and reflect hermeneutic ability, because they are chosen according to the needs (problems or solutions) of the community. The *sukia* are bilingual, as they use the Buglere language (of the Buglé people) in their rites. Specialists in song predominantly use classical Ngobere, now used only for ritual purposes. Quintero warns against confusing them with wizards, who display malignant powers. They have been empowered by *Ngöbö* to fight evil: they do not perform its destructive function but control it. Thus they use their knowledge to exorcise demons, cure diseases by means of botanical knowledge, foretell the future and interpret dreams. Reina Torres de Araúz (1999) mentions the existence of female *sukias*. It is the only information I found on women leadership in traditional Ngobe religion.

In the narrative of *Rogara Meto o Go*, collected by Séptimo (Séptimo & Joly 1986:92-96), the *sukia* played a political role in Ngobe history and headed insurrections against the Spanish colonists, who identified them as witches and persecuted them. Then the Ngobe protected them to prevent the *sukia* being jailed and killed.

According to Quintero (1996 and interview on July 2008) Ngobe cosmology distinguishes between three dimensions: the world of the living (*Ko Te*), heaven (*Ko Kwinbitdi*), and the sky and the other world (*Ko Nagebatdo*).

Spirits, the dead and evil beings inhabit *Ko Nagebatdo*. The spirits are divided into physical categories (spirits of the hills, spirits of waterfalls) and zoological categories (mystical malignant snakes). There are also spirits of darkness and demons that appear on roadways.

Finally, an important element in the Ngobe worldview is the number four. For them the number four represents totality, reflected in the construction of their houses, whose roofs are supported by four posts, the length of ritual holidays and the number of contenders in the *Balsería* (Young 1993c) (see next section). Their orientation system is also based on four cardinal points.

Rituals

The Ngobe have a rich ritual tradition, associated with farming (e.g. blessing of seeds), birth, male and female puberty, marriage and death. In this section we look at two rituals that extend beyond the confines of their small villages and thus act as social capital to reinforce group cohesion.

The *Chichería* or *Köboili* – its designation in Ngobere – is a ritual response to counterbalance the power of lightning. It strikes property, animals or people and through *chicha*, a fermented maize drink, nature is requested to help them withstand the power of lightning. According to Bletzer (1985:150), “The *Chichería* is a feast for the celebration of beauty represented in the processes and movements of nature, is a toast to nature which provides for the subsistence of the human being, and it requests that what is admirable in nature, may occur to the humans too.”

The key actor in the ceremony is called *mönkôn*, one who survived after being struck by lightning (Bletzer 1987:91, n.3). Bletzer’s research shows that in Ngobe tradition this person was chosen by the lightning and became a ‘crowned’, divinely selected candidate. The ceremony takes place at a spot where lightning has struck and members of different communities are invited to participate in the ritual celebration that lasts from one to four days, during which time consumption of large amounts of food and *chicha* is delayed. During the ceremony the *sukia* plays the main role of singer, intoning songs that are repeated by all participants alternately. The songs are in the Buglere or Murire language, derived from a common tradition with the neighbouring Buglé people. Another role played by the *sukia* is that of *Nui dui kûbûbui*, who leads the ceremony and communal *chicha* with his assistants (*dûroko*). The ritual is conducted in four stages: dances, drama, piercing of the right ear lobe and a closing ceremony. According to Bletzer (1987) the third part of the ritual (piercing the ear lobe) is private and exclusive to men and is analogous with lightning striking the earth. The blood mixes with the *chicha* consumed by those whose ears have been pierced, the crowned *mönkôn* and singers. The mixture of blood and *chicha* symbolises rain that fertilises the soil and also the blood that flows during hunts.

The *Balsería* (game of balsa wood), also known as *Krung* or *Krun*, is a key ritual in Ngobe tradition (Torres de Araúz 1999:104-131). It is a combination of sport, spiritual rituals and festive celebrations (Miranda Jiménez 1998). The key event is a sporting contest between two teams, one local, the other invited. The players paint geometric patterns on their faces and wear *chakira* necklaces, animal skins and hats adorned with *guacamaya* and *quetzal* feathers. In the game four members of each team face each other. They take balsa wood sticks and throw them at their opponents' legs at calf height with the aim of making them fall. The opponent tries to avoid the sticks by jumping over them or making lateral movements, and then have their turn to test their skill when they launch their sticks. The players participate under a ritual 'alias', not their own names, to avoid losing personal prestige in case of defeat. This could also suggest that the contest has been abstracted to a religious level. Once the game is over there are diverse competitions in which the public joins spontaneously. The games are accompanied by rituals in which men and women get drunk on *chicha*, a fermented maize drink. The ceremony lasts four days, with plenty of food and drink, songs and dances accompanied by indigenous musical instruments. Since it provides an opportunity to exchange goods, it also has the character of a fair.

For many Ngobe the *Balsería* is one of the few occasions when they leave their remote villages and meet members of other communities. It is also an occasion to look for a prospective marriage partner. Hence the ceremony creates social capital to strengthen links between different families, individuals and communities. It moreover generates cultural capital by transmitting and affirming cultural traditions and knowledge. According to Young (1993c:78) – supported by Max Gluckman's theories about rites of passage and social relationships – the ceremony creates ritual brotherhoods between the host and the main guest and constitutes a rite that “indicates or modifies the social relations by mystical ideas”. In particular the rite represents a kind of symbolic aggression (the hurling of the sticks) and a search for balance and harmony through the social relationships formed between the guest and the host.

Ngobe contributions to sustainable development

In the foregoing we provided an overview of the social, cultural, religious and historical context of the Ngobe. In this section we use the contextual data to analyse what the life and spirituality of the Ngobe mean for sustainable development, both for themselves and for other Panamanians. We draw on different theories and studies of social scientists and Catholic missionaries.

Deficiencies and potential

Socio-scientific studies show that the Ngobe people are severely impoverished and lack the wherewithal for basic subsistence. Poverty threatens present and future opportunities for progress. For these Amerindians it becomes a downward spiral that prevents them from improving their living conditions on many levels. The history of the Ngobe ascribes their poverty to expulsion from their territories, ethnocidal practices and imposed cultural assimilation. Over the past century great opportunities to create conditions for Ngobe participation in the economy and national politics were lost. *Desarrollista* (developmentalist) policies were unsuccessful, partly because their monocultural and hierarchical character left no scope for participation.

Ligia Herrera (s.a.:103) ascribes present-day indigenous poverty to geographical location characterised by dispersion, which generates structural poverty, unemployment and high transportation costs of goods to the outside world and the towns. In addition mobility and communication between communities are slow and difficult and it is too expensive for government to maintain health facilities and educational or cultural equality. According to Herrera poverty generated by dispersion has a heavy impact and causes the Ngobe to sell their land at low prices and migrate to urban centres or agricultural regions where, as is known, their living conditions will not improve.

Raúl Leis (2005), professor at the University of Panama, proposes studying the reality of Panamanian Amerindians from a dialectical point of view, recognising its advantages and disadvantages. First of all, one has to recognise the vulnerability that prevents them from developing the conditions necessary for life. Secondly, he suggests identifying the potential contribution of the Ngobe people to the sustainable development of their group and the country of Panama. For Leis the cardinal potential of the Ngobe lies in their own population, because they have built a history of survival in the face of all kinds of persecution. This human characteristic means that they can be mobilised in educational and labour projects at a time that is propitious for identity affirmation and participation in their own development.

Another advantage for the Ngobe people is their *comarca*. This new reality (since 1997) should be seen as a great historical opportunity for a development model in their own perspective. This analytical approach can also be used to protect Ngobe living in territories outside the *comarca*, which are endangered by national projects or have been declared environmental protection zones.

The social and family mutual aid networks are another special potential of the Ngobe people. Despite geographical distances the Ngobe, like other Panamanian Amerindians, have great communication skills inside and outside their communities. Statistical data reflect that 85% of them are affiliated to some kind of association and are, therefore, the most highly organised sector in

the country; 67% of Ngobe have done voluntary work for the benefit of their community (construction of roads, bridges, aqueducts, etc.). According to Leis these networks provide social capital that can be used for better articulation of common goals and to put indigenous demands on the political agenda of Panama.

Finally, the culture and identity of the Ngobe have great potential for community development. Leis (2005:125) writes: "Culture and identity are not barriers to human development, quite the opposite, because they are based on imaginary values that articulate keys factors like sustainability, communitarian organization and history."

To resume my analysis of the many historically entrenched causes of poverty in the population, besides the historical and socio-economic factors there are also geographic factors like poor soil and isolation. However, the literature that I consulted did not contain any critical analysis of poverty in relation to the dynamics or behaviour of the Ngobe group. It should be noted that by not including the endogenous factor in the analysis of the causes of poverty researchers ignore an essential means of strengthening the communities and the economy.

Leis's work is noteworthy, because he places Amerindian reality in a dynamic framework that helps us to identify key resources for sustainable development. His analytical perspective differs from hierarchical (top-down) approaches and monocultural expositions, which propose development plans based on a logic of superimposition. Leis, by contrast, proposes a horizontal, intercultural approach, partly because it proceeds from values and resources that are already within the Ngobe's reach. Yet his contribution has its limitations. Like other researchers, he recognises the importance of the Ngobe cosmo-vision for their development. Indeed, his lengthy article starts with a Ngobe creation story. But in his conclusions he does not return to the subject of the spirituality and confines himself to marginal notes on socio-political and economic factors.

Unlike the social researchers, documents and interviews with missionaries in Ngobe areas offer a critical perspective that does pay attention to internal factors conducive to poverty. We also found reflections on Ngobe spirituality and its relevance to sustainable development of the communities and the country.

Referring to internal causes of poverty in Ngobe communities, the missionaries recognise the importance of self-criticism to understand the current situation of indigenous people:

"The Ngobe, Buglé and Naso people live negative realities due to lack of many things. Why? 'The others have the fault' (we say), and never say that part is our fault. Let's assume the part of fault that corresponds to us (...)" (González & Endara 2003:47).

Secondly, missionaries make their critical analyses in an ethical perspective and qualify specifically Ngobe features that create poverty and marginalisation as ‘expressions of death’: alcoholism and *politiquera* (political manipulation of social life), which divides communities and leads to ignorance of natural medicine (Ganuza et al. 2000:9).

Other internal threats identified by missionaries and Christian Ngobe leaders are that evangelical groups, because of their sectarian nature, “damage the integrity of the people and sow division, condemn (*anatemizan*) expressions of our culture as diabolical” (González & Endara 2003:69). *Politiquería* is not only divisive but also corrupts political leaders, who pursue their own personal interests. According to Augustine José Tomás González (missionary in Kankintú region, interviewed in June and July 2008) corruption of political leaders is a major reason for slow development of the Ngobe region: without leaders “the people run out of tendons and turn into beggars”.

Given their concern about culture, language and traditions, missionaries accompany their development proposals with themes from Ngobe mythology and spirituality. González epitomises Ngobe spirituality as a balancing act:

*At the outset the earth shook without balance
and when God placed Ngobe at its centre
the earth and the world found their balance.
For this reason God, human beings and the world
constitute a cosmic unity.*

This spirituality is a wellspring of fresh water that the Ngobe offer to the world. It constitutes a cosmological balance that nowadays is kept in *tinajas* (earthen jars) to refresh all people.

González’s metaphor of water that refreshes all people pertains to the previously outlined Ngobe vision of sustainable development. On the basis of rituals like *Chicha* and *Balsería*, their veneration of natural resources and conservation of flora and fauna, we believe that the Ngobe have a holistic vision of conservation. In this view the sustainability of nature is not confined to care needed to preserve resources for future generations. It is expressive of a proper relationship between human beings.

Considering this holistic vision of sustainable development, we would argue that material poverty has prevented the Ngobe from consistently adhering to their traditions or symbolic universe and has forced them to prioritise mere survival. The land issue is particularly crucial, as is evident from the following two points.

First, government development plans have resulted in a huge imbalance between population and food production: birth rates have risen but investment in increased food production and new economic activities has been ineffectual.

Nowadays many Ngobe cause soil erosion because of the inarable land where they are forced to live, and those with any schooling stay in the cities because of lack of opportunities at home.

Second, because of large projects for the benefit of the national economy the Ngobe continue to lose their territories and are confronted with a neo-liberal vision and practice totally at odds with their cosmology of a balance between nature and humans.

In view of the constraints that prevent the Ngobe from applying their vision of development to their present way of life, I propose a two-pronged hypothetical approach: creating the elementary conditions to realise their own vision of development, and making it possible for the rest of Panama to benefit from it. It is questionable whether development projects can articulate the developmental visions of the Ngobe people that we explore in the next section.

Indigenous spirituality and sustainable development in the policy of the Inter-American Development Bank

In this final section I present findings from a major study of the reception and implementation of indigenous spirituality in the development policy of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). I confine myself to a summary and some key conclusions.

Why focus on the IDB and not another development institution or agency? After the World Bank and the PNUDEL, followed by the European Union and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the IDB is the biggest source of external funding in Panama. This banking institution dedicated US\$870,000.000 to financing development projects for the period 2005-2009 and supports more work areas than any other international cooperation agency in Panama. The policy document *Strategy of the IDB for Panama* includes projects in Ngobe territories in a national programme to “support sustainable economic growth and poverty reduction” (IDB 2005b: Executive Summary). The bank describes the concentration of poverty in indigenous areas as ‘alarming’ and makes brief recommendations for the inclusion of specific projects to reduce poverty in indigenous communities by 10%. As will be seen below, the IDB is more than a bank or a financial institution. It has promoted the neo-liberal economic model and has been the target of several protests by Amerindian groups in Panama and elsewhere in *Abya Yala*.

As mentioned in the introduction, I analyse IDB policy with the aid of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). CDA is an analytical method introduced by Norman Fairclough in the mid-1980s, mainly in his book *Language and power* (1989). CDA went through a long gestation process influenced by Antonio

Gramsci, the Frankfurt School, Michel Foucault, Pierre Bourdieu and others. It originated from theories on the construction of social reality, social language and practices.

In CDA discourse is interpreted as a social practice, in which (knowledge of) social reality or ‘social life’ is constructed to the exclusion of other interpretations. In the case of, for example, identity – a key category in this research – CDA assumes that identity arises from the power of discourse to shape the content of this concept by creating, defining and regulating identities. By virtue of its power to exclude other identities discourse thus stipulates what an identity can be. It creates both the objects (opinion/meaning) that it deals with and the corresponding subjects. Identity is also linked with individuals’ ability to make use of discursive images (of meaning). Images are of a temporary nature and contextual.

According to Teun A. van Dijk (2004:8) CDA helps to examine dominant groups and institutions and the perpetuation of social asymmetries through discourse. Following Ruth Wodak, CDA considers discourse to be discursive practices that can help to produce and reproduce asymmetrical relations in society. For that reason she proposes analysing discourse from the angles of ideology, power, hierarchy and gender (Wodak 2002:6).

Hence we investigate the discourse used by the IDB for the development of indigenous peoples as a discursive practice that produces social constructions and representations that affect public, social and mental spaces (Van Dijk 2004). The text of the discourse is produced with the explicit aim of projecting a picture of social reality that presents knowledge, norms, values and ideologies as commonly shared values. The contents of the speeches are studied in terms of institutions’ capacity to produce and obtain powers of domination that they exercise through persuasion, culminating in internalisation of the propagated ideology. According to Wodak (2002:10) discursive content propagated by power institutions is not simply a proposal, because it constitutes “symbolic violence”. A final advantage of CDA is its critical aspect (Van Dijk 2001; Schiffrin 2001:352).

Our analysis focuses on the document *Strategy for the indigenous development* issued by the IDB’s Department of Sustainable Development, Unit of Indigenous Peoples and Communitarian Development (IDB 2006a). The goal of this document is

“to guide the programming and execution of Bank activities and operations by developing lines of action and specific modalities in order to: (i) support national governments and indigenous peoples in promoting *development with identity* and the capacity for governance and institutional articulation of indigenous peoples; and (ii) avoid or mitigate the adverse impacts that Bank operations might have on indigenous peoples and their rights” (5.1).

I describe my research results in three methodological steps. The first examines the production of the text and its reproduction of reality. The second analyses the discursive and inter-*discursive* practice. In the third step I examine the social practice.

Analysis of the production of the text and the reproduction of the reality

The goal of this first step is to analyse the way discourse produces opinion. To this end I study the context in which speech occurs, its approach to reality and linguistic characteristics.

Production of the text

In 2004 to 2005 the IDB conducted a consultation process, involving meetings attended by over 1 680 delegates from NGOs, government, aid agencies and, in most cases, indigenous organisations (IDB 2005a:I). The meetings were accompanied by electronic consultation and set up an Indigenous Advisory Committee to support the IDB. Its members were proposed by indigenous organisations and selected according to criteria such as geographic representation and gender. The final document (2005a) details the course of the consultative rounds and summarises fourteen topics relating to indigenous development.

It should be emphasised that the consultation document, despite its explicit relationship with indigenous delegates, makes no specific reference to spirituality. The terms 'holistic education' and 'worldview' appear briefly in glosses to the text on increased access to and quality of social services (Annexure I, D). The document *Strategy for indigenous development* (IDB 2006a) was then published, incorporating recommendations from the consultative rounds. The implementation of the new development policy is outlined in the documents *Operational policy on indigenous peoples and strategy for indigenous development* (IDB 2006b) and *Operating guidelines indigenous peoples' policy (IPP)* (IDB 2006c). Finally, in this review of the production of the text we want to emphasise that the IDB did not submit the final documents to representatives of indigenous peoples.

Studies of social constructions of reality

In this second step I analyse the descriptions of context to come to grips with my research subject, namely the role of spirituality in the discourse of the IDB. I start by examining the discourse on social reality on the basis of four aspects: social reality, followed by identity, development and spirituality.

Social reality

My analysis shows that the diagnosis was based on problems relating to the history and present situation of indigenous peoples. Except for the issue of

women, which refers to the Summit of Indigenous Women in Oaxaca in 2002, there are no references to documents recording indigenous organisations' interpretation of their own reality and problems. Since the start of the new century political pressure has grown and indigenous groups demand that national governments pay attention to their difficulties and respect their civil, cultural and political rights. However, the document devotes only one paragraph to these protests or campaigns (IDB 2006a:1.2). Neither does it consider violations of indigenous peoples' rights in the context of infra-structural projects (roads), economics (mining and tourism) or energy (hydro-electric dams) funded or recommended by the IDB.

This diagnosis notes a number of current problems without considering their origin. Acknowledged 'diseases' are formulated in objectivist language, representing them in a depersonalised form, exempt from individual or institutional responsibility. Despite the round of consultations with indigenous participants (2005a) the discourse excludes their voices and those of support groups that challenge the IDB's neo-liberal economic development policy. For example, it fails to mention those who request it to stop its support for projects (hydropower, mining, roads, etc.) that lead to military and police occupation of indigenous areas and environmental deterioration whilst offering no benefits to those affected.⁶

Identity

The discourse recognises that in the past three decades the indigenous peoples have defended their identity and accordingly the IDB accepts it as a "resource for the economic and social development". It is not recognised, however, that the political space won by indigenous peoples is the result of a struggle against the economic and social policies of nation-states designed by financial institutions like the World Bank and the IDB. The historical oppression and the present process of indigenous emancipation are reviewed cursorily to substantiate a new development policy: "development with identity". This, then, is a kind of inaugural discourse that for the first time formulates the need to attune IDB policy to the expectations of indigenous peoples. It is a novel discourse, because it professes to be the product of a valuation of cultural, ethical and spiritual elements relating to the indigenous cosmology (IDB 2006a:2.5-2.6).

6 Cf. Manifiesto anti-American Development Bank, signed by about 1 500 individuals representing various organisations and social sectors in fifteen countries in Central America, the Caribbean and Europe (including Caritas and Oxfam), signed in Honduras during the Meso-American Forum against Dams II, "Por el agua y la vida de los pueblos" (For water and life of people), the Third Week of Cultural and Biological Diversity and the Fourth Mesoamerican Forum for Self-determination and Resistance of Peoples, July 2003.

Sustainable development

The term 'development' features in the document as a key concept in a strategy of development specifically for indigenous peoples. The IDB's concern to define development in the context of indigenous peoples stems from an evaluation of its own experiences dating to the 1980s. That is, the need for a new definition of development comes from within the institution and not from criticism levelled at it by numerous indigenous groups in *Abya Yala* or by failures of neo-liberal economics in indigenous areas. The IDB, therefore, wants to introduce new procedures to "to prevent, mitigate, or offset adverse impacts on indigenous communities" (IDB 2006a:4.1). As a result the bank has learnt lessons that lead it to define "a new generation of integrated local development projects that acknowledge the leadership role played by indigenous organizations and communities in project conceptualization, participatory planning, decentralized execution, and local capacity-building" (IDB 2006a:4.7).

This new developmental approach is called development with identity. Although the bank formulates its new policy according to an identity that links up with an early indigenous worldview, its approach to development remains economic (6.4). This is a pseudo-holistic approach, which maintains that the economy features in all sectors of indigenous peoples' lives: trade, labour, communication services, community development, law and jurisprudence, regulation of land ownership, intellectual and cultural heritage, tourism and biodiversity. Development, as is clear from this application, takes economic priority over identity, contrary to what is implied in the formulation of the binomial 'development with identity'.

Indigenous spirituality

Our analysis of the construction of social reality, based on the theme of indigenous spirituality, reveals that the IDB discourse operates with a strategy of argumentative persuasion to pave the way for a new development policy targeting economic sectors and political organisations. Spirituality is understood as the background to a worldview and culture that influence the development vision of indigenous peoples. It is a valuable element in maintaining the viability of a new generation of projects. This is an experimental assessment, because the IDB is not really convinced of the contribution spirituality makes to development projects (4.7).

Social practice

For reasons of space we do not present our analysis of discursive practice, that is research into the connections between subjects and discursive processes (transitivity), language strategies to increase the power of dominant groups and

institutions (type of modality) and different lines of argument (rhetorical structure). Instead we proceed to the social practice of discourse.

Drawing on CDA theory to analyse the impact on the discursive macro level, that is to say the level of institutional and social relationships, I investigate whether the discourse of the IDB responds to demands from the perspective of indigenous peoples.

Analysis of the impact of the discourse from its re-contextualisation

Our analysis deals especially with part VII of the strategy (IDB 2006a) entitled “Implementation activities” and documents on projects financed by the IDB in areas surrounding the Ngobe-Bugle. Our question focuses on how development practices incorporate the discourse features of identity and development, and how identity and indigenous spirituality are used in the operationalisation of the discourse.

The IDB document describes actions for practical implementation:

“This Strategy will be implemented through: (i) Bank mechanisms for dialogue with countries; (ii) country strategy preparation and negotiation processes, and, when relevant, Bank portfolio programming processes as needed; (iii) project identification, design, execution, monitoring, and evaluation processes (...)” (IDB 2006a:7.1).

It also provides for “training and awareness” among IDB officials, public servants, specialist agents and representatives of indigenous groups participating in IDB projects in order “to raise the level of awareness and sensitivity” of indigenous peoples (IDB 2006a:7.5). These three groups (government, specialists and indigenous people) are the main actors in development projects and are expected to have capabilities to enhance human relations. The point we want to emphasise is that it proposes to use cultural exchanges to improve relations between indigenous and non-indigenous people.

From this it is evident that the IDB is abandoning a development policy that is insensitive to indigenous groups. It is resolved to make the perspective and participation of indigenous groups part of its operational policy. The operationalisation discourse moreover implies the importance of spaces for dialogue and negotiation between different actors. These spaces are inter-cultural to allow for the specificity of indigenous peoples, their demands and needs (7.2-7.3).

The *Operating guidelines indigenous peoples policy (IPP)* (IDB 2006c) for the implementation of the strategy of development with identity in different countries states that the projects will be accompanied by a consultation process, which “must also be consistent with the legitimate decision-making mechanisms of affected indigenous peoples or groups” (IDB 2006c:2.34b).

Hence I conclude that the operationalisation discourse sets conditions to safeguard the rights of indigenous peoples and their participation in new development projects. However, these conditions are accompanied by other claims that limit them. The terms ‘affected’, ‘mitigation’ and ‘compensation’ are employed in a context which recognises the programming of projects that endanger the physical, territorial and cultural rights of indigenous communities. The bank maintains that when adverse situations arise, projects will only be financed if it can ascertain their socio-cultural viability (IDB 2006b: part IV), while measures will be taken to mitigate the adverse effects and to compensate the affected communities. But what does the IDB mean by these terms? They are not included in the definitions of the *Operational policy on indigenous peoples and strategy for indigenous development* (IDB 2006b). From a scrutiny of various IDB documents we clarified the meaning of these terms, mainly from the document *Involuntary resettlement in IDB Projects. Principles and guidelines* (IDB 1999:ii):

“Affected Population: People who are directly affected by project related activities through the loss of employment, housing, land or other assets.

Compensation: Money or payment in kind to which the affected people are entitled, as decreed by government regulations or laws.

Expropriation: The action of a government in taking or modifying the property rights of an individual in the exercise of its sovereignty.

Host Population: The community residing in or near the areas to which resettlers are to be moved.

Indemnification: The action of providing compensation for incurred hurt, loss or damage.

Mitigation: Compensation for losses incurred by affected communities as a result of a Bank-financed project.

Project Area: Areas in and adjacent to the construction areas and other areas to be modified by the project (e.g., impoundment of reservoirs, irrigation command areas, rights of way for urban infrastructure projects).

Vulnerable Groups: Distinct groups of people that may suffer disproportionately from project-related activities” (IDB 1999:ii).

The terms are defined in the context of ‘involuntary’ projects, ones not wanted by indigenous communities. Hence they suggest that the logic of imposition – the old development policy – retains its clout in the IDB’s new policy and creates dissonance and doubt about their intentions regarding development with identity, awareness of and sensitivity to indigenous peoples.

Let’s see how the old development policy continues to function in the Ngobe context. The document *Strategy for indigenous development* (2006a) stipulates that the IDB will promote and support initiatives to integrate regional trade with infrastructure as agreed in the Puebla-Panama Plan (7.2). But what are the aims of this plan and what are the implications for the Ngobe people?

The Puebla-Panama Plan, now known as the Mesoamerica Project, is an economic integration project launched in 2001 by former Mexican president Vicente Fox, which aims to expand free trade operations in an area stretching from Mexico to Colombia. Its key strategy is to launch large infrastructure projects. The benefits of these projects seem to accrue outside the borders of the participating countries due to increased energy demands from the USA.

In the case of Panama the Electricity Interconnection System for Central America programme, one of the major projects financed by the IDB, has led to dispossessing the Ngobe, Naso and Teribe of land needed for the construction of three hydroelectric plants. Their own authorities are opposed to these projects, because they encroach on the Ngobe-Bugle region and entail forcible expulsion of its inhabitants. The native habitat is reduced and the future extermination of fish will eliminate their traditional food source. Environmental groups have joined the protest because the proliferation of dams affects an area that has been declared a world heritage site by UNESCO. Groups that favour hydroelectric projects in their turn have mounted a smear campaign against indigenous groups and environmentalists. According to the campaign, indigenous and allied groups impede national development.

The negative effect of one of the three proposed dams (Bonyic) is so adverse that the IDB withdrew its financing in 2005. This is a symbolic gesture, because the Panamanian government found another source of finance and the energy generated in future will be included in the Electric Interconnection System that the IDB is financing. Companies from Colombia, the USA and Europe participate in the construction of the three projects with support from Panamanian authorities and World Bank funding. In many cases the government has played an ambiguous role and tries to present itself as a mediator between the responsible company and indigenous groups. As a result the government avoids dealings with opposition groups, thus causing direct confrontation between indigenous peoples and the construction company. The dams under construction are classic examples of monocultural policy that subordinates indigenous interests to so-called national interests or the exercise of state sovereignty.

In June 2009 the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights of the Organisation of American States asked the Panamanian government to suspend construction of the hydroelectric plants known as Chan 75 pending investigation and to take steps to prevent violation of the property rights and security of affected indigenous peoples. These comprise a support group of Ngobe, Teribe and Naso protesters and it becomes clear that the projects financed or supported indirectly by the IDB are not consistent with its announced strategy of development with identity.

It should be noted that the inclusion of indigenous issues in development projects has not yet been implemented in Panama. The Country strategy with

Panama (IDB 2005b) reduces indigenous peoples to a passive role without scope to participate in consultation processes or respect for their rights, identity and spirituality. The preparatory commission of the Panamanian country strategy did not advance the vision developed by the Department of Sustainable Development and Indigenous Peoples Unit Community of the IDB (2003, 2005a). It is a sad fact, because that strategy formulated the key points of development policy and the prerequisites for funding. This IDB strategy for Panama ended in 2009. The publication of a new strategy in 2010 will provide more criteria for analysing the re-contextualisation of the new discourse of the IDB in the context of Ngobe people.

Finally, if we interpret these findings in light of the criticism of philosopher and economist Franz J. Hinkelammert (1995, 1996, 1999; Duchorow & Hinkelammert 2003) we infer that the disregard of indigenous spirituality comes from interests shared by the state of Panama and the IDB (the latter in its capacity as promoter of neo-liberal economics in Latin America). According to Hinkelammert neo-liberal globalisation does not concern itself with human relationships and human or social development. They are not consonant with the economic logic of this ideology, since what counts is the totalised market: everything must be economically profitable. That is why he characterises neo-liberal globalisation as fundamentalism – a form of universality that takes only its own logic to be true. The neo-liberal paradigm (market economy), in deep crisis today, does not tolerate an alternative to the autonomy and automatism of the market economy. Alternatives merely inhibit economic growth. Hence this theory about the totalised market explains why the trend to support a market economy leaves no room for innovation in development policies as a result of indigenous considerations such as spirituality and identity.

Conclusion

In this paper we investigated how indigenous spirituality contributes to development in *Abya Yala* and what it signifies for development agencies. After a contextual study of the Ngobe people of Panama we explored the meaning of spirituality for social relationships and the environment. Our study shows that the Ngobe have a spirituality with great potential for sustainable development. However, through monocultural policies Panamanian governments have consistently denied these Ngobe values.

In the last part of the study we examined the importance of indigenous spirituality in IDB development policy. We noted that in the discourse this is characterised by (a) a line that attempts to include indigenous issues such as spirituality and identity, and (b) another line relating to practices inherent in the

bank's approach and its support for a market economy that contradicts indigenous practices and worldviews.

In the case of the IDB we found that it at first proposed to include Amerindians issues and even provided for their participation in socio-cultural feasibility studies of projects. But the institution has continued to fund projects without consultation and has been openly rejected by the affected indigenous groups, who have even invoked the intervention of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights.

The history of the Ngobe people offers numerous criteria for evaluating the importance of including spirituality in sustainable development policies. First, like other *Abya Yala* indigenous spiritualities, Ngobe spirituality is ambivalent. It may be idealised, romanticised, manipulated or instrumentalised by development policies. At the same time, as we saw in the case of the Mama Chi religion and rites, spirituality helped to empower and strengthen the identity of the Ngobe. From our study we conclude that the spirituality of the Ngobe people has a strong critical dimension that helps them to construct strategies to face threats from firstly, the colonial past and secondly, from both the monocultural structures of the Panamanian state and from neo-liberal globalisation.

Research by Juan van Kessel (2006) and Hans van den Berg (1989) among the Aymara and Quechua peoples offers theoretical models that help us understand this scope of indigenous spirituality. In our opinion these are very pertinent to Ngobe spirituality as far as the relationship between spirituality and economic development is concerned. Van Kessel and Van den Berg conclude that for indigenous people the economy is not simply a practice based on shared material resources, supply and demand; much less is it self-sufficient knowledge, uprooted from human communities and without reference to sacred space. For Amerindians economics is a 'meta-economy'. It is about a cosmology that encompasses time and space, history and existence (*pacha*) and is governed by four ethical principles: complementarity, reciprocity, a cyclical conception of time and transitional correspondence between micro- and macrocosm (Van Kessel 2006:224). The ultimate goal of the meta-economy is "to bring up, invigorate this life in good harmony" (Van Kessel 2006:225).

Indigenous spirituality builds a sense of sustainability that relates to preoccupation with and care of the environment in terms of mutual reference (i.e. communion), as the Chilean anthropologist and theologian Diego Irarrázaval (2006:51) affirms: "The reciprocity takes place in the community and in communion with the Earth, which implies a thinking rooted in the ritual and festive, in the myth and mystique, the everyday life and the political."

On the basis of our study we can assert that the indigenous spirituality of the Ngobe people generates practices and a unified vision that promotes development from a sustainability perspective. This development model does

not originate from opposition between sectors of the economy, society and the environment. This is the problem with the IDB model, which gives priority to economic development and sacrifices people and the environment.

By contrast the Ngobe people consider sustainable development to come from alterity relations and practices that seek to safeguard the cosmic balance. This perspective opens up new possibilities to analyse the limits of the development model proposed by the IDB. If the IDB and other development institutions want to promote sustainable development, they must conceive of the economy not as a self-sufficient, but as in balance with society and the environment as encapsulated in the formulation of a *comercio justo y ecológico* (fair and organic trade) (Vanderhoff Boersama 2005).

This development model reproduces spiritual visions about indigenous peoples' experience of life as coexistence with their environment and community and concern for the earth. Celebrations and rituals are pivotal in their life experience and form part of a meta-economic vision. Both return to the roots and reinforce the cosmic structure (*tejido*); both are key elements which renew and reaffirm this way of being (*ser y estar*) in the world.

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Ritual performance and social distinction in Tana Toraja, Indonesia

Edwin de Jong

Introduction

His thorough knowledge of the complicated rules governing local rituals makes Pong Cindy¹ a well-respected person in the village. Whenever there is a ritual performance he is invited to be the master of ceremonies, despite suffering from poor health. When I met him he was already orchestrating his third ceremony in less than a month. Given such commitments, Pong Cindy hardly finds time to do his job as village secretary or to cultivate his ten hectares of rice fields. Before the series of ceremonies commenced Pong Cindy and some fellow villagers went to the northern forests of Tana Toraja to cut down some trees to renovate a *tongkonan* (ancestral house). The ritual headman of the village had decided to rebuild the old *tongkonan* of his lineage, of which Pong Cindy is a member. All members are expected to contribute money and labour for its maintenance and lineage ceremonies. Although the headman's children, who had migrated to Merauke (Irian Jaya), had already donated one fifth of the total cost of 100 million *rupiah* (approximately €8,500), Pong Cindy, as a high status member of the family, is still expected to contribute 15 million *rupiah* – which for him is an enormous sum.

In such times several households eat only one meal per day, wear old clothes and take their children out of primary school because they can no longer pay the expenses. Nevertheless they spend a fortune on pigs and buffaloes to be slaughtered at ceremonies; sums that can run to as much as the total cost of putting a child through both school and university. Such spending behaviour does not go uncontested in this mountainous region of the Indonesian province of South Sulawesi, which is probably best known for its beautiful scenery, colourfully painted houses with saddle roofs and spectacular funeral ceremonies. Colonial missionaries and officials already condemned the 'irrational' behaviour of the Torajans² and many present-day government

1 To protect the privacy of the individuals described aliases are used throughout this paper.

2 There are various spellings for the name of the Toraja people. The more common ones are Toraja, Toradja and Toraya. According to Torajan linguists at the Christian University of Tana Toraja (IKIP), in English one should use the term 'Torajan' to refer to someone who originates

officials and well educated Torajans continue to criticise excessive expenditure on ceremonies. Some say bluntly that Torajan funeral ceremonies are a waste of time and money, which could be better spent on the development of the area. However, the vast majority of the Torajan population object to such statements as, in their view, large funeral ceremonies are not only a way of showing respect to ancestors, but also keep the Torajan economy going and help to maintain close contact with relatives and friends. As someone said: “If you see funeral ceremonies as destroying capital, you miss the point. To a Torajan it is not a matter of destroying capital but a way of maintaining social relations. If you lose your relatives and friends you lose everything; if you lose your money you can try to recover it.” Torajan society is also very status-conscious and social interaction is patterned along class lines – nobility, middle class, commoners and slaves. Funerals are important ceremonies that publicly display the status and wealth of individuals and whole families.

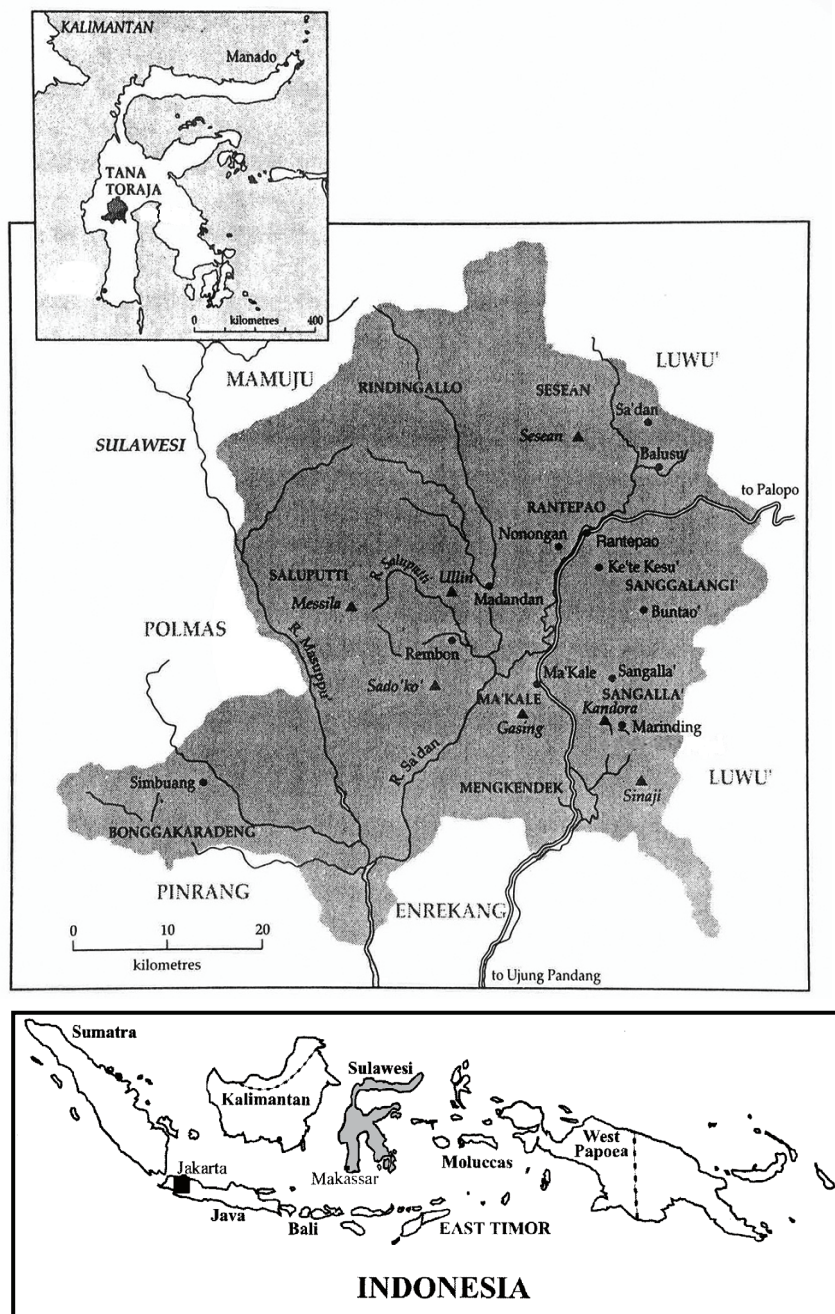
Although most literature on Tana Toraja is about the ‘spectacular’ funeral ceremonies, as we saw in the case of Pong Cindy, it is not only funeral ceremonies that absorb large amounts of money but also *tongkonans*. Rebuilding one could easily cost the price of a luxurious villa in a fancy suburb of the provincial capital of Makassar. It seems that the *tongkonan* is a pivotal institution in Tana Toraja, reflected in the Torajan expression ‘the *tongkonan* is like a mother’. A remark by a Torajan interviewed by Waterson (2003:43) makes it clear: “The house is the mother [starting-point, origin] of our search for a livelihood and of the birth of children.” The question is, why are Torajans so obsessed with *tongkonans* and funeral ceremonies? What is their interest in these houses and rituals, and how do these events affect intra-generational and intergenerational solidarity?

In this article I interpret the *tongkonan* and the funeral ceremony in the Geertzian sense as a basic ‘vehicle of meaning’ in Torajan life (Geertz 1973).³ I pay particular attention, moreover, to the concepts of honour, shame and prestige that are the main reasons for ‘taking a ride’ in these vehicles, that is, attaching oneself to a particular *tongkonan* and entering the arena to participate in ‘the game over meat’. In line with Lévi-Strauss’s (1983, 1987) account of house societies, a *tongkonan* is much more than a physical structure; it is an important locus of social organisation.

from the Tana Toraja region. In this article, therefore, I refer to the people of Tana Toraja as Torajans.

³ The field research on which this paper is based was part of the research programme “Indonesia in transition”, funded by the Royal Dutch Academy of Sciences (KNAW).

Map 1. Indonesia, Sulawesi island, Makassar and Tana Toraja



Source: Map from Sulawesi and Tana Toraja adopted from Waterson (2002)

Torajan order and status

Like many other Southeast Asian societies, the Torajan world is highly structured and carefully ordered.⁴ All objects, land, people and activities are classified, both spatially and temporally. “Some of the Toraja concern with temporal and spatial arrangements (...) is related to notions of hierarchy and to a desire to distinguish between different levels, including levels of social status and of ritual” (Hollan & Wellenkamp 1994:44). Torajan indigenous spirituality (*aluk to dolo*) determines how both rituals and daily life are conducted. “*Aluk* was the wisdom of the ancestors, brought by the great *to minaa* Suloara [ritual priest]; it was the multitude of spirits who inhabited mountain peaks, or streams, or house rafters; it was the speech of the priests, or *to mebalun*; the number of buffalo slaughtered; the countless (or 7,777) prohibitions that informed daily life; the proper performance of everyday prayer and ceremony” (Volkman 1985:33). Dutch missionaries who tried to introduce Christianity into the highlands met with fierce resistance because of the Torajan fondness for funeral ceremonies and gambling, so they formally separated custom [*adat*] from religion [*aluk*] as two complementary but distinct domains in order to harmoniously blend Torajan ritual with Christianity.

After the missionaries had divided *aluk to dolo* into a religious (*aluk*) and a customary dimension (*adat*), *aluk to dolo* receded as an all-embracing framework for life. But as an idea it has revived: a wealth of rituals intimately linked to agricultural cycles and to death and rebirth remains at the centre of Torajan life.⁵

The Torajan concern with proper placement is omnipresent in the ordering of rituals. The primary classification of rituals that permeates all aspects of life and death distinguishes between rituals of the east (smoke-rising or *rambu tuka*) and the west (smoke-descending or *rambu solo*). The east is associated with the rising sun and with rituals of birth, life and prosperity. Amongst the array of such rituals, marriages and ceremonies centring on the rebuilding or renovation of the *tongkonan* are currently the most elaborate and widely practised (see picture 1 for an example of a recently renovated *tongkonan*).⁶

4 See e.g. Errington (1989), who describes comparable concern for structure and order among the Bugis of Luwu, and Bateson & Mead (1942) and Belo (1970) for Balinese society (Hollan & Wellenkamp 1994: 43).

5 The motives for, and implications of, the division of *aluk to dolo* into religious and customary worlds will be discussed in more detail in the fifth section of this article.

6 Although wedding ceremonies are also becoming increasingly popular in Tana Toraja, and some wealthy and upper class Torajans spend considerable amounts of money on these events, they remain far behind *tongkonan* inauguration and funeral ceremonies, both in size and cost. Not many migrants will return to Tana Toraja for a wedding ceremony. For these reasons I do not elaborate on wedding ceremonies here.

Ceremonies of the west are connected with the setting sun and symbolise death and decay; Torajan death rituals are the major manifestations. Although a certain order of precedence is applied to all festivals, the two ritual spheres (east and west) should be strictly separated in both place and time.

In most Torajan rituals, both of the east and of the west, the *tongkonan* is the focus or centre of the events. “In cosmic orientation every house is equal: the simplest bamboo shack and the most statuesque *tongkonan* face directly north, toward the river’s source, ensuring that the right side of the house faces east (toward life) and the left side faces west (toward death)” (Volkman 1985:52). As such the *tongkonan* represents both life and death, a person’s ties with her contemporaries and ancestors, thus embodying the continuity of a group of people (Waterson 2000:181). When a child is born, the father buries the placenta on the east side of the house, the side associated with life. In time “the house becomes a place where ‘many placentas are buried’, and thus should never be moved” (Waterson 2003:42).



Picture 1. A recently renovated *tongkonan*

The rice barn and the house are complementary and make up a unit, in which the barn is a smaller replica of the *tongkonan* and stands opposite the house. Here the Torajan penchant for order and completeness, as Volkman (1985:14) puts it, is again apparent. Houses have to be linked to other structures to become a *tongkonan*. Apart from rice barns, “[i]mportant origin houses also have their own family tombs (*liang*) cut out of solid rock and used over generations; the house and the *liang* are described as pair (*sipasang*)” (Waterson 2000:183). Upon the death of a person whose placenta is buried next to the *tongkonan*, the corpse is brought back to the house before it is buried in the family tomb, thus completing the circle of life and death. *Tongkonans* of rank are also expected to possess ricefields, coconut and bamboo groves, and heirloom valuables such as gold and silver ornaments, daggers (*kris*), textiles, old Chinese porcelain and beadwork, together making up the inert wealth or *mana*’ (heirlooms) of a *tongkonan*.

Ownership of *mana*’ and even caring for *mana*’ confer prestige and power on the possessors or caretakers. In the theoretical terms of Bourdieu (1984) *mana*’ comprise objects of distinction in Toraja. In the power plays involving the distribution of *mana*’ the aim of the game is to amass *mana*’ for oneself and hence for one’s own *tongkonan* and preferably at the expense of another (...). Once acquired and considered *tongkonan* property, *mana*’ should be inert, never given away although still able to be circulated in exchange by being lent, shared or inherited (Robinson 2000:44).

The *tongkonan* itself is built according to a general architectural master plan, in which most parts have a particular function and place. According to Schefold (1988:233), who carefully documented traditional house construction with reference to both form and meaning, “*tongkonans* are among the most impressive forms of vernacular architecture in the world. With their curved, jutting roofs over towering gables, luxuriantly ornamented and in their upper part slanting outward, they bear witness to the pride of their builders.” The high *tongkonan* gables are supported by poles, to which dozens or even hundreds of buffalo horns are attached, indicating the slaughtering (ritual) history and thus the wealth of a family. The wall panels are decorated with painted engravings. The geometrically designed carvings each has an individual meaning and name. In theory all the details of construction and decoration correspond to the status of the *tongkonan*, or rather of the descendants who claim to be its members (Volkman 1985:53). Thus, although all *tongkonans* might be identical in their cosmic orientation, in social and ritual space they are not. In social space the *tongkonan* is a status symbol par excellence. It constitutes the centre of a web of strong, emotionally articulated bonds woven between people and their graves, land and ancestors, “all of which combine to create a particular sense of place” (Waterson 2000:183). No two *tongkonans* occupy exactly the same position in the social space of the village or wider territory. Each

tongkonan has its own name, heirlooms, ritual privileges and material property, which distinguish it from others. Its physical appearance demonstrates its status, wealth and power and thus its place and that of its members in the social ranking system.

Many Southeast Asian societies do not trace their lineage *from* their forebears but *to* forebears, and Torajans adopt this approach, making *tongkonan* membership more flexible. In practice only a few groups of siblings are able to trace their origins back to the cardinal, highly honoured forebears through battle, marriage, or by strategically utilising relationships over time. As a result social hierarchical relations exist not only between *tongkonans* but also within *tongkonans* or the group of people attached to them. Full siblings (placed at the centre of the kindred) are thus important in unravelling the structure of Torajan society. While siblings are more or less equal in status ('status peers'), the few sets of full siblings that claim membership of a particular *tongkonan* are to some extent hierarchically ordered. Each full sibling group in its turn relates hierarchically to sibling groups from other *tongkonans*. The idea of full sibling groups and *tongkonans* as the most fundamental factors in a person's social position will be explained in more detail in the sections on *tongkonans* and funeral ceremonies.

In addition to houses a person's social class is also apparent at certain ceremonies. As one Torajan said, "To know which social class someone comes from might also appear from the way they sit under the *alang* (rice barn) during ceremonies." People from the third and fourth classes always have to carry pigs and do work at ceremonies, such as slaughtering the animals. During a ceremony low class people sit on the ground, while the upper social strata sit under the rice barn. "Class has nothing to do with money. Even if you return from Malaysia and have become very rich, you retain your low status. The third class of commoners slaughter as many buffaloes as they can afford just to show off: to demonstrate that they have money. They can never achieve a higher position though. People from the fourth class are theoretically not allowed to hold a ceremony in their own right, but they can pay people from the top social stratum for permission to do so."

In the fourth section of this article the close link between funeral ceremonies and social stratification will be explained further. For now it is enough to understand that kin groups cannot be dissociated from particular *tongkonans*, hence from status and power. *Tongkonans* and family names reflect people's social position. Most villagers argue that social differentiation is fading, but when you list certain names and ask their opinion they are fully aware of the status of these family names. People with highly respected family names still seem to have greater access to resources than others. Having discussed this topic with various people, it seems that the concept of class and status is slowly changing and is interpreted differently from early times. Nevertheless it

remains omnipresent in house inaugurations and funeral ceremonies, and to a considerable degree in daily life as well.

The making and re-making of a *tongkonan*

One has to be extremely unobservant not to notice the traditional Torajan houses when arriving in Makassar. But whereas a careless eye could still have missed the *tongkonans* in Makassar, one would have to be blind not to notice *tongkonans* or parts of them in Tana Toraja. The *tongkonan* is simply everywhere: starting at the entrance gate to the district which is topped with a miniature *tongkonan*, to the architecture (roofs, walls and entrances) of most hotels and government buildings; as monuments, grave markers, roadside shelters, even in the shape of ceremonial pig-carriers and logos for government propaganda. The most striking are the enormous *tongkonan*-shape offices of the Torajan Protestant church in Rantepao and the newly built office of the district's council (DPRD) in Makale with its huge Torajan-style roof. It is no accident that both a church and a political party model their important buildings on a *tongkonan*. The *tongkonan* "was and continues to be a densely meaningful sign – a palpable, indeed, a live-in and walk-through sign – that ties together cosmos, kinship, the relations between the sexes, hierarchy, and the inscription of directions on the body and in social geography (such as up/down, right/left, and center/periphery)" (Errington 1998:203). Why should it not be an appropriate way to interlink Torajan Protestants or the whole Torajan community as well? Seen thus, the *tongkonan* can be considered an ethnic symbol par excellence, as Schefold (1988:238) puts it.

The reasons why a house is a *tongkonan* or not are sometimes difficult to unravel, as they differ between regions. It is commonly assumed that houses gain power over time: the older they are, the more they become associated with ancestors "who protect their descendants" (Waterson 2003:45). Moreover, generally *tongkonans* have to undergo a continuous cycle of renewal to obtain and maintain the title of an 'origin house'. In villages a lot of construction and renovation are clearly going on: the rebuilding of houses not only serves to restore the house structurally, it also reaffirms its role as the focus of a kinship group (Morrell 2001:7). Most *tongkonans* are actually renovated before they become dilapidated. A *tongkonan* destroyed by fire does not necessarily lose its function and can be rebuilt at any time by descendants, even after many generations. People remember their names and hold on to the titles connected to them.

The renovation or re-roofing of existing *tongkonans* or the building of completely new ones involves specific ceremonies. Membership of a *tongkonan* implies willingness to invest in the rebuilding of houses and the

concomitant rituals. Waterson (2000:183-184) notes: “The willingness to invest in the rebuilding of houses is still a striking feature of life in Tana Toraja, for it secures prestige and social approval.” However, the expense of contributing to the rebuilding of houses and participating in ceremonies prevents people from becoming members of too many houses. In practice most people only maintain ties with those of their parents and grandparents, and of their spouse’s parents and grandparents. One woman respondent drew a family tree of eight generations, traced through her mother. She named five *tongkonans* in different settlements that were connected to this genealogy and still of importance to her. Nevertheless she indicated the house of her grandmother, who had died ten years earlier, as the closest. This *tongkonan* is already 200 years old and in need of repair. Before the repairs started the members of the *tongkonan* gathered to plan and to collect money. She called this the ‘climax of social relations’: “Because after such a meeting each member knows, this is my family. Even if you have known each other for a long time but did not know you were kin, after the *tongkonan* ceremony you know that this is my family. Each *tongkonan* member feels a responsibility to bring something.” An explanation offered by another informant amplifies this:

Everybody has many *tongkonans*, depending on the number of marriages of their ancestors with people from outside their family. I do not know all my *tongkonans*, but if a *tongkonan* has to be rebuilt, its caretakers know that I belong to that *tongkonan*. I will be invited to attend the ceremony and of course I have to contribute money then. When a *tongkonan* has to be restored, it is unacceptable for people who are relatives from the same *tongkonan* not to be invited.

Morell (2001:7) writes “The importance of the *tongkonan*, as a symbol of one’s personal heritage, is such that few people avoid this responsibility, and expatriate family members still maintain their *tongkonan* affiliations, returning to the region to participate in events related to their house of origin.” In Palipu’ and Kondo’, in practice, it is these expatriates or migrants who take care of most of the expense of rebuilding a *tongkonan* and the concomitant rituals.

In the past *tongkonans* had a dual function. They served as residences or “places where people lived and around which daily life took place” as well as symbolic centres of a descent group (Schefold 1988:238). The former role started fading some decades ago and nowadays *tongkonans* are increasingly uninhabited. Schefold (1988:238) writes: “The Toraja are moving out of their ancestral seats, the rooms of which are too high up, and too cramped, and are building next to them stabler, more comfortable accommodations for themselves, as an environment for a modern way of life.” The diminishing role of the *tongkonan* as a residence is not only the consequence of a modern lifestyle. It is as much the result of the Torajan desire for prestige, of which the *tongkonan* is the physical expression. The modest shape and simple structure of

old *tongkonans*, designed as domiciles, have changed into architecturally sophisticated structures, which appear less suitable for living. The refinements of the building, both in structure and in specific details of construction techniques, have led to a spectacular enhancement of the visual effect (Schefold 1988:235). “(...) the towering modern houses with their tremendously curved roofs are most appropriate to the tasks that the tourist brochures ascribe to them, as if they were primarily intended for ‘show’” (Schefold 1988:235). As Schefold (1988:238) points out, taking into account the complex system of classes and ranks, the striving for recognition and prestige is certainly not a new phenomenon in Torajan society. Rather, the ‘new wealth’ of migrant family members fuels the construction of expensive modern *tongkonans*.

During my research period in a village in the north of Tana Toraja several villagers went off for a couple of days to fell timber in the northern tip of the highland district. They bought a licence from the government in Makale to chop down several square metres of trees. The wood was needed to renovate one of the oldest *tongkonans* in their village. The *to’ parenge* (headman) had decided to renovate this *tongkonan* as it was one of the important houses in his family line. Before the rebuilding of the *tongkonan* started, its leading members and prominent fellow villagers met to discuss the financial arrangements and ritual procedures. Although much of the work would be done for free, the lumberjacks who cut the trees, and later the carpenters who would build the house, had to be supplied with food, coffee, cigarettes and palm wine, all of which demanded considerable sums of money. Furthermore, every stage of house building would be accompanied by rituals, from the first felling of timber in the forest to the final roofing with corrugated iron. Thus, besides labour, hundreds of people considered to be members of the *tongkonan* had to donate money for the construction of the house and the rituals involved. Most of the contributors I spoke to commented that they had called on their migrant relatives for financial support. Because of the age of the house the circle of people that feel attached to it stretches far beyond the village. Even a government official in Makale mentioned that she had contributed some money and a pig to the renovation of this *tongkonan*, because her husband appeared to have some connections with it through distant relatives.

The inauguration of a *tongkonan* is a much smaller event than a funeral ceremony in terms of offerings made and number of participants. Nevertheless, depending on social rank and the age of the house, it can be considerable. The largest aristocratic inaugural house ceremonies, in which hundreds of pigs, chickens and dogs are sacrificed, might last three days and involve several hundreds or even thousands of people. Unlike at funeral ceremonies, it is uncommon to slaughter buffaloes on these occasions. A huge house ceremony for a *tongkonan* was held in Kondo’ in December 2002. The renovation took a

little over three months and many families could trace a link to this *tongkonan*. The work on the *tongkonan* had already been completed for over a year, but family members needed time to collect enough money for the ceremony. Because of the cost involved, some house inaugurations are delayed for more than ten years in Tana Toraja.

On the first day of the ceremony I arrived with Pa Rongko, head of the village Tondon Matallo, who had invited me. Together with his entourage of family and friends we entered the ceremonial field and walked straight to the rice barn facing the renovated *tongkonan*. Like all rice barns in Tana Toraja, it had a raised floor supported by six round poles (see picture 2 for an example of a traditional Torajan rice barn). Between the poles underneath the storehouse there was a lower floor or platform. In everyday life this space provides shelter from the heat of day. During ceremonies (inaugurations, funerals, etc.) it is where important, upper class people sit. Their seating is determined by rank and ritual function. Often there are several barns, enabling the close kin of the community's leaders to join in. The other guests are seated under temporary structures. The height of the floors in these guesthouses indicates the social standing of the guests. Low class people usually sit on the ground. Pa Rongko seated himself on the floor underneath the rice granary, against the right-hand front pole. Once seated, his movements, speech and the expression in his eyes changed immediately, becoming appropriate to a man of his prestige and status. Small trucks drove to and from the ceremonial field bringing enormous pigs from all the family members who claimed descent from this *tongkonan*. The pigs at house ceremonies are much larger and fatter than those at funeral ceremonies. The largest pigs, costing as much as a small buffalo, were so fat that they were unable to walk and had to be carried on a bamboo chair. Family members who did not bring or send any pigs for the ceremony lost their membership of the *tongkonan* and with it their rights (status, access to land, etc.). According to Waterson (1995:200), true descendants of a *tongkonan* are not only obliged to bring a pig to the house ceremony; they are also the ones that have an undisputed right to bring one:

If (...) one brings one's pig as a sign of one's descent from the house in question, one must be prepared to recite one's genealogy if questioned. If one cannot thus prove one's descent, the pig will be refused. If it is accepted, then one's membership is also an accepted fact; at a later date one might cite this as proof of it (Waterson 1995:200).

Meanwhile hundreds of members of the *tongkonan* and other villagers arrived, mostly in groups. The visitors came from nearby and from places as far as Kalimantan, Malaysia and Irian Jaya to demonstrate and confirm their membership. The space between the rebuilt *tongkonan* and its four rice barns was soon packed with people and pigs. A dozen pigs were slaughtered on the

first afternoon, but most were sacrificed on the third and most important day. This was a day of celebrations, graced with dance performances. The pork was shared among those present according to social rank. In retrospect, house inauguration feasts can be seen as expensive displays of wealth, status and class membership, only surpassed by funeral ceremonies. These ceremonies are excellent occasions to meet other people, to maintain one's social ties, and to define or question people's position in society. While physical and social *tongkonans* largely coincided in the past, today the circle of social *tongkonans* is steadily expanding and becoming translocal or transnational. With its members sometimes spread all over the world but showing a centripetal tendency, I call these 'global *tongkonans*': *tongkonans* that have become a kind of mythological temple to which people can always return.



Picture 2. Traditional Torajan rice barns in a family compound

***Siri'* makes the world go round**

The importance of belonging to a particular *tongkonan*, and the effort that Torajans put into demonstrating this to others, cannot be explained solely by the striving for wealth, status and power. The less observable explanation for this attitude and orientation is known as *siri'*. *Siri'* is a concept shared by the people of Tana Toraja and South Sulawesi in general, and is unique to the region. In ethnographic literature (e.g. Chabot 1950; Volkman 1985; Errington

1989; Hollan & Wellenkamp 1994) *siri* is translated variously as ‘shame’, ‘embarrassment’ and ‘shyness’, or more positively as ‘prestige’, ‘honour’ and ‘reputation’. However, as Errington (1989:145) points out, “Perhaps like all words, but especially like words that stand at the juncture of emotions, processes, reactions, contexts and understandings, *siri* cannot be satisfactorily translated.” At the very least any translation would need two words to render the dual nature of *siri* – its shame and honour aspects. A person who possesses *siri* is sensitive, and hence vulnerable to other people, and has the capacity to feel both embarrassment/shame and respect/honour (Errington 1989:145).

Both honour and shame make a person human and define their *siri*. According to Volkman (1985:73-74), “This is not a matter of inner subjectivity but of knowing one’s ‘place’, the recognition of self in relation to others: to those with whom one shares ancestors or *tongkonan*, to those of loftier or lesser status.” In this way, *siri* always surfaces in interactions and it orients people to their position in the social hierarchy. “If persons are accorded the deference and respect due to their place in society, they feel honoured/respected (*dikasiri*). But if their position is challenged in some way, they are likely to feel embarrassment/shame/humiliation” (Hollan & Wellenkamp 1994:51). As Volkman (1985:74) indicates, when people reach adulthood they are supposed to have an understanding of “social roles and hierarchies, linguistic codes, kinship relations, and avoidance patterns”. Or, as she puts it, “[t]o be without *siri* at all is to be scarcely alive”. Yet when people do not conform to these roles or norms, they are condemned for not knowing *siri* or being *ma’siri* (ashamed). Thus *siri* is not an inner control in the same way as we conceive of conscience, but rather represents “the capacity and sensibility required to adjust one’s behaviour to a situation without force or the threat of force” (Errington 1989:146). Children are not born with *siri* but “they have to be installed with it” (Errington 1989:146). To some extent, *siri* is comparable to what we would call ‘decent’ or ‘civilised’. Although there is no definition of a civilised person, adults know how to behave in a civilised way.

Siri is so closely linked to social relations that all relationships are conceptualised in terms of shared *siri*, or of ‘us’ and ‘them’. There are people that have *siri* in common or “share one’s *siri*”: they protect and guard it” and there are “those who do not share one’s *siri*” but attack it, thus dividing the world “into two sorts of people; ‘us’ and ‘them’” (Errington 1989:144). In theory everyone from the same household, clan, *tongkonan* – in other words, kin who trace their descent to the same source or ancestors – are of one *siri*. However, in practice, kinspeople can become ‘strangers’ to each other by offending one another (Errington 1989: 147). As we saw in the previous section, people do their utmost to retain membership of a particular *tongkonan*: they invest in it, in both material and social senses. However, their membership can be questioned at any time, and gifts may be refused by other members of

the *tongkonan*, implying denial of someone's relationship with the kin group. On the other hand, strangers (e.g. adopted children or in-laws) can sometimes become joined in *siri'* through association and habit. In fact, what Errington (1989:147-149) found among the Bugis applies just as much to Torajan society: "[w]hen people are thrown together into association, they either develop a single *siri'* or else they become enemies", because "[t]here is no neutral ground, and there are no alternatives".

This understanding of *siri'* partly explains why Torajan migrants stick together in Makassar and other migration centres. Far away from home, surrounded by strangers, Torajans have a heightened awareness of the oneness of *siri'* with their people from Tana Toraja. In explaining what makes a person Torajan someone gave an example that perfectly reflects this heightened awareness. "When there is a meeting in a neutral place in Makassar together with Bugis people, the Torajans will be less expressive and sit at the back. This is not because they are afraid to say something but because they are so concerned about what other people think about them that they are afraid to say the wrong things. They even have a word for such behaviour, *longko'*, meaning not shy but afraid to offend other people." This shows the sensitivity of being both protective of one's own *siri'* (by sitting at the back) and afraid to offend someone else's *siri'* (by using the wrong words).

Sharing one's *siri'* provides Torajans with a feeling of security, both through knowing their place in the wider social world and through belonging to a particular group of people that care for each other. Shared *siri'* thus has many advantages, but can also be very constraining. This is illustrated by the explanation of *siri'* by the village (*lembang*) headman of Tondon.

Even when people from the upper class become poor they will always receive support from others because if they become poor they will bring shame (*ma'siri'*) on their family or *tongkonan*. Other high-status family members feel *longko* (shame/afraid to offend others) and they will help this person not to lose face (and also their own) and provide him or her with the money and materials needed. For example, if I see poor family members, I will help them to maintain their status. This means that when they need to pay off a debt by bringing a pig or buffalo to a funeral ceremony, I will provide them with the necessary money. So you can imagine that you have to be rich when you are a district head, because you cannot lose face and become *ma'siri'*. You always have to help people who can claim to be kin and share a *siri'*.

The boundaries between those fused in *siri'* and those opposed in *siri'* constantly shift with place. When someone is living in Makassar, for example, her *siri'* group might extend to other Torajans not even living in her immediate vicinity or to kin in Tana Toraja. When they live outside Sulawesi where there are few other Torajans, they usually share a *siri'* with the other people of South Sulawesi. In these places *siri'* again varies with the occasion and social

interaction. For example,⁷ people in one village might work together in organising a ceremony because they all follow the same noble feast-givers, and in that sense are joined in support of another *siri*, not each other's. When the ceremony is over or when the nobleman returns to Makassar, these followers might offend each other and become strangers, or people who do not share the same *siri*.

Although *siri* is expressed in various social interactions, in daily life it generally relates to the way in which food is shared or eaten. Sharing food is important in social relations, and when it is not properly conducted it could shame the hosts. Conversely, when the food is properly served people will be honoured. When people approach someone's house (even if they are just passing by), they usually greet their hostess with the words 'O grandmother, is the rice cooked yet? (*O nene*, *manasu moraka?*)'. The usual reply is, 'Yes it's cooked (*manasumo*)'. People will be ashamed or *ma'siri* if people enter their house when the rice is finished. On the other hand, the hosts will be offended if a visitor does not eat before leaving (unless he or she is a very frequent visitor such as a neighbour). At meals guests are often encouraged to have more rice by saying, 'please have some more rice, do not feel ashamed (*ma'siri*)' and rules for eating together are very strict, everyone being afraid to start or stop eating before the others. Moreover, close social ties are often translated in terms of people who eat from the same pot. Rimba's explanation of the importance of food makes this clear:

I was brought up by my grandparents in Tana Toraja, while my parents and three younger brothers were living in Irian Jaya. When my grandfather died, we decided to offer 16 buffaloes at the funeral ceremony. My younger brothers did not agree with this large number of buffaloes and did not want to come to Tana Toraja. My father and I insisted on their participation in the ceremony and finally they showed up. As the eldest of the family and one who had always eaten with this society, I thought the time had come to pay my debt and provide them all with food. For that reason I thought the funeral ceremony was important and a large number of buffaloes was needed. Moreover, my grandfather had been living here and always took part in the feasts of others and ate from the same pot, so now I needed to give them food in return to protect our *siri*.

Though food and the way of sharing and eating it are important in Torajan life, there are many other social contexts in which *siri* surfaces or is cited as people's motivation for action. To many Torajans the image of Tondon (which includes Kondo) is that of a closed community, in which people are willing to forego their *siri* outside Tana Toraja in order to earn money and increase their *gengsi* or prestige back home. The Tondon area is regarded as a source of women working as prostitutes in the large industrial centres of Malaysia.

⁷ I borrow this example from Errington (1989: 150), who describes a similar event in Bugis society.

According to informants both in and beyond the village Tondon men are often involved in illegal activities (illegal gambling, running brothels, etc.) in the same areas. When one respondent in the south of Tana Toraja explained *siri'* he used the example of Tondon migrants: "Torajan people are always concerned about their name and reputation, but when they migrate they do whatever they like. They gamble and work in prostitution. Actually there is nobody left in Tondon who has *siri'* any longer."

Siri' is a powerful motivation in everyday life and also in rituals. Funeral ceremonies in particular are occasions for revealing or challenging one's *siri'*. As we saw in the example of Rimba, large-scale food sharing is a major means of expressing one's *siri'* at these events. However, depending on one's position, the organisers (mostly children or close family of the deceased) have to comply with a whole gamut of norms and rules to avoid becoming *ma'siri'*. Apart from the quantity and quality of the food served, the orchestration, size and duration of the rituals, the number of buffaloes and pigs offered, family wealth (*mana'*) displayed, and the number and status of guests all determine whether the organisers should be shamed or honoured by the living and the dead (spirits and ancestors). Through the funeral children fulfil their responsibilities to their parents and in this way demonstrate their own *siri'*: their place and honour in society. Because of this responsibility, as well as the opportunity to protect or increase one's own *siri'* and that of those who share the same *siri'* (including the dead), the funeral ceremony and the slaughtering of buffaloes at these events are, for many Torajans, their ultimate goal in life. Although people often claim that no-one is forced to contribute a buffalo to a ceremony, as we saw above in the case of Rimba people are often under pressure from others, feeling ashamed or *ma'siri'* if they do not give. Hence they are constantly looking for ways to make at least a small contribution to a relative's ritual celebration (Hollan & Wellenkamp 1994:85).

Not only the *siri'* of the organisers is at stake at funeral ceremonies, but also that of the guests and followers. Under the watchful eyes of the crowd they walk in large processions displaying their offerings, such as buffaloes, pigs, rice and palm wine. Their names and gifts (including money) are announced through loudspeakers. For high status people it is important not to show up alone or unshielded at these ceremonies, but to have a large entourage, including porters bearing the offerings. The most public display in which everyone's *siri'* is at stake is the division of meat (*lelang*).⁸ While the meat is tossed from the centre of the ritual field, or at larger ceremonies hurled down from a 5-6 metres high bamboo platform, the recipient's name is proclaimed through the loud speakers. During this activity the atmosphere in the ritual

⁸ See Volkman (1985:96-103) for a more elaborate description of meat division and its implications.

arena is tense, aptly described by Volkman (1985:75-76): “Everyone observes the calling order, the cut of meat, and its size. In what appears to be a bewildering rush of name-calling, meat-flinging, and animated conversation, everyone attunes himself to the subtleties of what is being tossed, when, and to whom. One hears frequent whispers of *ma'siri'*, for someone inevitably is being shamed.” The part of the slaughtered animal and the size of the portion, defines the receiver’s social status and thereby secures or challenges the *siri'* of this person and his *siri'* group. As the criteria for defining who gets what are generally ambiguous, it readily conceivable that some people will feel that their *siri'* is challenged, leading to emotional scenes and even fights. *Siri'* is thus not only about defending one’s position, but also about attack (Errington 1989:154). Moreover, *siri'* is the Torajan explanation for “why the system works at all: why they cut animals for their relatives, repay debts, and, at present, feel themselves caught in an endless slaughter cycle” (Volkman 1985:73).

Funeral ceremonies: public displays of wealth and status

Throughout this article life and death have been shown to be inextricably interlinked and pinpointed in the *tongkonan*. After birth the placenta is buried next to the *tongkonan* and, upon death the corpse of the person whose placenta was buried next to the *tongkonan* is brought back to the house before being buried in the family tomb, thus completing the circle of life and death. In the Torajan worldview all humans, rocks, trees, houses and artefacts contain an invisible animating energy that makes them effective and potent (Errington 1989:44). This life energy, or *sumanga'* as they call it, is in everything or pervades everything, but in varying degrees (Errington 1989:122).⁹ Thus every form of life in the Torajan universe is at once part of *sumanga'* and a container for it, which makes the cosmos continuous, reversible and open (Tsintjilonis 1999:640). In other words, all “activity and life is part of a single continuum, a single unfolding” (Tsintjilonis 1999:622). The objective for Torajans, then, is to embody *sumanga'* in such a way that it is arranged in a specific fashion: from right to left or from left to right around a source of power or navel (Tsintjilonis 1999:625). This explains the Torajan concern with order and proper placement and the strict division between rituals of the east and west

9 The idea that a constantly creative energy permeates and animates the universe is not unique to the Torajans but is shared by many other Southeast Asian societies. Whereas the Bugis and Makasar call it *sumange'* (see Errington 1983, 1989), the names given to this energy are close cognates of the Malay *semangat*. See Tsintjilonis (1999) for a more elaborate explanation of the Torajan idea of *sumanga'*.

referred to above. *Tongkonans* are a perfect example of sources of power or nodal points round which the energy collects, albeit in differing concentrations. In an open cosmos of energy the house has a definite existence that

... possesses a navel that should be seen both as the centre and origin point of the family group. In addition, although the succession of houses functions as a process of spatial inscription and differentiation, it does not amount to a permanent separation or irreversible fragmentation, but to a multiplication of points at which the creative energy associated with the cosmos can be tapped and utilized in a continuous process of expansion. In this expansion a *tongkonan* is much more than a house. It is not a spatial sign of life, it is the very place where life is 'planted' and 'grown'. (...) [I]t is the process of life itself (Tsintjilonis 1999:631).

Considering that death is coincident with the transformation of a life spirit into a 'black shadow', the most important purpose of traditional funeral rites is to initiate a transition, through which one's 'black shadow' is eventually 'converted back into *sumanga*' concentrated in the *tongkonan*. For this reason the *tongkonan* plays a special role in the funeral ceremony, as will be seen below.

The arrangement from right to left or left to right has to do with the movement between life (east or ascent) and death (west or descent) or, as Tsintjilonis (1999:638) puts it, "the transformation of a 'black shadow' into *sumanga*' may be seen as embodying an overall practice of exchange in relation to which the rites of the 'ascending smoke' [life] are both opposed and completed by the rites of the 'descending smoke' [death]." The overall practice of exchange achieved through sacrifice in ancestral rites is thus geared to proceeding in the right direction. As, according to Mauss (1990:16), a sacrifice is "an act of giving that is necessarily reciprocated life and death may be seen as integral parts of this reciprocity – that is, the overall exchange between gods, ancestors and humans, on which the cosmos depends" (quoted by Tsintjilonis 1999:638).

We do not need to probe the concept of *sumanga*¹⁰ too deeply to understand the principle underlying the 'excessive' offerings of money and animals at funeral ceremonies in Tana Toraja. It is much more complex than mere wealth, status, prestige or *siri*' – *sumanga*' determines the 'actual pattern of life' just as much. It is a belief in things that we cannot see, hear, smell or feel, unlike the funeral ceremony which is only an expression of it.

When someone dies it is important that her relatives (preferably her children) organise some kind of ritual that secures the transformation of the soul into *sumanga*'. This generally amounts to "some form of sacrifice which

10 Tsintjilonis (1999) and Errington (1983; 1989) provide a more elaborate explanation of the idea and concept of *sumanga*'.

is, whenever possible, shared and eaten” (Volkman 1985:84). The scale and sequence of the rituals as well as the size, type and number of animals to be sacrificed are all stipulated by local customary rules and are inextricably linked to the status and wealth of the deceased. There is a complex system of rituals for people from all classes and ranks, differing in size, duration and offerings. For poor people a simple ritual and a small symbolic sacrifice, such as a chicken egg or small pig, will do. However, the spirits will be angry with those who can afford more than they sacrifice. Traditionally the wealthiest people are expected to sacrifice 24 buffaloes and a number of pigs, and organise a funeral ceremony that lasts for several days. However, nowadays, these people slaughter up to 150 buffaloes and hundreds of pigs. In the southern village of Palipu’ *puang* families in particular are expected to hold such large ceremonies in order to retain their high status and not lose their *siri*’. Just after I left Palipu’ in January 2005 a prominent *puang* died and preparations for a large funeral were under way. In the preceding period I only attended a few small ceremonies of lower class people, in which no more than four buffaloes were slaughtered. In the northern village of Kondo’, on the other hand, funeral ceremonies appeared to be much larger and more costly, regardless of people’s social status. I attended several extraordinarily large funeral ceremonies and heard stories about others. Although a symbolic sacrifice might have satisfied the spirits and once was common for slaves and the poor, a socially acceptable funeral in Kondo’ today demands actual animal sacrifice.

In accordance with their belief in *sumanga*’ “death is treated as a gradual process rather than an abrupt event” (Hollan & Wellenkamp 1994:13). There is often a long delay, sometimes up to several years, between a person’s physical demise and the funeral. Torajan customary rules do not set limits on the period between death and burial. In fact, “the greater the eventual funeral the longer the hiatus between expiration of the deceased and the commencement of ritual activities culminating in burial” (Crystal 1974:126). The hiatus is caused by several factors, such as the need to save money, make preparations for the funeral, and wait for an auspicious date. In the meantime the body of the deceased is bathed, injected with formalin and wrapped in cloth. The corpse is often sat in a chair either in the southernmost room or in the main room, as if it is still a member of the household. The presence of a dead person in a house is usually signalled by hanging a white cloth in front of the house.

What follows is description of the funeral of Ne’ Sukku’, a high status person in the village of Kondo’ in northern Tana Toraja. It was eleven months after Ne’ Sukku’ died that the community of Kondo’ staged her great funeral ceremony. Family members and village cultural leaders had been urging her seven children to organise an extraordinary ceremonial display that corresponded to their high social status and, more importantly, would further add to the family’s prestige. However, the children’s resources were limited

and it was not easy for them to live up to the cultural expectations of the community within their limited means. Of Ne'Sukku's seven children only two daughters remain in the village. The others are living in Luwu in Southeast Sulawesi (two), and Sabah in Malaysia (three). The daughters in Tana Toraja (or rather their husbands) coordinated the preparations for the funeral ceremony, consulting with their migrant siblings by cellular phone. Generally migrant members will be notified of the necessary expenditures and, depending on their financial capacity, the total cost will be divided among the various family members. In practice migrants end up paying the largest shares. Ten months after Ne' Sukku passed away the children gathered and decided to slaughter 100 to 105 buffaloes at the ceremony, which was planned to last up to ten days before the corpse would eventually be taken to the family grave. The whole ceremony was orchestrated by Pong Cindy, a cousin of Ne'Sukku and well respected in the village for his knowledge of rituals (*ambe' kasiuluran*).

As Volkman (1985:104) puts it, "By the end of the funeral the children of the deceased have established new reputations, positions, new degrees of *siri'*, new cutting histories, and new debts." The total cost of constructing and decorating the ceremonial buildings, traditional costumes, drink and food for the thousands of guests, the expense of a photographer, the purchase of buffaloes and pigs and the animal slaughter tax were estimated to amount to nearly two billion *rupiah* (€170 000). Like many other ceremonies in northern Tana Toraja, this funeral was rather large considering the resources of the people involved. In reality the old nobility is challenged by rich members of the lower classes to demonstrate their wealth by sharing the slaughtered buffaloes' meat with the community of ritual participants. It now happens more often that low class people who have made so-called 'new money' in Jakarta, Irian Jaya or Malaysia organise exorbitant funeral ceremonies that do not befit their lowly status. According to one of my respondents in the north, "funeral ceremonies become bigger because traditional rules are no longer maintained. Nowadays people are more concerned with *gengsi* (prestige) than with custom. For example, according to indigenous spirituality 24 buffaloes is the highest number allowed to be slaughtered at a funeral ceremony. Slaughtering more has so far been over the top, or *gengsi*." It seems that it is the honour or prestige aspect of *siri'* that is inflating the size and cost of ceremonies. When I first arrived in Tana Toraja many people complained about the ever growing size of funeral ceremonies. They often linked this growth to *gengsi*. As one informant put it, "For low class people *gengsi* means showing that they are able to do many things, but for high class people it means maintaining their position." This struggle for prestige between upper and lower class people has led to increasing competition between ascribed status and achieved wealth, manifesting in a battle on the ceremonial field between blood ties and money (Volkman 1980:8).

The competitive element in the funeral ceremony is further stimulated by the inheritance system in Tana Toraja. Children receive an inheritance, usually wet rice fields, by paying a symbolic price in the form of buffaloes to be sacrificed at their parents' death ritual. This means that a child who sacrifices more will get more than its siblings. Not surprisingly, "This led to an ever greater competition between siblings, unless they were more or less willing to equalize their shares" (Liku Ada' 1986:229). The northern region seemed to be more conservative in applying the old inheritance system than the south, probably because almost every household in the north can own land, while most wet rice fields (*sawahs*) in the south are in the hands of the *puangs* and their descendants, thus obviating the need for intense competition in or outside a symbolic arena.

Conclusion

From the above it is evident that there is fierce competition for status in Tana Toraja, which is fought via *tongkonans* and ceremonies. These struggles are valuable for the upper social classes to maintain their status, and may be even more important for the middle class to gain prestige.¹¹ Yet the question remains whether these extravagant expressions of indigenous spirituality affect sustainable development, and in what ways.

In the view of most economists Torajan ceremonies (especially funerals and house-building ceremonies) are both time- and resource-consuming – in other words, a waste of money. A large part of a Torajan's life is devoted to ceremonial activities, time which cannot be used for economic (profit-making) purposes. Moreover, social obligations preoccupy entrepreneurs and prevent them from undertaking major business ventures. When entrepreneurs manage to build up a healthy business, family members and other acquaintances prevent it from growing further by claiming a share of the profits – often leading to rapid deterioration of the business. Blinded by status and aspiration, most Torajans would not even think of undertaking cost-effective activities. Economists do not see funeral and house-building ceremonies as a sound investment, because the duration and interest rates are unclear and there is no official contract. By and large, then, they consider funeral and house-building ceremonies an obstacle to sustainable development in Tana Toraja.

¹¹ A large group of people (especially from the lower social classes) have sought to escape from this status competition by migrating and giving up most of their contact with the heartland. Others escape the ritual obligations by converting to the Pentecostal church. However, this falls outside the scope of this article.

Social scientists, on the other hand, have pointed out the element of reciprocity that binds individuals together. Networks of reciprocity represent a chain of transactions in which economic and social considerations are inextricably linked. Time- and resource-consuming activities such as funeral and house-building ceremonies are important for establishing a common identity with a corresponding set of norms and values. By creating trust in reciprocity and a kind of 'emotional cement' between community members these activities fulfil the function of our current system of bookkeeping, business, law and government, and therefore transaction costs are kept low. Social scientists also point out the importance of the social relations maintained through these ceremonies for creating and securing a decent living. Social and economic investment in ceremonies will eventually pay off and is a deliberate decision with a view to the future.

Despite their value, current economic and social theories remain confined to the constraints or benefits of Torajan ceremonies for regional development in an exclusively economic sense. A more useful question would be whether these ceremonies promote sustainable development, more broadly defined as intra-generational and inter-generational solidarity (see introduction to this book). With regard to inter-generational solidarity, these ceremonies cannot be considered valuable for the sustainable development of the region. *Tongkonan* building is especially harmful for the local environment, because a lot of timber has to be cut down in the area. Funeral ceremonies are less harmful in the sense that most temporary shelters and stages are built of bamboo, which is specially grown for these events and easy replaceable. The roofs, however, are made of *nipah* (type of palm) imported from the harbour city of Palopo and needs more time to grow. When we take into account the fuel needed to transport the thousands of visitors from all over the world to the ceremonial arenas the picture becomes even worse.

When it comes to the effects of ceremonial and house-building ceremonies on intra-generational solidarity a different picture emerges. It appears that enhancing the *siri'* of individuals and *tongkonans* is the ultimate goal of many Torajans and is more important than food or drink. However, when you achieve the *siri'* you desire food and drink come automatically. People are clearly investing enormous sums of money in ceremonies for the sake of *siri'* and solidarity networks, through which they can accumulate even more wealth and, in turn, *siri'*. In the words of Bourdieu (1984), it is a dialectic relation between material and social/symbolic capital: through *siri'* and solidarity networks Torajans obtain more wealth and power, and greater wealth and power enhance *siri'*. But while the ceremonial rivalry provides opportunities for people from the upper classes, for the majority it is a burden. The rituals are an effective way of preventing people from the lower classes to climb up the social ladder. Consequently the only way they can escape the status competition and strive

for social equality and emancipation is by migrating and giving up most of their contact with the heartland or, more recently, through conversion to the Pentecostal church.

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Autochthonous symbols in an intercultural world

Diego Irazzaval

Introduction

Paradoxes arise when we view human situations in pluralistic contexts, and even more so when there is interaction with other ways of life. There are plenty of contradictions in the midst of supposedly ordinary human relationships. For example, indigenous peoples and external collaborators misunderstand each other because the latter interpret the former in terms of different categories and worldviews. Another paradox is how Western postmodernists benefit from autochthonous spiritualities (and often use them as objects of consumption). There are also widespread uncritical assumptions about neo-colonial patterns; little support for sustainable development; and great tension between local situations (where there are indigenous populations and other social groups) and global factors. These factors are part of an ongoing debate about 'glocalisation' and about homogeneity and heterogeneity (Robertson 1995:40).

My article focuses on two concerns and includes suggestions for sharing responsibility for our earthly home and with a view to faith experiences today. A first concern is how non-indigenous persons relate to autochthonous symbols. An intercultural agenda allows us to go beyond subtle or overt forms of fundamentalism and philosophical 'essentialism' that includes portrayal of indigenous populations as uncontaminated by *mestizaje* and *sincretismo*. Speaking positively, economic and ecological discussions are part of a human concern for sustainable development and have intercultural and inter-spiritual dimensions.

A second concern in our global context is to counteract consumerism in order that indigenous symbols may be acknowledged as genuinely liberating. Public discourse often deals with overcoming underdevelopment and poverty, but little attention is paid to deeper issues such as commodification and global forms of neo-colonialism. This article does not adopt a romantic approach to autochthonous cultures. Rather, it argues that symbolic sources of life (some of them being indigenous, and most of them being transcultural symbols) confront commodification of human existence (Silva Moreira 2008) and lead us forward toward genuine holistic development.

Economics and cultures

What do we understand by secular progress, and what may be called spiritual? In the long human journey through history spirituality is intimately associated with what is now called economics and culture. Spiritual traditions have cosmic and historical meaning. The environment, other persons, oneself, events – each and all of these are full of energy, power, meaning.

Today about 350 million people globally are classified as indigenous – 42.654.652 in South and North America or 5.16% of the American population. Autochthonous peoples speak approximately five thousand languages and account for 95% of cultural differences in the world. They represent an awesome human treasure trove.

How do aborigines (*ab + origo*, from the beginning) and autochthons (*autos + thon*, earth and humanity) see themselves and communicate with those who are different from them? They are modern people with strong roots in ancient times who have passed through several phases of cultural and historical development. These peoples are agents of intercultural behaviour.

On our continent the core experience is one of communion with creative forces in nature and history. The Maya *Popol'Vuh* (Book of Counselling) prays to *Corazón del cielo*, *Corazón de la tierra* (heart of heaven, heart of earth) in ancient imagery. Its prayer is eco-human: that dawn will arrive and that people will be peaceful and happy.¹ The creator is present in *allpa pacha* (earth), as the Franciscan Jerónimo de Oré pointed out in his “Indian Catholic symbol” in 1598.² However, as a result of the dualistic frameworks imposed during the colonial period the earth and the divine became separate entities.

Today autochthonous spiritual forces are felt and understood in several ways. ‘From below’ communities may be said to have their own economic and cultural symbols (that include elements from other cultures); ‘from above’ cultural industries are distributing and manipulating indigenous commodities. The latter phenomenon obviously implies a reinterpretation of what is autochthonous. In view of such economic and cultural distortions a re-grounding of spirituality is no romantic endeavour. Rather it is beset by endless paradoxes, negotiations between forces from ‘below’ and from ‘above’,

1 According to chapter 3 of *Popol'Vuh*, key sacred document of Maya civilisation, the first human beings said “*que amanezca... que los pueblos tengan paz, mucha paz y sean felices*” (that dawn may arrive, that people have peace, plenty of peace and be happy) (*Popol'Vuh, Las antiguas historias del Quiché* (1544?) (Anonymous 1952:109).

2 In 1598 the Franciscan Luis Jerónimo de Oré made a remarkable synthesis of Christian doctrine in his *Symbolo Catholico Indiano: Allpachapas kayniykikunawan, huntam rikurin*, (*allpa+pacha, la tierra se ve llena de las manifestaciones de Tu presencia*, the earth is full of manifestations of Your presence); translation and commentary by Taylor (2003:146-147).

interaction within indigenous communities, and deep tensions at the heart of consumer society.

Andean praxis

To understand indigenous spiritually one may focus on everyday life and its symbolic interactions. More than twenty years' experience in Andean regions has given me a sense of what this involves. One has to make a transition to share the people's perception of economic and cultural reality. It is earthly, healing, cheerful, communitarian. Their symbols of earth are quite different from what scientific discourse calls land; their healing goes beyond so-called scientific medical procedures; indigenous celebration is not at all like modern forms of entertainment that are sold and purchased.

Autochthonous spirituality is earthly and encompasses all time. What is fundamental is present time; the past is seen as reality before our eyes; and the future is perceived as being behind us. Such conceptions of space and time have an influence on rituals. For example, a spectrum of material symbols constitutes a *mesa*. This is a ritual in which offerings are laid on a cloth that is spread on the ground and prayed over. Above the cloth are placed signs of offerings to mother earth, referring mainly to agriculture, livestock, commerce, technological and financial concerns, and education (Fernandez 1997:210). Another important ritual is *ch'alla*, a liquid offering addressed to the sources of life. It is performed at harvest time, when machinery is bought, on the arrival of technological innovations, or on the anniversaries of social organisations. In other words, a *mesa* and a *ch'alla* certainly have ecological meaning, and they also have deep historical significance.

Concerning sickness and healing, Latin American practices are mostly intercultural. Throughout the continent people are "pragmatic ... they use whatever means are at hand according to the explanation about the causes of each sickness ... persons are called to do healing according to the results of their actions" (Kroeger & Ruiz 1988:16). Among poor people sickness is common, so a great deal of time and energy is devoted to healing each other. A gamut of therapies is used: herbs, counselling, pharmaceutical medicine, prayer, family dynamics, ethical patterns, et cetera. These and many other forms of intercultural and interreligious praxis forge strong spiritual bonds between autochthonous people. The imagery moreover fosters inculturation of the Christian message. Here one can cite an Andean myth about Thunupa, a divine hero that has characteristics of an indigenous Christ: he walked around the region, spoke several languages, healed the sick merely by touching them, preached a message of love, and was later rejected and carried a cross.³

3 See Thunupa's myth in a 17th century document by Joan de Santa Cruz Pachacuti Yamqui, *Relacion de antiguedades deste reyno del Piru* (1613), in Lara (2003:116-119).

As one delves into Andean peoples' praxis celebration is the outstanding feature (Irrarrazaval 1998). Common people attach more value to pleasant human and spiritual experiences than to what social elites teach them about truth and morality. Most indigenous and *mestizo* rituals serve to strengthen life and express thanksgiving. This autochthonous symbolic universe is amazing. Individuals and communities subjected to endless suffering and deprivation are irrepressibly joyous.

In terms of Christian tradition different peoples are considered to have a common origin and goal: to walk in God's light (Vatican II, *Nostra Aetate* 1). This language is remarkable. Cosmic metaphors, such as being people of the earth and walking in the light, adequately communicate intercultural and interreligious journeys. One can also say that human pilgrimage towards life entails taking good care of the earth, practising holistic healing, and has as its main goal that all people – particularly the marginalised – celebrate life in abundance.

So far it all seems quite idyllic. But there are also great dangers and evils. Autochthonous experiences are perverted when they undergo commodification of their meaning and practical implications. Human self-centredness and global economics inflict deep wounds and have catastrophic consequences.

Indigenous commodities

One of the great paradoxes is that indigenous people are praised, yet their lives and goods are sold and purchased. On the one hand human rights are proclaimed and exalted, on the other cultures are turned into commodities. The global market commodifies indigenous land, healing techniques, art, spirituality and so on. It is also disgusting, in Christian terms, how public discourse praises autochthonous people and at the same time makes them objects to be sold and bought. Tourism and its clever strategies have focused on the environment and the exotic qualities of 'Indians'.

Academic social analysis has made us aware of the modern framework, and of economic manipulation and trivialisation of human goods. Vincent Miller puts it bluntly: "[C]ultural differences and minority perspectives are preserved at the cost of being commodified ... it drives both the postmodern circulation of cultural wares and their evisceration; it demands ever more and ever shallower things" (Miller 2005:65, 70). What is most scandalous, from a Christian point of view, is the use of rituals in esoteric and cultural tourism. Many precious symbols of life become gimmicks to gratify emotions. In some places on our continent tourists have to pay to take photos or videos of Indians.

Everyday experience teaches us that such commodification is attributable not only to the global market but also to behaviour within indigenous communities. Many of them have agreed to a kind of cultural development and material progress that implies selling their land, artistic products, spiritual

wisdom, autochthonous science and technology. For example, ethnic clothing is advertised in an elitist Chilean newspaper as fabulous design that employs indigenous materials and technologies. In this and many other ways marginal people are manipulated by the market.

What lies behind these experiences of commodification? It seems to me that there is an unwritten and overpowering principle: narcissism (Cooper 1986). International and national policy makers constantly call for aid for the underprivileged, and sometimes for solidarity through voluntary associations. However, in everyday practice they simply satisfy their personal desires. The typical Western personality “has been deformed by consumerism and by the atmosphere of selfishness” (Cooper 1986:125,128). This leads to all kinds of narcissistic disorders.

Ethically such situations of narcissistic commodification are unacceptable. Thus there is a bright side to the picture. Many human beings feel uncomfortable with the state of affairs and seek to rediscover a sustainable spirituality that is not narcissistic and that reconnects us with interactive, spiritual sources of life.

Socio-spiritual hope

Since modern persons are converted into objects and self-interest is a sickening obsession, reconnection with nature, society and the spiritual realm has become a priority. Human survival is at stake. Such reconnection is not due to nostalgia for indigenous roots, nor because some exotic paraphernalia may fill our existential void. Rather it is a question of everyone’s survival and embarking on the 21st century without lapsing into personal despair and ecological suicide.

Networks of social activists and academic communities are saying that contemporary ecological agendas and debates on sustainable development are signs of hope in the midst of warnings that the earth and humanity are going down a slippery slope. We do have hope, and we also have new paradigms with roots in our ancient cultures. This may be called a bio-social-spiritual paradigm. It brings together personal well-being, the struggle for social justice, and longing for spiritual foundations. These different dimensions blend, despite the fact that they are often pulled apart by dualistic attitudes. The new paradigm includes the particle ‘bio’ because everything and everyone focus on life. The socio-economic agenda is bio-centred, and so is the bio-spiritual quest.

Spirituality on old and new grounds

Autochthonous spirituality deals with what Western civilisation abstractly defines as energy and power. These concepts may be compared to what is communicated through Andean language. What is most important -the *arche* of Andean existence- is *kawsay* (Quechua language) and *jakaña* (Aymara language). These categories cannot be rendered exactly: they do not fit into any one stratum of reality. They are holistic and dynamic, referring to life-giving processes that are biological, economic, sexual, emotional, cultural, spiritual, cosmic. All of this obviously does not correspond to postmodern spiritual wishful thinking and fantasy, which are incompatible with the bio-political and mystical meanings of *kawsay* and *jakaña*.

Andean spirituality has an earthly transcendental meaning that reconnects with all that is around and within us. It does not have a heavenly orientation, as is evident, for example, in everyday prayer: “Mother Earth, *Pachamama*, generous mother, with all our hearts we thank all that you give us, and plead that you continue blessing us, so that your sons and daughters have no hunger” (Mamani 2002:158). This earthly and transcendent being-in-relationship allows a community to address a ‘You’, a Mother Earth, that sustains life. Therefore there is contact with goodness in life. That is totally different from present-day narcissism and the sacred objects (commodities) that predominate throughout the world.

Everyday interaction and language are deeply meaningful. Autochthonous expressions (Pardo & Achahui 2008) convey mystical qualities and responsibility for others. It may be understood as a spiritual, social, personal, cosmic way of being alive. The following are some key formulas:

- ▶ living well: *sumaj kawsay*, *vivir bien* (Quechua and Spanish), *suma jakaña*, *suma qamaña*, *vivir bien* (Aymara and Spanish)
- ▶ well-being: *allin kawsay*, *estar bien*
- ▶ nothing else than living well: *allinlla kawsakuy*, *vivir bien no mas*
- ▶ harmonious existence: *allinlla kawsakylla*, *vivir en armonia*
- ▶ a lovable life: *munay kawsay*, *amable vida*,
- ▶ existence is like sugar: *mishk'i kawsay*, *moxsa jacana*, *dulce existencia*

These words/experiences are not easily understood in another frame of reference, nor can they be translated into other modes of communication (such as Spanish and English). Rather, those idioms speak to one’s heart and mind, alluding to everyday responsibilities. They are meaningful when they are expressed in prayerful interaction, in praxis, in friendly conversation with others, in acknowledged roots in the source of life. It is not a matter of recognising a religious object; rather it is a holistic praxis of being-in-life.

Let me also underline key economic and political dimensions. Andean praxis is not self-contained, since for centuries it has been characterised by

syncretism, *mestizaje*, interaction. Nothing is wholly indigenous and closed to otherness; nothing is purely secular. Indigenous understanding of reality has empirical and symbolic dimensions. Juan van Kessel and Porfirio Enriquez (Van Kessel 2002:55) have studied these interconnections in depth: “economic activity is seen as nurturing life, as a sacred action, because persons collaborate with creative forces that sustain life in the world.” In this sense it may honestly be said that all human action is grounded in spirituality.

It is also a macro-ecumenical way of being alive. It moves beyond borders. It is not harnessed by Christian denominations, nor is it subordinated to religious absolutes. Indigenous and *mestizo* peoples are macro-ecumenical in that they are open to both their own and other cultures and spiritualities.

This sharply contradicts any kind of fundamentalism, be it ethnic, economic, or spiritual. In particular it opposes material/political idolatry in today’s world. Certain economic rules are sacred, and anyone who fails to comply with them is marginalised. The idolatrous pattern supposedly yields emotional and biological gratification, but needless to say, it merely contributes to dehumanisation. So again the important thing is to acknowledge a multidimensional passion for life, and to have a strategy of bio-ecological-human development. It is autochthonous and *mestizo*, it comprehends all cultural colours and embraces all quests for meaning. This is why it can be said that our foundations are bio-social-spiritual.

Development and regeneration

Nowadays corporate economic enterprises that claim to be secular are adding some spiritual trimmings. For example, local communities and international business are catering for meditation techniques from Asia and promote Indo-American exotic art, myths and forms of healing. Among black communities in Latin America there is growing interest in rituals and symbols from Africa. Some of this is intercultural dialogue, but most of it is distortion and manipulation of spirituality. They are transformed into commodities for the sake of material success and social prestige. This is one side of the story.

There is another side as well. Some development proposals and programmes include genuine cultural interaction and bonding, economic equity, democratic institutions and spiritual growth. In Latin America and throughout the world there is greater awareness of holistic goals, sustainable ethnic and intercultural concerns, grass-roots empowerment, a blending of ecological and techno-scientific progress.⁴ Open-minded people agree in their criticism of using

4 The social sciences and philosophy are joining hands in a holistic enterprise. I am grateful for insights gained from Calderón (2003); Elizalde (2005); Raza (2000); Valenzuela & Rangel (2004); De Sousa Santos (2004); Amin (2002:35-49); Apffel-Marglin (1999); Leff (2002); Rotania & Werneck (2004); Arnold (2008: 20-41); Estermann (2006:245-276).

nature and persons for the benefit of minorities. Since eco-suicide is taking place in overt and subtle ways, one cannot abstain from acting.

In today's global scenario shared responsibility for intercultural development has two major objectives: (a) systematic critique of the dominant pattern that destroys the environment, discriminates against cultures, and generates unhappy persons; and (b) local and interactive global initiatives that lead to holistic well-being (taking care of creation, sharing historical responsibility).

Such convictions are sometimes seen as anti-modern, unrealistic and romantic. Here a core issue is that local/global alternative strategies should be implemented honestly and debated openly. Do they contain a certain degree of scepticism? Is world progress seen as homogeneous and totalitarian? Is there an unconscious assumption of secular myths, such as universal scientific and technological progress that has to be channelled into every situation? What needs to be done by each association of human beings in interaction with the rest?

This short article is expressive of a widespread, often silent passion for life. It comes from the ranks of many who walk towards a pluralistic and eco-human utopia. We are persons and peoples with different worldviews and spiritualities, who implicitly or explicitly share an interactive utopia. It includes material development; but is not reduced to quantitative goals or sacred commodities. It is focused on well-being that is in harmony with nature and blends different worldviews.

Indigenous communities and non-indigenous agencies who are their collaborators often misunderstand each other's contribution to genuine sustainable development. There is a dangerous hidden trap, namely the linguistic and emotional dichotomy of 'them' and 'us' that fails to acknowledge interactive patterns. There are methodological tasks ahead for each person. How can small associations take charge of alternative forms of action? How can autochthonous and non-autochthonous persons collaborate in economic and cultural projects of global human development?

As noted already, nowadays enlightened neo-liberal strategies are cleverly manipulating what belongs to peoples-of-the-earth, autochthonous and *mestizo* communities, and others with holistic concerns. Development agencies have incorporated qualifiers such as 'sustainable', 'ethnic', 'ecological', 'gender development', et cetera. Since there is plenty of ambivalence and cooptation, a debate on goals and means is urgently needed. Teleological concerns are important.

Teleology implies an intercultural goal of sustainable eco-human development; it implies seeking and contributing to 'another possible world' (this brief English concept may be explained in Spanish: *teleología del progreso ecohumano y de otro mundo posible*). It does not promote a false dichotomy

such as respect for creation versus techno-scientific progress. Rather it focuses on the goal of well-being for all. In our asymmetrical societies it takes into account scarcity of resources and their unjust appropriation. Its goals are sharing limited resources and social equity.

Unfortunately development is often misunderstood. It is seen as an evolution from an uncivilised past (in which autochthonous cultures are allegedly stuck) and advancing to techno-scientific modernity that guarantees happiness (and is measured in economic terms).

When things are done holistically the goal is bio-economic-spiritual. It is genuine regeneration that draws from the sources of life, is carried out by nature with its inner energies and by human beings who reconstruct reality (Estermann 2006:245-276, Apffel-Marglin 1999, Arnold 2008). The image of *regeneración*, meaningful in Andean cultures, has been promoted by F. Apffel-Marglin, J. Estermann and others. It is not nostalgic nor a one-dimensional programme (such as *pachamamismo*, *andinismo*). Bio-spirituality is practised by small-scale initiatives that become networks of alternative development and thus foster globalisation from below (as we say in Spanish: *globalización desde abajo*).

Some final comments: When hearts and minds listen to indigenous wisdom (and to other alternative ways of life) sustainable bio-development includes spirituality. Daily economic and cultural activities have to go beyond market parameters so as to engage in genuine earthly, human, spiritual growth. This implies that indigenous symbols should be regarded not as commodities in a consumer society but as meaningful for both autochthonous and other human groups. This promotes intercultural well-being in a globalised world, as well as inter-spiritual liberation from all forms of evil. In this article we have tried to show how secular absolutes (especially commodification of humans and things) are confronted by the symbolic experiences of common people. These autochthonous and *mestizo* experiences offer new grounds for a spirituality that confronts secular absolutes and allows us to approach the source of life.

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Ubuntu management in the World Council of Churches

Frans Dokman

Introduction

Because of globalisation and migration organisations are becoming increasingly multicultural, so intercultural management has become a must. Theories of intercultural management pay a lot of attention to cultural differences, but religion is often neglected. This is a lacuna. Theories of international relations show that there is a global resurgence of religion, and in this respect Europe seems to be an exception. Whereas for many, if not most, Westerners religious belief has diminished or is relegated to the private domain, this does not apply to non-Western people.¹

The *question* to be answered in this article is: how is religion dealt with in multicultural organisations? The *objective* is to show how the aforementioned lacuna in intercultural management theories could be filled. The article presents a case study of ubuntu management in the World Council of Churches. This is a faith-based organisation but, as we show below in greater detail, it exemplifies the dissonance about religion between Western and non-Western people. The *method* used is critical discourse analysis. Critical discourse analysts assume that there is a dialectical relation between language use and social reality, in this case social organisations. They assume, moreover, that social organisations are created, maintained or transformed through a power struggle between dominant and peripheral discourses that strive for hegemony. Sometimes critical discourse analysts focus on the study of single words (Fairclough 1992:186). In this article we look at the discourse on ubuntu in the World Council of Churches and the way it has sought to transform itself since the inauguration of the Kenyan Samuel Kobia as secretary general. First we explain the concept of ubuntu management. Next we describe an attempt to introduce ubuntu management in the World Council of Churches. Then we make a critical discourse analysis of this case. We end with a discussion and conclusion.

¹ As we will show later in greater detail, Western and non-Western are not geographical but historical categories. They indicate differences in philosophy of life, not territories where people live.

Ubuntu management

The term 'ubuntu' derives from isiZulu, a member of the Bantu language group, and the ideas of ubuntu management are rooted in Bantu philosophy. The premise of ubuntu is encapsulated in the maxim, '*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*' (a person is a person through other persons). Ubuntu is characterised by the individual's solidarity with the community. "*Ubuntu is the willingness to go the extra mile for one's fellow human. It is interdependence, the realisation that everyone in a group is interrelated. I call that: 'I am because we are'*" (Muskens 2002:24).²

Mbigi seeks to develop a management style inspired by ubuntu. In the view of this organisation scientist, organisations are components of life force (Mbigi 1997; Mbigi & Maree 2005). Managing an organisation is an intellectual, emotional and spiritual journey. It is an awareness that everybody in a group is related to everybody else. If an organisation is successful, it is because human beings are in harmony with one another, with spirits, ancestors and God. If an organisation does not do well it is because there is no sense of community, no harmony with the spirits and with God. The spiritual journey of management and staff consists in restoring accord with one another, the spirits and God by means of ceremonies and rituals.

In order to flourish, says Mbigi, organisations have turn to spirituality. They have to draw on the so-called social capital of emotional and spiritual resources:

Social capital, an organization's emotional and spiritual resources, is a distinctive competitive factor akin to intellectual capital. Social capital affects the impact of any strategic intervention and the ultimate effectiveness of policies, procedures and processes. But modern management thinking, practices and literature are weak in managing emotional and spiritual resources, which also help to determine the value of an organization (Mbigi 2000:36).

Spirits, associated with ubuntu, can help to activate and transform social capital: the supra-tribal hierarchy of spirits can be used to tap emotional and spiritual sources in an organisation. When that happens spirits are linked with various norms and values, as is evident in the following scheme, "Spirits of management" (Mbigi 2000:38):

² This is a quotation from Lovemore Mbigi, rephrasing words of John Mbiti.

Cultural Values	Spirits
Morality and dignity	Rainmaker spirit Gobwa
Performance and enterprise	Hunter spirit Shavi Rudzimba
Authority: know the truth	Divination spirit Sangoma
Power and conflict	War spirit Majukwa
Survival of oneself and one's group	Clan/family spirit Mudzimu Wemhuri
Particular obsession, ability and creativity	Wandering spirit Shave
Bitterness, anger, revenge	Avenging spirit Ngozi
Cynism, negativity, destruction	Witch spirit Mutakati

Spirits are not directly part of the community, but their names and significance are frequently remembered. Mbigi became acquainted with spirits by asking participants in meetings to recount stories about their work. Mbigi's narrative approach accords with critical discourse analysis (to be discussed below), which discerns social relations, identities and institutional links in stories.

Negative stories mean that an organisation has negative spirits. An explicitly negative spirit is Mutakati, who represents cynicism, negativity and destructiveness. The most positive spirit is Gobwa, who takes care of the organisation's internal and external relations. Gobwa ranks above Shavi Rudzimba, the spirit of enterprise. Mbigi tries to enlist positive spirits for the organisation by constructing new narratives. He also performs rituals to drive out negative spirits and welcome back positive ones. Staff members take part in these rituals, thus committing themselves to the organisation's spirits.

The transformation of an organization is not just an intellectual journey, it's also an emotional and spiritual journey. In order to access the emotional and spiritual resources of an organization, appropriate bonding symbols, myths, ceremonies and rituals are needed (Mbigi 2000:39).

The result of transformation by way of indigenous spirituality is enormously increased productivity, because people feel spiritually and socially nourished and committed to their organisation and environment. Mbigi emphasises that in African Christianity the presence of spirits is perfectly normal:

The belief in God and the Spirit is very pervasive, very central and fundamental among African people. In Afrocentric religion, God is revered and one should not speak to Him directly except through the spirits and ancestors (Mbigi 1997:51).

He makes a distinction between positive ancestral spirits, nature (oracular) spirits and evil spirits. The supreme force in the spiritual universe of ubuntu is God.

Another hallmark of ubuntu management is its advocacy of consensus. Unlike the Western democratic model, the majority position does not win the

day. The minority viewpoint is included in decision making. The views of all participants are taken into account. Obviously leadership retains the right to make snap decisions, but when it comes to important issues and strategies there should be consensus. According to ubuntu management all organisations share in the same eternal life force, hence they are all religious. The thinking is not dualistic. Dichotomies such as secular – religious, culture – religion, organisation – religion are not on. In ubuntu management culture is religious by definition, implying that there is no distinction between religion and non-religion in cultures. At most there is a difference in the degree of visibility of religion in a society's culture. Societies in the South give greater expression to their religiosity, in contrast to the West where religion, while clearly not absent, tends to be confined to the private sphere. This means that organisations merely differ in the extent to which religion is visible. The fact that they have a spiritual dimension is incontrovertible.

The foregoing conception of organisational management contrasts with the mainstream view. The dominant view in the Western world is that religion may or may not play a role in the private sphere, but it should be kept out of the public domain. The dominant view in the global South is that religion plays an important role in people's lives and organisations. This difference features in most multinational organisations, even in so-called faith-based organisations. To Western staff of the latter a multinational faith-based organisation is an organisation like any other multinational company or business where the same management principles and methods apply, as will be shown in greater detail below. According to southern staff faith-based organisations require extraordinary management styles, because they are not only social but also spiritual realities.

In short, Lovemore Mbigi maintains that transforming an organisation “is not just an intellectual journey, it's also an emotional and spiritual journey” (Mbigi 2000:39).

Samuel Kobia

On 28 August 2003 Samuel Kobia was appointed general secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC). At his first press conference Kobia announced his intention to run the WCC using an African management style, focussing on religiosity and humanity, which he explicitly described in terms of ubuntu. It is an interesting case to answer our question. To this end we use critical discourse analysis as our research method. Discourse analysis requires one to select a sample of texts (Fairclough 1992:227). In this section we describe Kobia's texts on his African-style management of the WCC. We also look at texts in which he explicitly deals with ubuntu or alternative words.

Wording is an important tool for discourse analysis (Fairclough 1992:190-194). To broaden the picture other reports and memoranda of the Central Committee were analysed, but they did not deal with either ubuntu or an African management style. Before we describe our sample, we briefly describe the WCC as an organisation.

The WCC is a leading international Christian ecumenical body. Founded on 23 August 1948, its headquarters are in Geneva, Switzerland. Most non-Catholic Christian churches have joined the WCC. At its inception in 1948 147 churches from 44 countries joined it as founding members (Michiels 1999). Currently 348 denominations from 120 countries are represented. In 1999 the WCC represented some 80% of non-Catholic Christians, comprising about 380 million Protestants and 120 million Eastern Orthodox members – that is some 30% of all Christians and about 10% of the world population. Most Christian groups are represented, such as Eastern Orthodox churches, Protestant churches, the Anglican Church, some Baptists, most Lutherans, Methodists, various Reformed churches and some liberal churches. Although Christians on the whole experience ecumenism as positive, there is criticism as well, specifically of the ecumenical approach and the resultant broad base. The criticism derives in part from orthodox Protestant churches. The Roman Catholic Church is not a member of the WCC, but since Vatican II it has cooperated closely as a ‘participant observer’, particularly at the level of national councils of churches. The evangelical and Pentecostal movements are mostly unaligned with the WCC. Evangelical and Pentecostal churches represent as many Christians as all churches affiliated to the WCC, and their following, especially among the poor and among black people in the South, is growing steadily.

The WCC has been in dire financial straits for many years. Since the 1998 Assembly in Harare, Zimbabwe its income has dropped by some 30% to roughly €27 million per annum. About 30% of its members have never paid even the minimum contribution of €650. In view of the southward shift of Christianity’s centre of gravity and the location of the WCC in cosmopolitan Geneva, there are suggestions that its headquarters should be moved from Switzerland to a country in the southern hemisphere.

Member churches of the WCC meet fairly regularly (every six to eight years) for an Assembly. The Assembly, the top management organ, elects the members of its board, the Central Committee. This committee on its own elects the general secretary, who heads the international headquarters of the WCC. The WCC is a faith-based organisation which, on behalf of its member denominations, works for a better world. Programmes are built around the themes of mission and evangelism, faith and order, *diakonia* and solidarity, international affairs, peace and human security, and justice and peace. The salaried staff comprises 200 workers. Although some of the professionals are of

Swiss origin, the staff as a whole reflects the diverse cultures and denominations represented in the WCC. This is promoted by a large intake of committee members and workgroups engaged on the aforementioned themes. In short, people with a wide range of religio-cultural identities cooperate in the WCC.

After a series of mainly Western secretaries, starting with the Dutch Visser 't Hoof and ending with the German Konrad Raiser, the Kenyan Samuel Kobia, appointed in 2003, is the first African general secretary.

Public lecture

Our first source is Kobia's speech immediately after the announcement of his election as general secretary on 28 August 2003.³ In it he addresses both the WCC and (international) society. In the speech he dwells on the financial troubles besetting the WCC, but he concentrates even more on African spirituality and the ideas of ubuntu. Although Kobia does not use the word 'ubuntu' in his address as newly elected secretary, he does cite the premises of ubuntu. The words 'together' and 'fellowship' are italicised. It is not known if Kobia or the editors had a hand in this, but it indicates the significance attached to these words.

What Kobia wants is for WCC staff "to relate as human beings". His aim is "to be the captain of the team" in which "every member of the team is valuable because we can succeed only with the participation of all". The general secretary's leadership, apart from the organisational programme and finances, is mainly spiritual.

We must seek ways of deepening spiritual life for the Ecumenical Centre community. And because this is not going to be easy, we would want to call on the central committee to accompany us in this effort to deepen the spirituality in our lives here in this community.

Accomplishing the mission of the WCC is "a journey that we must walk together", says Kobia. Subsequent to this address there was a press conference, in which he explicitly uses the word 'ubuntu' and explains its meaning: "Evoking the concept of Ubuntu, a Zulu word, Kobia explained that for Africans, it is 'that which makes human beings human'."⁴

This was reported in various international newspapers. Kobia voiced his intention to introduce ubuntu values into the WCC. Humanity and spirituality are at the centre of his view of management. On the basis of such a relationship he hopes to achieve cooperation. In an interview with the Dutch daily paper

3 Dr S. Kobia, Remarks following the election of the WCC general secretary, 28 August 2003, *The Ecumenical Review* 55, 2003, 431-432.

4 WCC Central Committee News Release, "General Secretary-elect brings African touch to WCC", Geneva, 30 August 2003.

Trouw (7 May 2008) Kobia reiterates his point: “From the outset I have let myself be guided by the African ubuntu proverb, ‘If you want to walk fast, walk alone. But if you want to go far, walk together with others’.”

In the management period from January 2004 to April 2008 Dr Kobia gave 21 public lectures. In two of these he elaborated on ubuntu. In an address to the International Council of Christians and Jews in July 2005 he stressed the importance of ubuntu in conflict resolution, using the term in the sense of wholeness: “Shalom and wholeness (or ubuntu as Africans would put it)...”⁵ On 13 August 2007 Kobia spoke in Chang Seong, Korea. His lecture was entitled “Consultation on new waves of life-centred theology, spirituality and mission in the 21st century”. What strikes one is the connection he makes between ubuntu and sangsaeng, an Asian philosophy centring on life force.

Sangseang recalls the ancient Korean concept of sharing community and economy that allows all to flourish together. When Ubuntu and Sangseang meet together, justice and peace kiss each other, and the Biblical vision of life in God’s shalom shines in the light of two congenial cultures of this world and speaks to people of Africa and Asia, but not only to them.⁶

Thus there are alternative words. Shalom and sangsaeng seem equivalent to ubuntu. The lectures in Chicago and Chang Seong do not deal with management styles as such.

Article: “NCKK as enabler for church mission”

The book *Christian mission and social transformation. A Kenyan perspective* (1989) contains an article written by Kobia in his capacity as general secretary of the National Council of Churches Kenya (NCKK). In the article, “NCKK as enabler for church mission”, he underscores the value of relations and humanity: “We can be complete human beings only in relation to others” (Kobia 1989:11).

Kobia expresses his view that an organisation should be linked to the whole of human life and should promote biblical values such as service to people. The word ‘ubuntu’ is not used. Instead Kobia uses the Swahili word ‘*harambee*’, meaning wholeness. Harambee is associated with ecumenism and sharing:

5 “Healing the world, working together. Religion in global society”, international conference of the International Council of Christians and Jews, Chicago, 24 July 2005.

<http://www.oikoumene.org/gr/resources/documents/general-secretary/speeches/religion-in-global-society.html>

6 “Consultation on new waves of life-centered theology, spirituality and mission in the 21st century”, Chang Seong, Korea, 13 August 2007.

<http://www.oikoumene.org/gr/resources/documents/general-secretary/speeches/chang-seong-korea-transforming-theology.html>

The concept of sharing is not new to Kenyans. The spirit of *Harambee* itself is very much in the framework of sharing. In Kenya there is already a solid basis for ecumenical sharing of resources (Kobia 1989:13).

As an organisation the NCKK should be a driving force of wholeness, a task for which it has biblical legitimisation: “The biblical basis of the NCKK is its source of strength for life and work” (Kobia 1989:9). Via life force the NCKK enables affiliated churches to conduct the church’s mission.

Books by Dr Samuel Kobia

The title of Kobia’s book *The courage to hope* (2003) refers to the motto of the WCC Assembly in Harare in 1998, “A journey of hope for Africa”. In it Kobia deals with the spiritual and ethical aspects of African leadership.

Key expressions are ‘human dignity’ and ‘African traditional values’. With reference to the side effects of globalisation, which include the neo-liberal market system and the spread of aids, ubuntu is introduced briefly as traditional respect for the sacredness of life with an eye for humanity. Kobia calls on African theologians to value ubuntu: “Theology in Africa has to rediscover the positive attributes of our culture and the pride of ubuntu for it to be able to fight globalization” (Kobia 2003:125).

In 2006 a second book by Samuel Kobia appeared, *Called to the one hope. A new ecumenical epoch*. It was published after the Assembly in Porto Alegre. With reference to economic inequality and the need for peace and justice, Kobia discusses the connection between ubuntu and shalom:

There have been dialogues between African Christians and Jews in recent years and in these talks they learned that ‘shalom’ means not only ‘wholeness’ but its roots can mean ‘to pay one’s debts’. In order to obtain the blissful condition of ‘shalom’ wholeness, one must pay one’s debts. And with respect to the longer commitment from our respective faiths, ‘shalom’, or ‘ubuntu’ as Africans would put it, means almost the same thing in English (Kobia 2006:119).

Kobia discusses the dominant Western influence on the organisational culture of the WCC – dominance at a theological, financial and bureaucratic level that is rooted in the past and does not tally with the present multicultural and multi-denominational staff:

The first general secretary of the WCC, W.A. Visser ‘t Hooft, a Dutchman, once humorously remarked that the theology of the WCC was German, the financing was American and its bureaucracy was Dutch. Today, European churches are largely empty and their members growing older, American churches lack the funds and energy for the WCC and while the style of the bureaucracy remains stolidly old-fashioned European, the staff reflects the multi-racial, multi-cultural and multi-denominational nature of the world (Kobia 2006:24-25).

Kobia observes a preference among Western church organisations for retreating to the safety of established institutional frameworks whilst tightening their grip on faiths and denominations:

I compiled a growing and changing list of significant implications for ecumenism in the 21st century which require urgent action if the movement is not be stifled by institutionalism and structures:

The decline of membership among churches in Western Europe and North America and their reduced abilities to contribute financially to the work of the ecumenical movement while increasing their ties to confessions and denominations.

The reduced influence and status of these Northern churches in society, politics, governance, advocacy and common witness while turning inward for security to institutions and bureaucracies (Kobia 2006:54).

The general secretary sees Western church organisations as fearful of adapting to present-day circumstances in the ecumenical field, where many Christians are drawn to the religious vitality of the evangelical and Pentecostal movement and new charismatic churches, both in the North and in the South. Kobia's main concern is that institutionalisation of the WCC is a development that not only harms its dynamics and spirituality, but also hampers agreement with a growing group of charismatic denominations:

Traditional youth and lay training centres supported by Protestants in Europe had been the training ground for the early ecumenical movement. Now the evangelical and Pentecostal youth movements are alive with energy and dynamism but they were not with us. Where, I wondered, are our future ecumenical leaders to be formed? Even though I found everywhere a hunger for spirituality, the gnawing and difficult question arose: have we in the WCC become too institutionalized and too bureaucratized, to respond in 21st century terms to this yearning for healing and wholeness? *Movements are thriving while institutions are languishing. These have a vitality and openness lacking in our structures. We are over-cautious, we are afraid of offending* (Kobia 2006:xii). [Italics in original.]

Kobia questions the mode of full membership (as a result of which not all denominations are able or willing to join) and the structures of ecumenical organisations. Are these structures inspired by God or by the business world?

Are we willing to give up, for example, the rigid concept of membership? Our insistence that all assistance must be made on the basis of need alone? These structures of security we have erected – are they of God, or are they of the corporate world where professionalism, competition, internal politics, promotions and status are the motivation? (Kobia 2006:xii).

Kobia foresees that the time of global institutionalised church organisations is running out since it is evident that institutional structures are no longer viable:

Global confessional and denominational bodies and ecumenical institutions have always been able to find support but the time is nigh when these institutionalized structures cannot be sustained (Kobia 2006:xiii).

To survive as ecumenical organisations as well as link up with the current situation of dynamic churches in the South and a growing Pentecostal movement, Kobia advocates taking the risk of transformation:

The church can be church again, the ecumenical movement can rekindle the flame of hope, it can if it is willing to accept the challenge of change ... It is a different world, a different movement and the work for transformation is daunting. We can face the future directly and honestly or we can turn further inwards and fail in our mission to offer hope (Kobia 2006:xiii).

Kobia decided to make visits to Christians grappling with change a top priority:

So, in those early months as general secretary, I made a critical decision to visit all the regions of the world wherever Christians were wrestling with change. This would be my priority above all other priorities (Kobia 2006:xi).

The subtitle of *Called to the one hope* is *A new ecumenical epoch*. The cover picture shows enthusiastic youths, hands raised heavenwards, attending a lively gathering of some evangelical or Pentecostal church. Kobia fears that an institutionalised WCC will not be able to join in this. His vision of the future is an ecumenical world in which charismatic, dynamic churches, especially in the South, will predominate.

The shift of Christianity's centre from the North to the South is numerically, theologically and doctrinally and away from denominationalism, hierarchy and structure (Kobia 2006:54).

Reports and memorandums of the Central Committee

At a meeting of the Central Committee on 15-22 February 2005 Kobia reported a mutation in staff organisation, consisting in a reduced staff at the Ecumenical Centre in Geneva as opposed to an increase in staff at offices in the South and greater utilisation of decentralised consultants.

In the last few years, a considerable number of developments have taken place with regard to the Council's overall staffing situation: while, on the one hand, the numbers of the core staff decreased significantly, on the other hand the numbers of decentralized consultants to programmatic activities were increased (EEF; EHAIA); offices were located in the regions (Middle East and Pacific Desks; Indigenous Peoples' Programme; Ecumenical Disability

Advocates Network); specialized consultants were invited to accomplish concrete tasks (Publications; Reconfiguration).⁷

Apart from this, the meeting did not discuss topics associated with an African management style or ubuntu.

A Central Committee meeting in the first week of September 2006 devoted a great deal of attention to planning for the period 2007-2013 based on recommendations of the Assembly in Porto Alegre earlier that year (February 2006). Kobia started his report with a proposal to adopt a different procedure for policy implementation:

It is proposed that the projects and activities that will be approved by the Central Committee be implemented by flexible staff groups drawn from various parts of the WCC, to ensure a truly integrated and interactive model for work that holds together mission and unity, public witness and action on economics, diakonia and justice, ecumenical formation and the Bossey Ecumenical Institute – all harmonized in a more intentional way. Every program has built into it a relational component, a communications plan and a plan for good stewardship of staff and resources. [nr.9]⁸

In the past the different groups implemented their own programmes, but here Kobia, following a recommendation by the Assembly in Porto Alegre to initiate closer cooperation between the various programme lines, proposes a transition to a more integrated approach, in which projects and activities are carried out by teams of representatives from all programme lines. The accent is on harmony and relations. Kobia stresses that all WCC activities have a theological basis. His report to this session does not mention ubuntu or an African management style.

The next meeting of the Central Committee was 13-20 February 2008. The theme was the WCC's 60th anniversary. The re-election of the general secretary was also on the agenda, but on 18 February the WCC announced that Dr Kobia had indicated that he was not available for a second term. In his report he underscored the purpose of his travels to maintain relations:⁹

7 Central Committee 2005, Gen. 3, Report of the General Secretary, Geneva, 22 February 2005. <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/central-committee/geneva-2005/reports-and-documents/gen-3-report-of-the-general-secretary.html>

8 Central Committee 2006, Gen. 05, programme plans 2007-2013. Geneva, 6 September 2006. <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/central-committee/geneva-2006/reports-and-documents/programme-plans-2007-2013-summary.html>

9 Kobia was probably responding to bishop Hein's criticism of the general secretary's frequent travels; see page 19 of the report which is referred to below.

One of my responsibilities as general secretary is to maintain close contacts with the churches through correspondence and, even more effectively, through visits. In the last four years, I have visited churches in all the regions.¹⁰

The aforementioned Central Committee meeting in 2006 had decided to reorganise the work of the Geneva staff by changing to a more integrated approach in which projects and activities would be carried out by teams of representatives from all programme lines. In his 2008 report Kobia comments on this as follows:

Indeed, it has not been at all easy to carry the heavy burden of a structural and programmatic transition with all its implications. Dealing, on the one hand, with a heavy workload and, on the other, with a fairly new working style expecting staff colleagues to serve more than one programme area or project has been a permanent source of tension. In the latter part of 2006, there had been a low level of morale among some staff, but by mid-2007 immense progress was made in the raising of staff morale generally. Trying to be faithful to the request of the governing bodies to 'do less' and receiving requests from member churches and the wider ecumenical constituency for 'more', constituted a permanent pressure on most of the staff. The genuine commitment of the latter made it possible to go through all these storms and, towards the end of the year, we had begun sailing in more peaceful and calmer waters.¹¹

The third section of his report is entitled "The re-shaping of Christianity". Here Kobia dwells on changes in the ecumenical field. He quotes from Prof. Manfred Ernst's book *Re-shaping of Christianity in the context of globalization*:

It is an interesting fact that all the Christian denominations and para-churches that have grown rapidly since World War II display striking similarities to transnational business corporations.¹²

As noted earlier, Kobia acknowledges the similarities between ecclesiastic and business organisations, but he does not elaborate on the parallel.

Critical discourse analysis

To gain deeper insight into how religion is dealt with in a multicultural organisation such as the WCC and how different management styles clash we

10 Central Committee 2008, Gen.02 Report of the General Secretary, Geneva, 20 February 2008 <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/central-committee/geneva-2008/reports-and-documents/report-of-the-general-secretary.html> See pt. 2

11 Ibid., see pt. 47. (Report of General Secretary is written point by point, internet document has no page numbers.)

12 Ibid., pt. 13. (Report of General Secretary is written point by point, internet document has no page numbers.)

make a critical discourse analysis of Kobia's texts described above. Discourse analysis is not strange to organisation studies. Mumby and Clair (1997:181) maintain that via discourse an organisation creates a social community and reality that are linked to the social dimension of identity:

... we suggest that organizations exist only in so far as their members create them through discourse. This is not to claim that organizations are 'nothing but' discourse but rather that discourse is the principal means by which organization members create a coherent social reality that frames their sense of who they are.

In this article we use Norman Fairclough's three dimensional model of discourse analysis. This model centres on language use and social change. Rather than Foucault's concept of power he favours Gramsci's concept of hegemony (Fairclough 1992:58). Further theoretical and methodical considerations will be mentioned in the course of the analysis.

Analysis of linguistic practice

In harmony with the pragmatic turn, Fairclough (1992:71) considers discourse to be a practice like other practice. Discourse is a way of doing things. The only difference from other practices is its linguistic form. Thus the first dimension of analysis concerns linguistic features of the text such as vocabulary and metaphor (Fairclough 1992:73-78).

In both his speeches and writings Kobia (2006:x) uses African proverbs:

My friends will know that I am partial to the wisdom shared with me over the years by African elders. Often we would hear someone sum up a complex discussion or problem with a proverb.

By basing his views on proverbs Kobia invokes the wisdom and authority of African ancestors.

The public lectures are characterised by probing the connection between ubuntu and shalom and between ubuntu and sangseang. Kobia draws a prophetic, eschatological picture of a better world in which God's peace radiates in the light of an encounter between two friendly cultures from Africa and Asia. Having invoked the wisdom of African ancestors by way of proverbs, he now invokes the wisdom of the Bible and claims that God's Spirit is present in the cultures of Africa and Asia.

Years before he became general secretary of the WCC Kobia stressed the word 'humanity' in articles written in his capacity as general secretary of the Kenan Council of Churches. The style of argumentation in *NCCCK as enabler for church mission* is catechetical rather than academic, in the sense that Kobia explains to his readers why it is important for a Christian organisation to take the Bible as its premise. In a manner of speaking he is teaching his readers. He

makes the point that life force and ecumenical sharing are vitally important for a church organisation. The word *harambee* means wholeness and to Kenyans it is indissolubly linked with ecumenism and sharing. In *Called to the one hope* Kobia again underscores the importance of sharing when he points out that ubuntu, too, signifies wholeness in the sense of paying each other's debts.

Kobia (2006:9) used his experience and vision as general secretary of the Kenyan Council of Churches in his subsequent position as general secretary of the WCC, not only when referring to wholeness in the sense of ecumenical sharing but also via his notion that church organisations are connected with God's life force: "The biblical basis of the NCCCK is its source of strength for life and work." The titles of Kobia's first two books, *The courage to hope* and *Called to the one hope*, indicate the link between the two publications. The style of *The courage to hope* may be described as imperative in the sense that Kobia (2003:v) challenges the churches in Africa to improve the life conditions of Africans in ways that differ from those of other organisations. "The voice of the Church must be distinguished and distinguishable from voices spoken by secular organisations, it should be a voice grounded in spirituality." This is perpetuated in *Called to the one hope*, but here it is directed to developments in the ecumenical world and the appeal to transform the WCC. Chapter 6 is entitled "God, in your grace, transform the World Council of Churches". Kobia turns his appeal for organisational transformation into a prayer. Samuel Kobia experiences the transformation of the WCC as a spiritual journey. In his first speech after his election as general secretary he already mentioned the importance of spirituality for the organisation:

We must seek ways of deepening spiritual life for the Ecumenical Centre community. And because this is not going to be easy, we would want to call on the central committee to accompany us in this effort to deepen the spirituality in our lives here in this community.¹³

According to Kobia spirituality also manifests itself in organisational structures. Again he asks himself if the structures of the WCC are inspired by God or by the business world.

These structures of security we have erected – are they of God, or are they of the corporate world where professionalism, competition, internal politics, promotions and status are the motivation? (Kobia 2006:xii)

Earlier Kobia had briefly mentioned similarities between church organisations and transnational businesses, but he is particularly worried that institutionalisa-

¹³ Dr S. Kobia, Remarks following the election of the WCC general secretary, August 28, 2003, *The Ecumenical Review* 55, 2003, p. 432.

tion of the WCC would impair its dynamics and spirituality, making it an institution rather than a movement:

Have we in the WCC become too institutionalized and too bureaucratized, to respond in 21st century terms to this yearning for healing and wholeness? *Movements are thriving while institutions are languishing. These have a vitality and openness lacking in our structures. We are over-cautious, we are afraid of offending*" (Kobia, 2006:xii). [Italics in original.]

According to Kobia the WCC should not be a business, a rigid organisation, but should transform into a movement that will make the church a church once more:

The church can be church again, the ecumenical movement can rekindle the flame of hope, it can if it is willing to accept the challenge of change ... It is a different world, a different movement and the work for transformation is daunting (Kobia 2006:xiii).

The style of Kobia's general secretary reports to the Central Committee and the Assembly is formal. The texts are couched in the form of policy, which is consonant with operating in an organisation known for its assembly culture. Nonetheless Kobia's style incorporates personal, spiritual experience and insight, avoiding a bureaucratic approach.

The reports represent a clarification and defence of the policy implemented by Kobia and his office. The style is descriptive in the sense that Kobia reports to Central Committee members and the Assembly on developments in the ecumenical field which he observed in the course of his travels and meetings.

Analysis of discursive practice

Fairclough (1992:71) assumes that there is a dialectical relation between discourse as linguistic practice and discourse as social practice, and that discourse as discursive practice mediates between the two. By discourse as discursive practice he means the production, distribution and consumption of a text. Analytical tools are inter-discursivity and inter-textuality

Production of the discourse

In speaking about ubuntu there is an intertextual relation with the article, "NCCCK as enabler for church mission", which he wrote in his capacity as general secretary of the Kenyan Council of Churches. In that text Kobia accentuates the importance of relations, humanity, an organisation's commitment to spiritual values like service, and vitality. Intertextuality is also evident between harambee and ubuntu as wholeness. In the NCCCK article harambee is presented as signifying wholeness in relation to ecumenism and sharing. In *Called to the one hope* ubuntu, too, is presented as signifying sharing, inter alia of each other's debts.

In his book, *The courage to hope* (2003), Kobia dwells on the ethical and spiritual aspects of African leadership and management, expressed in dealing with humanity. Again there is an intertextual relation between the ideas in the book and the discourse on African management that Kobia conducts in the WCC. In *Called to the one hope* Kobia gives his own perception that institutionalisation of the WCC is to the detriment of the organisation's spirituality and inhibits links with charismatic denominations.

In his speech to the International Council of Christians and Jews in July 2005 Kobia stresses the importance of ubuntu for conflict resolution. This links up with views on ubuntu expressed in a book, also published in 2005 but based on articles dating back to 2001: *Worlds of memory and wisdom. Encounters of Jews and African Christians*, by WCC colleague Hans Ucko, programme secretary of the Office on Inter-religious Relations and Dialogue. As in Kobia's speech, Ucko's book compares ubuntu with shalom as concepts that, in the sense of 'wholeness', are conducive to reconciliation.

In the lecture in Chang Seong, Korea on 13 August 2007 Kobia relates ubuntu to sangseang, an Asian philosophic school, which, like ubuntu, centres on life force. During my visit to WCC headquarters in Geneva in March 2008 I was informed that this lecture was written by Rogate Mshana, a Tanzanian WCC staff member heading the Agape programme.

The term 'ubuntu' occurs prior to Kobia's appointment in 2004. In 2001 the Justice, Peace and Creation section contributed to the UN World Conference against Racism in Durban. In the report on the conference ubuntu features prominently twice:

Africa must find courage and capacity to challenge the world to embrace as a basis for the war against racism, UBUNTU, the philosophy that I am because you are, and you are because I am. The drive for the renewal of this continent must not be driven merely by a desire to emulate the western world. It must be driven by a desire to put UBUNTU at the heart of globalization as an alternative philosophy for the world.¹⁴

Ubuntu, in the sense of 'I am, therefore we are, and we are, therefore I am', is offered as Africa's response to the global problem of racism.

In 2001 the WCC, in conjunction with the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the Council of European Churches, organised discussions on how churches should respond to economic globalisation. The report on the various meetings is entitled "The island of hope: an alternative to economic globalization".

Ubuntu is considered valuable for establishing an economy centring on human beings.

¹⁴ "Making a fresh start: the urgency of combating racism", WCC Report on the WCAR, 2001, p. 20.

From Africa we heard about the concept of “UBUNTU”; going back into ourselves and the knowledge of our communities, to find solutions to problems, through sharing traditional values of inclusiveness, sense of community, reconciliation, participation, dialogue, partnership, hospitality and fellowship. UBUNTU inspires work for a people-centred economy, that provides food security, the exchange of goods and services, especially by women.¹⁵

In 2004 the Commission on Faith and Order, a WCC programme, gathered for a theological consultation on human dignity, human rights and the integrity of creation. The meeting took place in Kigali, Rwanda on 4-9 December 2004. The section on human dignity mentions ubuntu, “the African understanding of being persons in community”.¹⁶

The aforementioned texts suggest that Kobia is not the only and possibly not the first producer of ubuntu discourse. They demonstrate an intertextual chain between his texts and already existing texts on ubuntu in the WCC. Kobia must have known these existing texts. In his various positions as director (1993-1999) of the Justice, Peace and Creation unit and as director (1999-2002) of the WCC Cluster “Issues and Themes” he participated in defining visions using the word ‘ubuntu’ and alternative terms.

In 2005 the WCC published the book, *Worlds of memory and wisdom. Encounters of Jews and African Christians*. One of the editors is Hans Ucko, programme secretary of the WCC Office on Inter-Religious Relations and Dialogue. The articles are products of conferences in Nairobi (1986), Johannesburg (1995) and Yaoundé (2001). The book is dedicated to Dr Samuel Kobia. Kasonga wa Kasonga, professor of theology in Congo, wrote an article, “The meaning and scope of ubuntu”. He emphasised meanings of ubuntu like humanity, respect and honesty. Under the influence of modernity and Western values ubuntu has lost some of its meaning:

In many ways, the practice of Ubuntu (bumuntu) is being corrupted nowadays when it is confronted with western values. In traditional African society, parents took seriously their responsibility to pass on ‘bumuntu’ during the socialisation of their children (Kasonga wa Kasonga 2005:128).

Hans Ucko (2005:74) concludes that Jews and Africans share the experience of marginalisation. Ubuntu is essential to transform people to regain their humanity:

We need to revive ubuntu. It is ubuntu to love and care for others. It is ubuntu to act kindly to others. It is ubuntu to be hospitable. It is ubuntu to be just and fair. It is ubuntu to be

¹⁵ “The island of hope:an alternative to economic globalization”, WCC Report, 2001, p.13.

¹⁶ Theological consultation on affirming human dignity, rights of peoples and the integrity of creation, Commission on Faith and Order, Kigali, Rwanda, 4-9 December 2004.

compassionate. It is ubuntu to assist those in distress. It is ubuntu to be truthful and honest. It is ubuntu to have good morals. A country which practices ubuntu is the closest thing on earth to the kingdom of God.

Ucko's and Kasongo wa Kasonga's texts were produced for the conference of African Christians and Jews in Yaoundé in 2001.

The WCC has a programme known as Agape. Agape is an acronym for Alternative Globalisation Addressing People and Earth. In preparation for a consultation on the relation between poverty, wealth and ecology in Dar es Salaam on 5-9 November 2007 a workgroup met in Geneva on 25-26 June 2007. Ubuntu is referred to in the sense of economic solidarity and cooperation. The phrase 'ubuntu economy' is used:

The *ubuntu* economy does not promote private ownership; everyone in the community has access to resources according to his/her needs. It is an economy of 'enough'.¹⁷

The report¹⁸ of the Dar es Salaam conference speaks of ubuntu in the sense of human fellowship and living in wholeness (along with ujamaa, living in community). Ubuntu is linked with abundant life (John 10:10), with the accent on its affirmation of life, for instance through respect for nature.

On the basis of this analysis Dr Samuel Kobia, Dr Hans Ucko and Dr Rogate Mshana appear to be the principal producers of ubuntu discourse in the WCC. The fact that Ucko and Mshana disseminated that discourse prior to and seemingly more explicitly than Kobia himself leads us to conclude that they are the (co-)producers and distributors of ubuntu discourse. The publications cited in this section examine the meaning of ubuntu without any reference to an African style of management.

The reports and memoranda of the Central Committee contain no references to the ubuntu discourse. In Central Committee meetings Kobia produced no discourse, hence there was no reception by committee members as consumers.

Distribution of the discourse

Samuel Kobia, Hans Ucko and Rogate Mshana are the principal producers of discourse on African management and ubuntu. For maximum reception of the discourse, the time, place and target group are decisive factors. At what time and in what place does the 'producer' expect a particular group of 'consumers' to receive the discourse optimally?

¹⁷ "Impact of economic globalization", Reference Group on Poverty, Wealth and Ecology, Geneva, 25-26 June 2007.

¹⁸ "Alternative Globalisation Addressing People and Earth (Agape). Consultation on linking poverty, wealth and ecology: African ecumenical perspectives." Dar es Salaam, 5-9 November 2007.

Kobia decided to use his first press conference as general secretary elect in August 2003 to introduce and distribute his vision. Via the international press he brings his aspiration to operate according to an African management style and ubuntu to the attention of both his organisation and the ecumenical world.

During his term of office Kobia used two international lectures to distribute the ubuntu discourse: one a lecture to the International Council of Christians and Jews in Chicago in July 2005, the other to the conference, "Transforming theology for vital ecumenism in the 21st century", in Chang Seong (Korea) on 13 August 2007.

Whilst reaching a larger public but directed mainly to the ecumenical world and the WCC itself, Dr Samuel Kobia wrote his books, *The courage to hope* (2003) and *Called to the one hope* (2006). In *The courage to hope* he discusses ubuntu. In *Called to the one hope* Kobia advocates less institutionalised organisational structures and calls for transformation of the WCC. The book was published shortly after the Porto Alegre Assembly. In his foreword to *Called to the one hope* Philip Potter writes: "He has reviewed the assembly and raises the issues that must be faced following Porto Alegre."

But within the WCC Kobia produced no speeches or texts focusing specifically on ubuntu and African management, although reports to the Central Committee and the Assembly contain references to spirituality and management, indirectly alluding to the discourse on African management and ubuntu.

Also addressing an international readership, including colleagues in the WCC, Hans Ucko distributes his view of ubuntu in two contributions to *Worlds of memory and wisdom. Encounters of Jews and African Christians* (2005), a book he co-edited with Halperin, namely "The story of Jews and Christians meeting in Africa", and "Travel report". Focusing more specifically on the WCC, Rogate Mshana raises the ubuntu discourse at conferences and reports on the Agape programme (2007).

Judging by the poor distribution, especially within the WCC, one could say that there is either no strategic plan for proclaiming the discourse, or that the strategy is in fact not to proclaim the discourse on ubuntu and African management too much. At all events, the influence of the media on the distribution of the discourse was only utilised at the start of Kobia's term as general secretary.¹⁹

Consumption of the discourse

To gain greater insight into reception of the discourse on African management and ubuntu and developments in the organisation four key informants were

¹⁹ Since February 2008 the media have been playing a major role in disseminating news on Kobia's invalid doctoral title and criticism of his modus operandi as general secretary.

interviewed in late March 2008. Three of them were members of the management team and one worked for an ecumenical organisation and was often active in the offices of the WCC. In view of the confidential nature of the interviews it was decided not to divulge the informants' names.

My first informant stated outright that he had “not encountered ubuntu as a living concept in the organisation”. This informant asked himself whether it was indeed possible to transplant ubuntu to a body like the WCC, being “an organisation that is not a true community due to cultural differences and opposing interests. Besides, the WCC has no ancestors.”

According to this informant it was not a matter of a Western or African management style but rather of ‘who makes up the service?’. Is it the Europeans who foot the bill and want to make the decisions but who in Assembly meetings find themselves literally confronted with a majority of member churches from the South? Is the question not rather whether the WCC as an ecumenical organisation can rise above money and power? This informant asked himself how serious Kobia was about ubuntu, since he was familiar with the context/power game in the WCC. What chance does ubuntu stand in a context where it is ultimately a matter of money and power?

My second informant said that proponents of ubuntu management and Western management are radically opposed to each other. According to him, being fundamentally amenable to African management “makes it impossible to lead the WCC, for instance when it comes to budgeting you have to group staff in terms of task division. Lumping everyone together just won't work. Issues of that nature have caused great friction in the management team and the Central Committee.” This informant perceived a conflict between “political management and economy management”. The former makes more substantive decisions, the latter is inclined to base itself on financial (im)possibilities and systematically puts pressure on proceedings. The West, more especially the German sponsors, are in the economy management camp and, since the clash with Kopia, has laid down policy. The informant finds it a pity that they do not rather draw their inspiration from theological principles and refers to the (German) economy managers as the “Western liberal Protestant culture of enterprise”, a leadership culture that has predominated ever since the establishment of the WCC. The economy management style moreover accords with the pragmatic and technocratic trends that Norman Fairclough (1992:200-224) discerns in Western society, even in organisations with more idealistic goals.

My third informant maintained that Kobia had no official plans to introduce ubuntu in the WCC. Working according to an African management style as such was never mooted, hence there was no debate in the organisation about a different, new management style. What Kobia did do was to form the Group of 14, comprising fourteen staff members who had to see to it that staff worked in

a more integrated fashion and activities were more closely interrelated. Up to the time of Kobia's appointment the various programmes (Mission, *Diakonia*, Peace and Justice, etc.) had worked in isolation and staff operated very much on their own. Kobia wanted to change that and also created a Department of Planning and Integration at headquarters to move towards a more integrated approach to programmes and interlink people and activities. According to this informant it is difficult to create a new organisational culture when the headquarters of the WCC are situated in the West. A complete change in working methods, he said, would only be possible if headquarters were moved to the South, otherwise they will remain "Northern shaped".

My fourth informant did not find Kobia much of an organiser, but he was a relational person and warm in communication. "That contrasts with his predecessor Konrad Raiser, a formidable theologian but cold and distant. A German professor who brooked no opposition and towards the end was at loggerheads with everyone, including his staff." In this informant's opinion the post of general secretary should be divided between two people: one a manager to head the office, the other a 'prophet' who deals with external relations and gives the WCC a face.

The second informant discerns a conflict between political management and economy management and refers to a Western liberal Protestant culture of enterprise. Viewed in this light it is remarkable that it is bishop Martin Hein of the German Evangelical Church who voices the criticism of Kobia in the public media. He speaks disapprovingly of the general secretary's frequent travels and Kobia's way of taking decisions without consultation. As a strategy, distrust of the general secretary is distributed via the media, partly by bishop Hein. First there were reports in the press about the invalidity of his doctoral title. Then bishop Hein complained publicly that Kobia travels too much and devotes too little attention to leadership of the organisation. And even if his travels were intended to build up the organisation, the discourse has undertones of 'interesting globetrotting'.

At the Central Committee meeting in 2008 Kobia explained that the visits were important to maintain and build relations with member churches in the South. In an interview with *Trouw* (7 May 2008) Kobia indicated the importance of inter-church relations:

From the outset I have let myself be guided by the African ubuntu proverb, 'If you want to walk fast, walk alone. But if you want to go far, walk together with others.' I have tried to get the churches to walk together as much as possible ... Of course, one could ask oneself whether everyone actually wants to walk together.

If the criticism that Kobia takes decisions without consultation is valid, it would be counter to the premises of African management. In his first speech as

newly elected general secretary Kobia stated his ambition “to be the captain of the team” in which “every member of the team is valuable because we can succeed only with the participation of all”. It is not clear whether Kobia sees his position as that of *primus inter pares* or as elevated above others.

Analysis of social practice

The third dimension of analysis concerns discourse as social practice, or the socio-cognitive effects of discourse. This is the most important but also the most problematic part of critical discourse analysis. The dialectical relation between language use and social organisation is an assumption. How can the analyst prove that this relation exists (Jørgensen & Phillips 2004:89)? One tool is triangulation. Another is dialogical research.

The cardinal question here is in what way discourses help to stabilise or transform power relations and ideologies. Kobia’s discourse is aimed at transforming power relations and ideology in the WCC. What is the link between his discourse and the transformation of the organisation that we described?

Kobia’s first address as general secretary elect was aimed at changing the meaning of the organisation: from an organisation whose staff feel pressurised by ever more stringent budgetary constraints (which can lead to tensions) to one in which people feel spiritually committed. Kobia discerned a lack of unity and produced a text that put the accent on organisational unanimity. In so doing the general secretary envisaged transformation of the WCC. His first address is not only informative but performative. It aims at affecting meaning and changing the organisation (Bos 2007:17, 21, 26).

A premise of discourse analysis is that identity is a social construction with power as the main determinant. The centre of gravity of Christianity has moved to the South and that changes its dominant identity from a Western one to an African, Asian and South American one. The identity of Christian organisations like the WCC likewise follows this trend. The appointment of the first African general secretary is a sign that in the WCC the South has moved from the periphery to the centre.

Kobia’s discourse on African management and ubuntu is indicative of this change. It is a means of constructing a new organisational identity: it has to change from an international Christian organisation with a Western profile to an international Christian organisation with a Southern profile, symbolised by an African leader. An analysis of the book *Called to the one hope* shows that Kobia considers it imperative to transform the WCC by creating a new organisational culture and identity. In his view a Western institutionalised organisational culture and identity in the WCC do not accord with the proliferation, especially in the South, of charismatic churches that are movements rather than institutions.

In the power centre of the WCC representatives of Western churches have always determined the funding and modus operandi of the organisation. There is tension between the West (which pays the bills but experiences less of a say) and the South (which wants to see numerical dominance translated into greater influence). But an even greater problem than that of operating according to an African or a Western management style or the question of power is that the WCC is caught up in a profound identity crisis. Ecumenism may be seen as the promotion of unity, cooperation and mutual understanding between different Christian denominations. As one of our informants asked, is it possible for the WCC as an ecumenical organisation to rise above the issues of power and money?

By changing the organisational structure Kobia is responding to the dominant manifestation of Christianity in the South. The staff at the Ecumenical Centre in Geneva has been reduced, as opposed to an increase in staff members at offices in the South and greater use of decentralised consultants.

In addition the strategy of African management is discernible in the changes Kobia introduced. At WCC headquarters he initiated a transition to an integrated approach, whereby projects and activities are conducted by teams comprising representatives of all programme lines. Here, too, the accent is on harmony and relations – key concepts of African management. Besides, the introduction of interdisciplinary teams offers scope for a mingling of denominations, cultures and races, a way of adapting the culture of ‘Dutch’ bureaucracy. To steer this process Kobia created a Department of Planning and Integration and a Group of 14.

Norman Fairclough (2005:931) maintains that, in addition to speech acts, organisational structures are vehicles of discourse. Both structures and social processes in an organisation are elements of discourse. Adjustments to the organisational structure by moving jobs to the South and modifying cooperative processes by using integrated teams are major, visible elements of Kobia’s management discourse.

Informants and, more publicly, members of the Central Committee do not object to the transfer of posts from North to South. What they do rebel against is working in integrated teams and ‘holistic’ leadership at WCC headquarters. At the 2008 Central Committee meeting Kobia indicated that the reception of his plans for flexible workgroups at the end of 2005 had been negative. But according to him staff morale had improved greatly by mid-2007.

Since February 2008 the media have carried reports of trouble in the WCC. In mid-February the German press agency EPD (*Evangelischer Pressedienst*) came up with news that Samuel Kobia had received his doctorate from Fairfax University, an institution not recognised by the American government. According to the press agency ENI Fairfax University does not exist. Kobia

said that he was ‘shocked and surprised’ to learn that Fairfax University was not certified. Since he has been awarded two honorary doctorates, he can continue to use his doctoral title. These reports appeared just before the Central Committee meeting of 13-20 February 2008, which was to be the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the WCC and the (re-)election of the general secretary. Before the meeting EPD published an interview with bishop Martin Hein of the German Evangelical Church (EKD), in which he criticised Kobia’s modus operandi, his frequent travels and decision making without consultation. Bishop Hein added that the German Evangelical Church should reduce its financial contribution to the WCC in the near future. That contribution makes up one third of the WCC’s revenue. On 18 February the WCC announced that Dr Kobia had declared himself unavailable for a second term as general secretary for personal reasons. He was the first general secretary to refuse a second term. A new general secretary was elected at the Central Committee meeting in September 2009. Two candidates had been nominated, Rev. Dr Park Seong-won of the Presbyterian Church of Korea and Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit of the Church of Norway (Lutheran). Dr Tveit won the election and will be general secretary of the WCC as from 1 January 2010.

Discussion and conclusion

With the aid of critical discourse analysis we have formed a picture of processes in an intercultural organisation such as the WCC, which, after decades of European management, has come into contact with an African management style. It appears that in such an organisation intercultural interaction is determined by the power factor, with different groups evolving strategies to retain or obtain power.

The text analysis shows that Kobia uses African proverbs to substantiate his views, thus invoking the traditional, indigenous wisdom of African ancestors. The key word in his discourse is ‘humanity’. Kobia believes that authentic values like ethics and human dignity should be retrieved from traditional African cultures. Ubuntu and an African management style as such do not feature pertinently in his discourse, which nonetheless shows intertextual links with the existing ubuntu discourse. In Kobia’s books, however, one finds an apologetic strategy in regard to that discourse, in the form of defence and praise of African spirituality and leadership in terms of aspects like humanity and enhancement of community life. The dominant discourse in the publications of Kobia, Ucko and Mshana concerns the conviction that African traditional values are obstructed by colonialism and globalisation, based on Western hegemony in economic, cultural, political and religious power structures. Kobia observes the same Western hegemony in the institutionalisation of the WCC.

Particularly in his book, *Called to the one hope*, Kobia advocates transformation by operating less bureaucratically as an institution and being more open to vitality as a movement.

In keeping with the shift of the centre of gravity of Christianity to the South, Kobia cut back staff numbers at the Ecumenical Centre in Geneva and instead expanded the staff in offices in the South. At WCC headquarters a transition was made, with the accent on harmony and relations, to an integrated approach, in which projects and activities are conducted by teams representing all programme lines. This process was overseen by a Department of Planning and Integration and the so-called Group of 14.

There were no objections to relocating posts from North to South, but staff did rebel against working in integrated teams and the 'holistic' financial leadership of the organisation. In the Central Committee bishop Martin Hein was the opposition spokesperson, who thought that Kobia travelled too much and took decisions without consultation. Just before Kobia was due for re-election as general secretary there were reports in the media about an invalid doctoral title.

Fairclough maintains that in crisis situations groups evolve their own strategies (counter to other strategies) that may culminate in a power struggle. As a strategy a discourse of no confidence in the general secretary was created in the media, notably by bishop Hein (German member of the Central Committee). For personal reasons Kobia decided against standing as a candidate for a second term as general secretary.

The European discourse of 'Western liberal Protestant culture of enterprise' restrained the African discourse of spiritual ubuntu. As was noted before, in asking if faith-based organisations are 'of God' or 'of the world' Kobia refers to a struggle to define what faith-based organisations are all about,²⁰ ironically pointing at the Dutch bureaucracy of the first general secretary and the American finding. One of my informants called it a conflict between political management and economy management. The former takes substantive decisions, the latter is inclined to base itself on financial (im)possibilities and puts time pressure on proceedings. The West, especially the German sponsors, is in the economy management camp and, after the clash with Kobia, has laid down policy. This informant thinks it is a pity that they do not rather draw their inspiration from theological principles.

Thus our analysis shows that there is a conflict between a Western management discourse based on secularism and technocracy and an African management discourse based on indigenous spirituality. Time will tell who will emerge the victor. For now, with Dr Kobia stepping down as general secretary

20 See Torry (2005) for the distinction between secular, faith-based and religiously based organisations.

of the WCC and Dr Tveit taking over from him, the ‘technocrats’ appear to have the upper hand.

The question is if this management style is sustainable. If we define sustainability in terms of intra-generational and inter-generational solidarity, as was done in the introduction to this book, we can conclude that ubuntu management promotes inter-generational solidarity between Western and non-Western, and possibly also between ‘old’ and ‘new’ (i.e. more Charismatic and Pentecostal) WCC members. But if it promotes inter-generational solidarity in the sense of providing an ecumenical body for the generations to come it is questionable, as the WCC is under permanent risk of running out of funds.

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