



# NEWSLETTER

Published by the Research Committee 22

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## Letter from the President

Dear friends and colleagues,

Welcome to this new issue of the RC22 newsletter.

Since the last World Congress in Sweden, the new RC22 executive board has been quite active in preparing the promotion of the sociology of religion at various key international events. Afe Adogame, our new secretary/Treasurer, is organising our mid-term conference in

collaboration with the Pan-African Strategic and Policy Research Group in Abuja, Nigeria, known for being one of the best purpose-built cities in Africa. The theme of this very exciting conference is "Religion, Conflict, Violence and Tolerance in Global Perspectives", 27-30 JANUARY 2012, and RC22 is looking forward to organising this conference in Africa. Eloisa Martin is coordinating the RC22 programme at the next ISA forum in Buenos Aires, Argentina, with the topical theme of 'Religion, justice and democratization in contemporary societies', August 1-4, 2012. As part of RC22's commitments to reach as many parts of our global world as possible, we welcome ISA's choice of hosting this conference in South America. We also have some joint sessions with the International Society for the Sociology of Religion at their 2011

conference in Aix-En-Provence, France, in July this year. These sessions have been organised by Afe Adogame, Jim Spickard and Ivan Varga. RC22 will also be present at the XVIII ISA World Congress of Sociology in Yokohama, Japan, 2014; and we will keep informed as we get closer to the event. Key dates (see call for proposals with details in this newsletter):

June 20, 2011 to submit a session proposal for the RC22's program at the ISA Forum, Buenos Aires.

July 30, 2011 to submit a paper at RC22 mid-term conference, Abuja.

December 15<sup>th</sup>, 2011 to submit a paper at RC22's program for the ISA Forum, Buenos Aires.

Thanks to Jim Spickard's work and dedication, RC22 has a new and exciting website that can be found at <http://www.isarc22.org/> I invite you with great pleasure to surf around that side of the cyber-space.

In this newsletter, you will find two reports from the last World Congress, a spotlight on two research centres in the world, an interview piece on the sociology of religion in



Africa, and an article on religion and suicide. I would like to thank Afe Adogame, Maria del Mar Griera, Riaz Hassan, Elisio Macamo, Sebastian Nastuta, Per Petterson, and Heinrich Wilhelm Schäfer for their contribution to this newsletter. If you would like to contribute to any future issues of the RC22 newsletter, please feel free to contact me ([A.Possamai@uws.edu.au](mailto:A.Possamai@uws.edu.au)) and/or Afe ([A.Adogame@ed.ac.uk](mailto:A.Adogame@ed.ac.uk)) to discuss your ideas. Alternatively, feel free to have a chat with anyone from the board when you see any of us at a conference, or other academic activities, to discuss some ideas.

Many of you will be aware of our e-mailing list ([RC22@uws.edu.au](mailto:RC22@uws.edu.au)) which dispatches information on the sociology of religion from all around the world. If you would like to join this e-mailing list, please send me and/or Afe an e-mail, and you will be included. Sociologically yours,

Adam Possamai

# XVII ISA World Congress of Sociology Gothenburg, Sweden - 11-17 July 2010



## Reports on XVII ISA World Congress of Sociology Gothenburg, Sweden - 11-17 July 2010

### The sociology of religion in the XVII ISA World Congress

Maria del Mar Griera  
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“The sociology of religion has propelled itself off to the side of the plane and is currently lying in a strictly marginal position” stated James Beckford in an article published in 1985, and added “the treatment accorded to studies of religion in national and international congresses of sociologists seems to be on the decline”. A quick glance at the program of the XVII ISA World Congress, held in July in Gothenburg (Sweden), shows that the situation detected by Beckford twenty years ago has somehow been reversed and the sociology of religion has gained prestige and popularity.

In that sense, it is worth noting that one of the five plenary sessions of the conference was devoted to the sociology of religion. Thus, sociology of religion was considered by the Congress organizers to be –along with war, sustainability, imagination and diversity– a topic that merited the attention of the over 5000 sociologists registered in the Conference. “Religion and Power” was the title of this plenary session coordinated by Grace Davie, Hans Joas and Björn Wittrock. The plenary was presented through five sessions that convened some of the most outstanding scholars on sociology of religion –such as José

Casanova, Linda Woodhead and Fenggang Yang among others– to discuss the current religious trends from a global perspective. The high scientific level of the presentations, the liveliness of the debates and the engagement of a broader audience are good indicators of the current health of the discipline.

Likewise, it should also be underlined that the Research Committee 22 on Sociology of Religion was also highly successful. Almost 200 sociologists submitted an abstract, around 100 of them were accepted as regular papers and 30 as distributed ones. RC22 coordinated 18 sessions, which is one of the highest number of sessions conceded by the ISA executive committee to a research committee. Due to the high number of sessions, some were to be held between 8pm and 10 pm and others joined more than 10 paper givers in a single session. In a way, and in the words of Roberto Blancarte, past president of the RC22, “we have been the victims of our own success”. However, despite the apparent drawbacks everything worked well: time management in sessions was strict but fair, the audience in the 8pm to 10pm sessions was not enormous but neither was it insignificant and the atmosphere of conviviality, exchange and friendship contributed to the success of the event.

However, it is not only that sociology of religion was the protagonist of one of the five Congress plenaries or that the RC22 was a success, but also that religion has gained a presence

beyond the boundaries of the program coordinated by the Sociology of Religion committee. This meant that there were sessions devoted to religious issues in the Political Sociology Research Committee and in the Migration Research Committee, apart from many other papers that appeared throughout the Conference sessions. Likewise, it is relevant that the program shows the multiple and diverse collaboration that has been forged between RC22 members and other research committee members through the organization of “joint sessions” such that with RC34 (Sociology of Youth) or with the thematic group on “Sociology of Risk and Uncertainty”.

Therefore, for those who were participating in the conference in Gothenburg or for anyone who takes a close look at the XVII ISA Congress program it is easy to see that the diagnosis made by Beckford 25 years ago –and shared with many other sociologists– does no longer apply today. This change obviously reflects the high salience of religion in the contemporary world. To some extent, the long-standing myopia of sociologists towards religion is no longer an option and religion is becoming a trendy topic among academics these days. Thus, research on sociology of religion attracts funding more easily than before and draws the attention of political authorities and scientific colleagues. The fact that religion is seen as a fashionable subject presents some risks but also some

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opportunities. Nevertheless after participating in the XVII ISA Congress I feel impelled to favour the optimistic view.

Sociology of religion has become less isolated in recent years and it seems fair to say that this has not only been a consequence of the increasing importance of religion in the current world, but also thanks to the efforts, open mindedness and *savoir faire* of the sociologists of religion themselves. On the one hand, the capacity of sociologists like Grace Davie, Roberto Blancarte, James Beckford, Adam Possamai, Eloisa Martin among many others for communicating their research, engaging with wider social science debates and taking part in the organization of social science conferences and other academic events, such as the ISA Congress itself, has played an important role in this task. On the other hand, as became evident at the XVII ISA World Congress, the thrust of research into sociology of religion, which fills some of the theoretical or methodological gaps and opens up new avenues for research, is reinforcing the prestige and the vitality of the discipline.

The debates at the XVII ISA World Congress gave greater visibility to the fact that sociologists of religion have recently taken the discipline one step further. Firstly, a significant number of contributions made clear the need to go beyond the use –and abuse– of the great theoretical models and the importance to give

priority to the empirical work.

Secondly, on this occasion the call to move beyond the EU-USA dichotomy was not only a kind of politically-correct aspiration but a reality. Some of the most inspiring presentations were those focused on the Latin American, Asian or African cases, which showed the relevance of putting concepts and theories in dialogue with different contexts. Thirdly, the research presented indicated that the historical lack of research in gender issues is now being addressed; the empirical and theoretical gaps on youth and religion are also being filled. The list is endless but what is important to emphasize is that the conference showed the current vitality, openness and strength of research in the field of sociology of religion.

In conclusion, the [XVII ISA World Congress of Sociology](#) made clear that sociology of religion is in better shape than 25 years ago. Attending and participating in the conference, in one of the most secular cities of the world, was a good opportunity to become aware of this.

### **“Sociology on the move” – XVII ISA World Congress of Sociology**

Sebastian Nastuta

([Sebastian.nastuta@gmail.com](mailto:Sebastian.nastuta@gmail.com))

- 5007 registered participants from 103 countries
- 850 sessions organized by ISA's research committees, working or thematic groups.
- 86 joint sessions
- 25 plenary theme sessions
- 13 integrative sessions

- 7 *ad hoc* sessions
- 5 “Author Meets Critics” sessions, etc.

These were the main statistical details characterizing the XVII edition of the ISA World Congress of Sociology. Taking place 60 years after the first event in Zurich in 1950, the Gothenburg congress was, certainly, one of the most important and impressive events that ever took place under the auspices of the scientific field of sociology. Impressive not only for its almost overwhelming breadth, but also for the quality of its papers and post-presentation debates, and for the sheer numbers of interesting personalities gathered together at the same time and place. For many sociologists, the congress in Sweden was an unique chance to attend lectures by many very prestigious contemporary sociologists (founders of new scientific concepts, initiators of new directions in scientific research, etc.).

The Sociology of Religion Research Committee's activities from the XVII World Congress—our paper sessions, debates, keynote addresses and integrative sessions—perfectly mirrored the interests and current research of the specialists in the field. General topics approached in RC22's sessions were religion in the context of global migration, immigrant religion and gender, religious freedom and religious rights, and intersection(s) between religion and power, youth and religion, or risk society and religion. The religions of

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modernity or religion in Europe, the interactions between new religious movements (NRM) and the secular states or religion and sociological imagination also represented subjects of interest on our panels.

The first two sessions, "Religion on the move: religion in the context of global migration", chaired by James V. Spickard and Afe Adogame, intensely discussed Pentecostal diaspora, migrants' religions, the role of religion in the integration process or in civic integration, religious entrepreneurship, Muslims' religious experience, confluence of religious and national identities, religious global flows and models of religion in transnational migration.

The third session, "Religion and power: observing Catholicism from the global south", chaired by Eloisa Martin, broached subjects like popular Catholic religiosity, Catholicism and human rights, post-global Romanization, indigenous religions and case studies of relations between Church and the State,.

The intersection between power and religion was a focus for the keynote addresses of David Lyon ("God's Eye") and Enzo Pace ("Religion between power and empowerment"). These addresses were subsequently discussed by Sinisa Zrinscak.

The fifth (Joint session 37 of RC22 (host committee) and RC34) and the sixth sessions, "Youth and religion",

chaired by Sebastian Nastuta, investigated subjects such as Muslim religious youth (sub)culture, the conservative Islamic avant-garde, religious transmission, transformation of Islamic religiosity, international volunteering and religion, Jewish youth socialization, young people's vicarious religion, youth diasporas, and Christian punk or life values.

In the presidential address chaired by Roberto Blancarte, president of RC22 from 2006 and 2010, three papers were presented: "Scope and Limits of Theoretical Tools for a Diverse Religious World" (Roberto Blancarte), "Are We Stealing the Elgin Marbles? Exploring the Limits of a World-conscious Sociology" (**James V. Spickard**) and "Transnationalism, Religion and Community: Crossing Boundaries; New Conceptual Challenges" (**Judit Bokser Liwerant**).

The joint session "Risk society and religion", chaired by Alpha Possamai-Inesedy and Jens Zinn, was about uncertainty management by risk specific religious habitus construction, religious beliefs and worldviews of unemployed persons, sustainable development and religion, modernity in monasteries, religion and AIDS, and post-traditional religiosity.

Sessions seven and eight, chaired by Dick Houtman and Stef Aupers, included papers on syncretism and modernity, quasi-religions, new spiritualities and new forms of religion, western Buddhism and postsecular re-enchantment, the

future of secularization, quests for religious purity, advertising and religion, religious TV networks and usage of communication technologies by churches.

The ninth session, "Immigrant religion and gender", chaired by Inger Furseth, approached topics like religious participation, religious transformation or revivalism of women's, Muslim women's academic routes, and gendered spaces within Western African Pentecostal diaspora.

Session ten was the RC22 business meeting, and session eleven, "New religious movements and the secular state", chaired by Martin Geoffroy and Susan Palmer, analyzed anti-cultism in post-communist Russia and government raids against NRM.

Session twelve, "Religion in Europe", chaired by Daniel Guttierrez, looked at revision of Bourdieu's model of religious fields, religious economy and pluralism, the changing role of the clergy and the reproduction of women's status in the official discourse of the Church.

Sessions thirteen and fourteen, "Religion and sociological imagination", chaired by Grace Davie and Adam Possamai, spanned very diverse topics like social power and religion, perspectives on human nature, social change, multiple secularities, religion in Eastern Europe, public discourse on religion and spirituality, religion and popular

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culture, re-thinking pluralism or how to deal with other religions.

The fifteenth session, "Religious freedom and religious rights: different contexts, different concepts?" chaired by Sinisa Zrinscak, covered religious rights and religious freedom, the impact of the State on religion, religious pluralism, religious tensions and management of religious diversity.

The last session, "Miscellaneous aspects of the sociology of religion" was chaired by Adam Possamai and included discussions on global change and the rise of Islamism, factors of democratic consolidation in Muslim states, social integration in secularized societies, the impact of social stratification on Pentecostalism, liberation theologies, and contested Latin American modernity.

Within our integrative session "Islam and power", chaired by Grace Davie, we presented these papers: "Historical Patterns for Legitimation and Contestation of Power in Islamicate Civilization" by Saïd Amir Arjomand, "Islam: a new religious vehicle for aboriginal self-empowerment in Australia?" by Adam Possamai, Bryan Turner and Helena Onnuddottir, "The domestication and securitisation of diaspora muslims and Islam as a national security project" by Michael Humphrey and "Power and migrant Muslim women" by Inger Furseth.

Another important session with an administrative character was the business meeting where the ex-president Roberto Blancarte handed

over the presidency of our committee to Adam Possamai.

***Looking at this overview, I believe that our sessions perfectly reflected*** and fully covered the main topics of scientific interest within the sociology of religion. We talked about secularization and postsecularism, about the evolutionary trends within traditional religions, about emergent religions like Islamism (in Europe or Australia) or global Pentecostalism, and about youth religious subcultures and youth religiosity. We analyzed the mainstream reactions to new religious movements and the role of religion in social integration of immigrants and diaspora. The global flows of religious migration, Latin American religiosity and reactions to modernity, and also Eastern religions' reactions and adaptations to Western culture were included in our agenda.

The sessions' tones and attitudes were marked by a reassessment of the classical theories, and a tendency to apply these re-evaluative concepts to new geographical areas through careful attention to how old traditions adapt to the challenges of the contemporary world, and how their social environments and social groups reflect various religious phenomena.

## Research Centre: Religion & Society

### Uppsala Religion and Society Research Centre (CRS)

#### Uppsala Religion and Society Research Centre (CRS)

Uppsala Religion and Society Research Centre (CRS) is a centre for interdisciplinary research and education at the Department of Theology, Uppsala University, Sweden. The major academic focus is at religious and social change within the area of religion, welfare and wellbeing and on the interplay between these processes and the social work of the churches. The centre is responsible for the development of diaconal studies as an academic subject at Uppsala University. The present major research program administrated by the centre is *The Impact of religion – Challenges for Society, Law and Democracy*. Apart from this, researchers at CRS are involved in a number of other research projects, within the area of welfare, religion and values. Altogether around 50 researchers are linked to the centre, although only thirteen are employed at the centre. Thereby the centre has the function of being a coordinating agent and a research environment with a small staff but a large network, within Uppsala university as well as internationally. The presently ongoing research is shortly described on this page. More information and contact details can be found at CRS website:

[www.crs.uu.se](http://www.crs.uu.se).

#### Administrative staff

Director: Professor Pettersson

([per.pettersson@crs.uu.se](mailto:per.pettersson@crs.uu.se))

Scientific leader: Professor Anders Bäckström

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Administrative assistant: Barbro Borg ([barbro.borg@crs.uu.se](mailto:barbro.borg@crs.uu.se))

#### The Impact of Religion - Challenges for Society, Law and Democracy (IMPACT)

IMPACT is a ten year Research Programme at Uppsala University financed mainly by the Swedish Research Council as part of their excellence granting. It runs over ten years 2008-2018 and involves about 45 researchers from 6 faculties at Uppsala University. The Impact of Religion programme is concerned with economic, social, political and legal changes related to religious changes – that are taking place in Sweden and the Nordic countries at the beginning of the 21st century. IMPACT includes the following six thematic research areas each including a number of projects.

#### Theme 1: Religious and Social Change

Aim to increase our understanding of the processes of change in Sweden and Northern Europe by using data from international social surveys and selected localities. These sources are used to develop a model for understanding religious and social change which brings together global, national and local perspectives.

#### Theme 2: Integration, Democracy and Political Culture

This theme links multiculturalism and religious diversity to civil society and political life in order to understand the complex relationships between religion, human rights, democracy and national security.

#### Theme 3: Families, Law and Society

Aim to analyze the inter-relationship

between family law, religion and society, not only from an internal Swedish perspective but also from a multicultural and international viewpoint. Special attention is given to the impact of the EU on legislation, case law and extra-judicial practice, and to the impact of immigration into Sweden.

#### Theme 4: Well-Being and Health

The aim is to inaugurate innovative research on the relationship between health, well-being, stress and religion in Swedish multicultural healthcare, also observing the legal aspects of this field.

#### Theme 5: Welfare Models - Organization and Values

Aim to analyze ongoing changes in the public welfare provision in the North of Europe and Europe in general by building specialist competence at the intersection of religion, welfare and law.

#### Theme 6: Science and Religion

The aim is to identify and understand contemporary conceptions of how science and religion are related and the impact of each on the other. How, in other words, should we understand the relationship between two powerful cultural forces and how do they shape worldviews in a pluralistic and global society?

**im**PACT  
THE IMPACT OF RELIGION

*Challenges for Society, Law and Democracy*

## Research Centre: Religion & Society

### Center for the interdisciplinary research on religion and society (*CIRRuS*)

Prof. Dr. Dr. Heinrich Wilhelm Schäfer

<http://www.uni-bielefeld.de/religionsforschung>

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The *Center for the interdisciplinary research on religion and society* (CIRRuS) was founded in 2007 at University Bielefeld. *CIRRuS* combines the classical disciplines of theology and religious studies with research foci, methods and theories of empirical and hermeneutical sciences. Thus, normative and descriptive competence come into dialogue and a broad spectrum of interdisciplinary cooperation is being disclosed, at Bielefeld University and beyond. In the following we focus the research on the Sociology of Religion, which is led by Prof. Dr. Dr. Heinrich Schäfer.

#### Religious Theory: Religion as Practical Logic

The religio-social research at CIRRuS is based upon the general social theory of Pierre Bourdieu. This theory, oriented towards actors as well as social structures, would appear to be particularly suited for research on religious practices. Thus, accompanied by various empirical projects, central Bourdieuan theorems will be further developed and deepened with a special methodological and theoretical focus on religion. Developing the notions of 'habitus' and 'practical logic' Schäfer has designed a theory of identity and a method of habitus analysis in combination with models of fields and social space – instruments that are being tested and further developed by empirical research. Further, normative perspectives of empirical research are being reflected, mainly by combining philosophical suppositions of Bourdieu's sociology with moderately communitarian

(Nussbaum) and liberal (Rorty) thought.

#### Religion, Conflict and Peace – conflict mediation

Conflict and peace have dimensions relevant to sociology of religion and theology. Over the last thirty years, there has been dramatic identity conflicts with religious and/or ethnic origins. Also at the micro level – for example in schools or in professional environments – the problems of conflict and violence have increasingly shifted into public consciousness, making the need for an ethically informed conflict management more than obvious. Modern approaches to mediation are of special interest in this context. In consequence various projects – Seibert, Stimac (Bosnia), M. Stockmeier, A. Stockmeier (Germany), Rueppell (various countries) – deal with issues of conflict and peace.

#### Religion and Social Inequality – Pentecostalism and Related Topics

Since Max Weber's writings on Status, Class and Religion', it has been clear that people's religious dispositions are closely interconnected with their social positions – not only within national societies but also on transnational level. Today, this interconnectedness is demonstrated very clearly in the Pentecostal movement in the Third World, which is currently the world's most dynamic religious movement. Various projects – Tovar (Mexico), Köhrsen (Argentina), Schäfer (diff. countries), dealing with Pentecostalism shed light particularly on the connections between social positions and religious dispositions in order to better understand the religious and social importance of the identity politics and strategies employed by religious actors transforming Third World societies.

#### Fundamentalism

With the second wave of religious fundamentalism since the beginning of the 1980s – the emergence of the Religious Right in the United States, the Iranian revolution etc. – began a long standing research on fundamentalisms (Schäfer). In its recent phase the focus was on comparing Islamic and US-American fundamentalisms.

#### Systematic Theology: Reconciliation, Pneumatology, Ethics

Theological projects are focused on a contextual and ecumenical theology. Of central interest in our current systematic-theological activities are pneumatology, reconciliation, ecumenical ethics of peace and Christian communitarian ethics, developed in various projects: Kim (Korea), Stockmeier (Germany), Rueppell and Schäfer (various countries).

## ***ISA/RC22 mid-term International Conference,*** **“Religion, Conflict, Violence and Tolerance in Global Perspectives”** **27-30 January 2012, Abuja, Nigeria**

### **CALL FOR PAPERS!**

#### **“RELIGION, CONFLICT, VIOLENCE AND TOLERANCE IN GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES”**

**An ISA/RC22 mid-term  
International Conference** (*in  
collaboration with PANAFSTRAG: Pan  
-African Strategic and Policy  
Research Group*)

**ABUJA, NIGERIA. 27-30 JANUARY 2012**

Increasing cross-disciplinary discourses are focusing on the intersections of conflict and violence in different religious traditions, in varied historical epochs within local and global contexts. Theorizing about religion, conflict and violence have been largely insufficient in grasping the complexities that characterize all forms of local-global conflicts and violence. Conventional explanations of conflict and violence remain incomplete as they separately emphasize different yet related phenomena of conflict and violence, without much effort to provide for a comprehensive explanation or framework that encompasses the full range of interpersonal, institutional, structural and symbolic violence.

This international interdisciplinary conference will seek to focus on theoretical perspectives, case studies to generate more nuanced analysis of social contexts from different times and places, giving

greater historical depth to social scientific interpretations of conflict/violence and tolerance in contemporary societies. The conference aims to foster social scientific expertise on religion, conflict and violence at multiple levels of analysis, ranging from interpersonal forms of violence to ethnic, class and civil conflicts. It will explore ways in which religion is, and is not, implicated in conflict/violence commissioned by State or non-State actors, the ways in which religious groups respond to or negotiate violence, the lived religious meanings of conflict/violence, tolerance and conflict-resolution, or the construction of religious groups as sources of conflict/violence.

Individual paper and panel abstracts are invited on any aspect of religion, conflict, violence and tolerance in local-global contexts. **Paper/panel abstract** submissions of not more than **300 words** should be submitted electronically (**as email attachment**) to:

**Afe Adogame**

[[a.adogame@ed.ac.uk](mailto:a.adogame@ed.ac.uk)] and;

**Olufunke Adeboye**

[[funks29adeboye@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:funks29adeboye@yahoo.co.uk)]

The deadline for abstract proposals is  
**JULY 30, 2011**

Notification of acceptance by **AUGUST  
15, 2011**

Online registration commence on  
**AUGUST 30** and close on **DECEMBER  
15, 2011**

Proposals should include: Name(s) and affiliation(s) of the author(s); institutional details (contact address, telephone, email address); title of proposed presentation; body of abstract. For general queries about the conference, please contact: **Afe Adogame** [[a.adogame@ed.ac.uk](mailto:a.adogame@ed.ac.uk)].

Further details of the conference will soon be available on the ISA-RC22 website:

<http://isarc22.org/Conferences/Conferences.htm>

## Why Do Terrorists Blow Themselves Up?

### Surprisingly, altruism is found among the complex set of factors

By: Riaz Hassan (reproduced with thanks to YaleGlobal , 9 September 2010)

ADELAIDE: Nine years ago, 19 young Muslims commandeered passenger jets and killed themselves, taking with them 2973 people to the inferno of fire. Since the 9/11 attacks suicide bombings have become a staple of daily news, although the practice dates back at least two decades. A commonly accepted narrative frames such acts of self-destruction as the action of psychologically impaired, morally deficient, uneducated, impoverished individuals and, most of all, religious fanatics.

But the analysis of information based on 1597 suicide attacks between 1981 and 2008, which killed more than 21,000 in 34 countries, suggests a more complex set of reasons, an understanding of which is essential if the world is to see an end of such slaughter. My book, "Life as a Weapon," analyzes suicide bombings as a method of choice among terrorist groups around the world and the motivations.

Surprisingly, altruism emerges as a major factor in the complex set of causes behind the suicide attacks. In its most fundamental character, following the seminal studies of economist Ernest Fehr and colleagues, altruism can be defined as the costly actions that confer benefits on other

individuals. Altruism is a fundamental condition accounting for human cooperation for organization of society and its cohesiveness. In the conceptual map of French sociologist Emile Durkheim, suicide bombings would fall in the category of altruistic suicidal actions – distinct from other types of suicidal actions caused by personal catastrophes, hopelessness and psychopathologies that lead people to believe life is not worth living. Altruistic suicides, on the other hand, involve valuing one's life as less worthy than the group's honor, religion or other collective interests.

The genesis of suicide bombings is rooted in intractable asymmetrical conflicts pitching the state against non-state actors over political entitlements, territorial occupation and dispossession. Invariably such conflicts instigate state-sanctioned violence and repressive policies against weaker non-state parties causing widespread outrage and large-scale dislocation of people, many of whom become refugees in makeshift camps, in or outside so-called war zones.

Carolyn Nordstrom captures the mood in Sri Lanka during the recently ended civil war: "In the war zones, violence and war permeated all aspect of daily life. It was not certain a person going for work would return in the evening. A home could be suddenly searched, someone brutally killed, a mother

raped or father taken away. A shell could land anywhere destroying everything around....This kind of pervasive atmosphere of violence, rather than breaking down the resistance and spirit of population, in times creates resistance and defiance, particularly in the youth." Other contributing factors include incarceration and dehumanizing treatments of insurgents in state custody and mutual dehumanization of the "other."

Suicide bombing, rarely the strategy of first choice, is selected by terrorist organizations after collective assessments, based on observations and experience, of strategies' relative effectiveness to achieve political goals. The decision to participate is facilitated by suicide bombers' internalized social identities, their exposure to asymmetric conflict and its costs, their exposure to organizations that sponsor such attacks as well as membership in a larger community where sacrifice and martyrdom carry high symbolic significance. In Sri Lanka, the Black Tigers attached importance to how the community would view their actions: They were glorified in their burial rituals, and an eternal lamp adorned the tombstone of every Black Tiger grave to commemorate the sacrifice.

From sociological and economic perspectives, suicide bombings can be linked to altruism as a form of

## Why Do Terrorists Blow Themselves Up?

### Surprisingly, altruism is found among the complex set of factors

intergenerational investment or an extreme form of saving in which the agent gives up current consumption for the sake of enhancing probability of descendants enjoying benefit of some future public good.

Analysis of Hezbollah suicide bombers in Lebanon shows that incidents of suicide bombing attacks increase with current income and the degree of altruism towards the next generation. Hezbollah suicide bombers come from above-average wealthy families and have above-average levels of education. The willingness of more educated people to engage in suicide missions suggests that education affects one's view of the world, enhancing sensitivity to the future.

Altruism is not antithetical to aggression. In war soldiers perform altruistic actions by risking lives for comrades and country and also killing the enemy. Actions of Japanese kamikaze pilots in World War II are examples of military sacrifice.

Altruism can also be socially constructed in communities that have endured massive social and economic dislocations as a result of long, violent and painful conflict with a more powerful enemy. Under such conditions people react to perceived inferiority and the failure of other efforts by valuing and supporting ideals of self-sacrifice such as suicide

bombing. Religiously and nationalistically coded attitudes towards acceptance of death stemming from long periods of collective suffering, humiliation and powerlessness enable political organizations to give people suicide bombing as an outlet for feelings of desperation, deprivation, hostility and injustice.

The evidence, however, also shows that such personal and collective sufferings motivating suicide bombers coexist with their inner feelings of altruism and sense of fairness. An Iraqi suicide bomber Marwan prayed that "no innocent people were killed in his mission." Shafiqa, an incarcerated failed Palestinian suicide bomber in Israel, did not detonate her device after seeing "a woman with a little baby in her carriage. And I thought, why do I have to do this to that woman and her child?... I won't be doing something good for Allah. I thought about the people who loved me and about the innocent people in the street...It was a very difficult moment for me."

French filmmaker Pierre Rehov interviewed many Palestinians in Israeli jails, arrested following failed suicide-bombing missions or for aiding and abetting such missions, for his film "Suicide Killers." Every one of them tried to convince him that that the action was the right thing to do for moralistic reasons. According to Rehov, "these aren't kids who want to do evil. These are kids who want to do good...." The

result – young people who had previously conducted their lives as good people believe that a suicide bombing represented doing something great.

Everyday degradations of Israeli occupation had created collective hatred, making them susceptible to indoctrination to become martyrs. As Stanford University psychologist Philip Zimbardo puts it, "It is neither mindless nor senseless, only a very different mind-set and with different sensibilities than we have been used to witnessing among young adults in most countries."

Suicide bombings invariably provoke a brutal response from authorities. By injecting fear and mayhem into ordinary rhythms of daily life, such bombings undermine the state's authority in providing security and maintaining social order. Under such conditions the state can legitimately impose *altruistic punishments* to deter future violation threatening security and social order. These include punishments meted out to perpetrators and their supporters. The state-sanctioned military actions against the Palestinians, Sri Lankan Tamil Tigers, Iraqi insurgents and the Taliban in Pakistan and Afghanistan are examples of these punishments.

But altruistic punishments are only effective when they do not violate the norms of *fairness*. Punishments and

## Why Do Terrorists Blow Themselves Up?

Surprisingly, altruism is found among the complex set of factors

sanctions seen as unfair, hostile, selfish and vindictive by targeted groups tend to have detrimental effects. Instead of promoting compliance, they reinforce recipients' resolve to non-compliance. Counter-insurgency operations are aimed at increasing the cost of insurgency to the insurgents, and invariably involve eliminating leaders and supporters who plan suicide bombings, destroying insurgents' capabilities for mounting future attacks, and restrictions on mobility and other violations of civil liberties.

But there is mounting evidence that such harsh measures reinforce radical opposition and even intensify it. This is now happening in Pakistan, Afghanistan and the Palestinian territories and has also been the case in Sri Lanka and Iraq and other conflict sites.

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#### STS 4

#### Joint session RC 22 and ISSR

#### RELIGION AND ECONOMY IN AFRICA AND THE NEW AFRICAN DIASPORA // RELIGION ET ÉCONOMIE EN AFRIQUE ET DANS LA NOUVELLE DIASPORA AFRICAINE

##### Convener / Organisateur :

**James V. SPICKARD**, University of Redlands, USA,  
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**Afe ADOGAME**, University of Edinburgh, UK, [a.adogame@ed.ac.uk](mailto:a.adogame@ed.ac.uk)

##### Session / Séance:

##### Chairperson / Président:

**ADOGAME, Afe** (University of Edinburgh, UK)

#### The Economy of Sacred Muslim Space in Durban – Some Theoretical Reflections // L'économie de l'espace sacré musulman à Durban – quelques réflexions théorétiques

**KOGELMANN, Franz** (Bayreuth University, Germany)

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Studies on Muslim communities in Durban do not refer to "space" as category of research. The Group Areas Act forced Muslim communities to relocate to specifically designated areas. After apartheid the administration of Durban started integrated area development projects. Recent research on this development is lacking the religious aspect. This is surprising because the apartheid regime dislodged persons and destroyed houses but left religious buildings untouched. Sacred space is socially produced space. *Spatial practices* like rituals set apart sacred from secular space. Holy places as *representational spaces* thus created represent their religious group and structure secular space. Conflicting or concordant sacred and secular landscapes make up the *representation of space* within Durban. By talking of the economy of sacred

space, the project emphasises the competitive aspects of socially produced space. Rituals produce structured space and structured time. The project tries to analyze to what extent sacred space and time can be considered as counter-hegemonic structures (heterotopias). This seems especially interesting in the context of Durban, where the structuring of space and time, was the instrument of social control of the apartheid state.

*Les études sur les communautés Musulmanes à Durban ne font pas allusion à 'l'espace' comme catégorie de recherche. Il suppose que l'espace sacré est un espace sociétal. Les espaces perçus comme les rites distinguent l'espace sacré de l'espace séculaire. L'espaces saints ainsi créés comme des espaces vécus représentent leur groupe religieux et structure l'espace séculaire. Paysages contestés ou concordants soient-ils sacrés ou séculaires sont les espaces conçus dans la ville de Durban. En parlant de l'économie d'espace sacré, le projet met l'accent sur les aspects compétitifs d'espace sociétal. Le projet essaie d'analyser dans quelle mesure l'espace et le temps sacré peuvent être considérés comme des structures contre-hégémoniques (heterotopias).*

#### Dynamics of thrift and cooperative society in the economic empowerment of Muslims in Lagos State University, Southwestern Nigeria // Économie et société coopérative auprès de Musulmans de l'Université d'Etat du Lagos dans le sud du Nigéria

##### ADETONA, Lateef Mobolaji

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This effort sets out to document how Muslim academic and non academic staff in the above named university come together to found an economic community based on zero interest and which has over time empowered them to meet their social and economic responsibilities in the community

without violating their religious precepts on zero interest rate on borrowing, especially when salaries are not paid. The success of the venture had over the years rubbed on neighboring communities and Muslim groups who are now en mass adopting this model.

*Dans cette présentation, nous montrons comment les membres académiques et non-académiques musulmans de l'université mentionnée plus haut ont formé une communauté économique fondée sur l'intérêt zéro et comment au travers du temps, celle-ci leur a permis de satisfaire leurs responsabilités économiques et sociales sans violer le principe de zéro intérêt, en particulier lorsque les salaires ne sont pas versés. Au fil du temps, le succès de ce projet s'est propagé auprès des communautés voisines et des groupes musulmans qui ont adopté ce modèle en masse.*

#### Interface of religion and economic realities in Nigeria: the case of intervention of faith based non-governmental organisations – Redeemed Christian Church of God // Interface entre religion et réalités économiques au nigéria : le cas de l'intervention des organisations non gouvernementales confessionnelles – la redeemed christian church of god

##### OGUNTOLA- LAGUDA, Danoye

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This paper seeks to study the interface between religion and economic development in Nigeria within the ambit of economic capitals that are made available to unemployed youth and the middle class that form the economic nerve of developing economies of our time by faith-based non-governmental organizations (NGOs) using the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) in Nigeria as our case study. It further attempts to examine the level of intervention of faith-based organizations (FBOs) in the economic debacle of the Nigeria. It

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also seeks to pursue the thesis that religion can foster social and economic changes in the society. The paper shall adopt a pedagogical approach to stimulate discussion on the interface between religion and economy in Africa and the new African diaspora.

*En prenant le cas de l'église Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), cette communication traite de l'interface entre la religion et le développement économique au Nigéria dans le cadre du capital économique qui est offert aux jeunes au chômage et à la classe moyenne par des organisations non gouvernementales confessionnelles (ONGC). Nous examinons l'intervention des NGOc relativement à la débâcle économique du Nigéria et soutenons que la religion peut entraîner des changements économiques et sociaux. Nous adoptons une approche pédagogique pour stimuler la discussion sur les interfaces entre la religion et l'économie en Afrique et dans la nouvelle diaspora africaine.*

**La diaspora kimbanguiste et le développement des sites au Congo démocratique // The Kimbanguist diaspora and development of the Democratic Republic of Congo**  
**GAMPIOT, Aurélien Mokoko, (GSRL)**

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*Née dans des pays où l'état est dépassé par le débordement de la misère des populations qui va toujours croissant en Afrique, L'Eglise kimbanguiste est comptée parmi les organismes qui contribuent de par son idéologie et sa diaspora au développement des pays qui en constituent le berceau. Quand, dans les années 70, les fidèles de cette Eglise s'installent dans les pays d'Europe, ils créent progressivement des conditions propices au développement de différentes formes d'activité économiques, sociales et culturelles, établies au Congo. Cette Eglise, laisse percevoir un système économique dont l'aspect le plus visible est le travail communautaire. La*

*question qui nous occupe dans cette communication est de montrer les éléments qui sous-tendent au développement de l'Eglise kimbanguiste et notamment de son pays de naissance.*

Born in nations where the state is overwhelmed by the ever-increasing poverty of the population, the Kimbanguist church ranks among the organizations whose ideology and diaspora contribute in the development of its home countries. In the early 1970s, a handful of members of this historical African Initiated Church settled down in European countries, where they gradually created the necessary conditions for the development of various forms of economic, social, and cultural activity in the now Democratic Republic of Congo and the Republic of Congo. The Kimbanguist church rests on an economic system whose most conspicuous dimension is community work. The purpose of this paper will be to show the elements underpinning the development of the Kimbanguist church and its birthplace, the DRC.

**Politics of Islamic Banking: Hindering the National Unity of Sudan? // La politique bancaire islamique : un frein à l'unité nationale du Soudan?**

**ELHASSAB, Ahmed El-Hassab Umer (BIGSAS, Univeersity of Bayreuth, Germany)**

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Islamic banking in Sudan, which overwhelmed the banking sector since 1990s, may pose a direct threat to the unity of the country. The anxiety express in this paper, is based on the feeling that the issue of Islamizing the economy is not an innocent policy, rather, it goes hand by hand with the issue of the contested identity of Sudan which divides the country along the Arabism-Islamized and Africanism-secularized dichotomy. The way the question of national identity was tackled left too many issues swept under the rug of this dichotomy, notably the banking industry. These two contradictory views have been at the very heart of the socio-

economic turmoil which lies at the center of the decay of the Sudanese state.

*La politique bancaire du Soudan en vigueur depuis les années 1900 pose une menace directe à l'unité du pays. Selon nous, l'islamisation de l'économie va de pair avec le problème de l'identité contestée du Soudan dont la division s'établit entre les pôles de l'arabité islamisée et de l'africanisme sécularisé. Ces deux voies contradictoires sont au coeur de l'instabilité socio-économique qui a provoqué le déclin de l'état soudanais. Cette communication tente de montrer comment, en manipulant le religieux, l'unité du pays réalisée à travers la politique bancaire pourrait engendrer un résultat sens dessus dessous.*

**STS 36**

**Joint session RC 22 and ISSR**

**RELIGION AND COLLECTIVE MEMORY // RELIGION ET MÉMOIRE COLLECTIVE**

**Convener / Organisateur :**

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The focus of this session is to discuss the role of religion in shaping the *collective memory* of a community, society or a nation. It includes references or even metaphors ranging from foundation stories to maintenance of a symbolic universe. These are mostly couched in religious ideas and representations, although secular symbols – the national flag, the crown of the ruler, revered places or persons of historical importance, etc. – are also included (many of them are attributed a quasi-religious importance). Tradition plays an important role in shaping collective (or social) memory, mainly by perpetuating a set of ideas, legends and myths about a community or society. Anthropological studies of pre-modern societies demonstrate the cohesive function of those. Religious

## In Conversation with Elisio Macamo: The Sociology of Religion in Africa Interview by Afe Adogame

Elisio Macamo is Assistant Professor of African Studies and Development Sociology at the University of Basel, Switzerland. Previously, he taught development sociology at the University of Bayreuth, where he was a founding member of the Bayreuth International Graduate School of African Studies. He was born and grew up in Mozambique. He studied in Maputo (Mozambique), Salford and London (England) and Bayreuth (Germany). He holds an MA degree in Translation and Interpreting (Salford), an MA degree in Sociology and Social Policy (University of North London) and a PhD and "Habilitation" in General Sociology (University of Bayreuth). He was Post-Doctoral Fellow at the University of Bayreuth, Research Fellow at the Centre for African Studies in Lisbon (Portugal), AGORA-Fellow at the Institute for Advanced Studies in Berlin and a visiting lecturer at Eduardo Mondlane University in Mozambique. He regularly offers methodological workshops to Portuguese speaking African doctoral students on behalf of CODESRIA (Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa). His major interests are the sociology of religion, technology, knowledge, politics and risk. He takes a special interest in phenomenological and interpretive approaches to empirical social research.

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Afe Adogame is Assistant Professor of Religious Studies and World Christianity at the University of Edinburgh, UK. He is currently the General Secretary/Treasurer of Research Committee on Sociology of Religion RC22 of the International Sociological Association. He obtained his PhD in History of Religions from the University of Bayreuth, Germany. Prior to his appointment in 2005, he was Senior Research Fellow at the Department for the Study of Religion and Institute of African Studies, Bayreuth University

from 1995-2005. He served as Senior Fellow at the Harvard University Center for the Study of World Religions, Cambridge, MA, USA in 2003-04. His broad research interests include interrogating new dynamics of religious experience (s) and expression(s) in Africa and the African Diaspora; the interconnectedness between religion, migration and globalization. He is the General Secretary of the African Association for the Study of Religions and a member of the Association for the Sociology of Religion, Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, British Association for the Study of Religion, African Studies Association, American Academy of Religion to mention a few.

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**Afe Adogame (AA):** In most of your writings you are often fond of negotiating identity? But who are you?

**Elisio Macamo (EM):** I'm one of those people made possible by modernity. I lived the first 10 years of my life under Portuguese colonial rule in Mozambique. I experienced its humiliating and dehumanizing side, especially through seeing how my parents and older relatives were treated by the system. When the country became independent in 1975 I had a quick induction into modern milleniarism and I experienced the power which hope turned into a sense of mission can have on the imagination of people. Multi-party democracy in most of Africa in the late eighties and early nineties as well as my training as a sociologist gave me an opportunity to take stock of what has happened to me over the years. I've come to the conclusion that I've been making myself all through the events that have provided context for my life. So, that's what I am, an identity in the making. In my spare time I am a sociologist working on development issues at the University of Basel.

**AA:** In your earlier work 'What is Af-

rica?' you seem to suggest the invention of Africa. Could you shed light on who invented Africa and for what end? If invented, and so what?

**EM:** Well, my argument in that book (published by Duncker & Humblot, Berlin, 1999) can indeed be construed as a case for the invention of... but what I actually do is a sociology of knowledge of the debate among African intellectuals concerning the question whether there is an African philosophy. I was fascinated by this discussion which seemed to reach its peak in the late eighties and early nineties and I wanted to understand what made it possible and what it meant. This forced me to go back in history and engage with the writings of the likes of Crummel and Blyden through Nkrumah, Nyerere, Senghor and Oruka, Bodunrin, Wiredu, Hountondji all the way to many others who are still very active, such as Mudimbe and Appiah. I emerged with the idea that the debate documented the making of Africa by Africans themselves to the extent that they accepted the gauntlet thrown to them by modernity to situate themselves in history. I tried to make a case for the idea that we concede too much to Europe or to the West by insisting that Africa is their invention. Rather, we should also be sensitive to the fact that by engaging actively with colonialism, rejecting or embracing aspects of its structural and ideological presence in our midst, we were basically taking centre stage in our own history, producing ourselves as thinking, active and historically sensitive individuals. So what, you ask. Well, indeed, so what? I'm still working on that. In the meantime, though, I take comfort in the aesthetics of it all. I'm proud to be a member of a people with such a strong hold on life. Not many have gone through what we have gone through in history and stayed alive to tell the story. This perseverance is fascinating!

**AA:** As one of the youngest, enterpris-

## In Conversation with Elisio Macamo: The Sociology of Religion in Africa Interview by Afe Adogame

ing development sociologists and researcher in Africa, what particular challenge(s) does research in and on Africa pose to you and to your contemporaries irrespective of their academic orientation and background?

**EM:** Oh, Afe, you are very kind! Basically, I think that research in and on Africa poses to all of us the same kinds of challenges that research in and on anything else poses to scholars. We work with concepts, theories and methodologies and are always confronted with the question of their suitability to our objects. The moment one stops posing this question, one is lost. Of course we need to be sensitive to the particular circumstances of the African continent, especially its trajectory in the production of knowledge. I usually make a distinction among three types of knowledge on Africa, namely traditional, colonial and African. Traditional knowledge refers to pre-colonial knowledge, i.e. the everyday knowledge which communities on the African continent required for their own reproduction. By colonial knowledge I mean the kind of knowledge that represented Europe's will to power in Africa, i.e. knowledge that served the purpose of bringing Africa under foreign domination. African knowledge is emancipatory knowledge, it is the knowledge that Africans produce in order to achieve freedom. Although these types of knowledge correspond to rough historical periods often they overlap and don't die away. The production of "African" knowledge is the main challenge that all of us face who are engaged in research in and on Africa.

**AA:** How do you mean that colonialism, far from being the vehicle for the "civilisation" of Africa was an important factor in denying modernity to Africa?

**EM:** Colonialism was central to what I consider to be the ambivalence of modernity in Africa. Ideologically, it

promised "civilisation" through progress, emancipation and order. At the same time however it blocked all the access routes to its promise through its own practice of making Africans subjects of Europe's will to power. Take the regulation of native labour in Portuguese colonies in Africa: On the one hand, it was based on the idea that wage labour would free Africans from the constraining hold of their "traditional" communities and lead them into the revolution of rising expectations that would spur them on into modernity. On the other hand, however, the needs of the colonial state in terms of cheap labour forced administrations to conjure up an "African society" that was functional to the colonial state's inability to care for the increasing number of Africans not attached to "traditional" communities. In so doing, it denied the very modernity which its discourse promised.

**AA:** Quite realistically, what would you consider to be Africans' experience of modernity and social change?

**EM:** Our experience of modernity and social change is the experience of a tension between promise and denial. It's a tough predicament, for often our voice is made possible by the very things that we have to criticize in order to move forward. I call this the paradox of modernity in Africa. Africa as a viable intellectual category for Africans was made possible by our critical engagement with modernity, an engagement which has often rested on the rejection of modernity's progressive claims.

**AA:** In what way(s) is the African experience of modernity unique and relevant for wider social theory, offering valuable analytical insights?

**EM:** I think that it is unique in the sense that it predisposes us to be sensitive to the discursive nature of the tools of the social sciences. Concepts are words, theories are merely coherent strings of words and methods are our decisions

on how we want to make sense of the world. Our experience of modernity allows us to be cynical about these things and that's a good pre-condition for an awareness of the limits of science and its tools.

**AA:** How would you critically reflect on the role of development aid in the production of non-Western countries – particularly African, but maybe using Mozambique the country you know best – as social realities?

**EM:** Well, development aid is based on the colonial type of knowledge I was talking about earlier on. It is knowledge for domination which, as far as I am concerned, is quite legitimate. The onus is on us to appreciate this and know how to deal with it. We appreciate this by taking a critical distance towards the good intentions of development aid and not allowing them to numb our minds. You see, development aid, much like colonialism, promises a bright future, but makes it dependent on doing things which it considers essential and fundamental. It fits well into Karl Popper's definition of historicism. It is totalitarian and tyrannical in the name of a better future. It promotes silence because being critical of it is often construed as a rejection of the future which it promises. However, if you embrace it, like many African governments have been forced to do by real politics, you give up history, precisely the thing that generations of Africans have fought to recover. So, knowing how to deal with development aid consists, in my view, in holding on to history, i.e. resisting the transformation of our countries into arenas for the trial of technical solutions and insisting in making our own mistakes. Development aid poses a major threat to politics and it is upon us to resist this.

**AA:** May I take you a bit further on this point? In your reflection about Mozambique, particularly with reference to structural adjustment programmes

## In Conversation with Elisio Macamo: The Sociology of Religion in Africa Interview by Afe Adogame

(SAPs), you opined that the most intriguing problem faced by the social sciences is not so much the inability to produce a critical theory, but rather its uselessness. Could you unravel this enigmatic illusion?

**EM:** I was actually engaging with a very perceptive comment made by a Portuguese social scientist, Boaventura de Sousa Santos, who deplored the absence of a critical theory at a time when there is so much to criticize. I argued, in contrast, that the problem was not that no critical theory was being produced. Rather, the problem was that we are living at a time dominated by the general complacency of a few very powerful institutions, countries and people which turn any critique, no matter how coherent and well formulated, into some sort of anachronism or ungratefulness. I am deploring the disappearance of debate from the public sphere driven by neo-liberal fundamentalism and by our growing failure to recognise that one of the strengths of liberal democracy has been its ability to provide room for discussion based on the honest acknowledgement of other people's right to an opinion. I understand the right to an opinion not merely as the acceptance of the fact that people have a right to hold different opinions than mine, but rather as the acknowledgement of the duty that falls upon me to engage truthfully with them in the public interest. Every one is shouting right now, but no one is engaging with anyone else. This is what I mean by the uselessness of critical theory. There is no room for debate. Therefore, we need to recover this room as a matter of urgency.

**AA:** Ever since its inception the sociology of religion has been dogged by the problem of defining its object. What is your view on this?

**EM:** I don't think you will like my answer. I think that the object of the sociology of religion is society, as Emile

Durkheim has shown very well. Better still the object is social relations as aptly shown by Max Weber. Religion documents society or social relations, so it is only fair that we should define its object in this manner.

**AA:** Elsewhere, you have argued that the sociology of religion is only interested in religion to the extent that the practical manifestations of the latter can help sociologists describe and analyse society in a better way. To what extent has this been the case for sociology of religion in Africa?

**EM:** I think that generally speaking there have been a considerable number of studies of religion in Africa. I'm not sure if it would be appropriate to call these studies "sociology of religion" given what I have said concerning the object of this discipline. My feeling is that we have not yet quite managed to articulate our empirical observations of religious life and phenomena in Africa with the relationship between historically constituted social order and individual agency. We are still describing phenomena. The American sociologist Randal Collins, for instance, has a very thought-provoking thesis concerning the role of irrationality in the possibility of social order which suggests to me that some of the problems we have with order and stability in Africa are due to the fact that we are too rational. In fact, when you think of it you realize that we have a very practical and down-to-earth approach to religion, but I have not seen this documented in any way in terms of what it means to social order in Africa other than the usual drive to see religious life in Africa as an instance of the exotic. There are, of course, exceptions. I'm thinking particularly of the work of Benneta Jules-Rosetta, whose symbolic interactionist approach to religion in central Africa has given me much food for thought.

**AA:** You again noted that while Africa has been undergoing rapid social change over the past century, no

equivalent intellectual engineering has taken place. In a controversial way you contended that there is no such thing as a sociology of religion in Africa, and that it is more appropriate to write about the study rather than the sociology of religion in Africa. What exactly do you mean by this?

**EM:** I mean precisely what I have just said. Take Durkheim's approach to religion. He used his insights to make sense of society and, thereby, formulate an intellectual approach, namely sociology. You could also take Weber. His studies of religion enabled him to work out with great precision his idea of the rationalisation process which is so central to our understanding of modern society. I see no similar proposal in Africa and this is not for lack of equally brilliant scholars. We simply have not taken the time to go farther than our empirical observations allow us to do. But we need to do this, more or less along the lines of Kwame Bediako, who sought to articulate such phenomena with a kind of social structural logic in our history.

**AA:** Is it not ambiguous to suggest that African sociology of religion has never been sociological?

**EM:** It is, but that is because we have not been accurate in our use of words. We have studied religion, but we have not necessarily done it in a sociological manner. Remember Peter Berger's distinction between social problems and sociological problems. Our interest in religion in Africa reflects our social interest in the phenomenon, but not necessarily our sociological interest in the sense of trying to understand what makes religion socially relevant.

**AA:** You have argued that sociology of religion is imposing itself on the study of religion in Africa. Is this not really a contradiction in terms?

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**EM:** No, not at all. Curiosity may have killed the cat, but it is also the mother of serious scholarship. Amassing empirical data gets tiresome at some stage. Mountains of data force you to classify, sift through categories, build typologies, etc. In so doing, you begin to seriously engage with society.

**AA:** If you were to receive a generous research grant of \$1 million to revolutionize sociological scholarship and research, what exactly would you do with it?

**EM:** I would probably commission a study on the meaning of “revolutionizing sociological scholarship”! No, seriously, I would encourage younger scholars to revisit everything that has been written about Africa and tease out lines of enquiry that were not pursued, but had the potential to bring us closer to truly African forms of knowledge. By “African” I don’t, of course, mean any essential cultural category. Rather, I mean ways of perceiving the world that are fully cognisant of our historical legacy as a modern construct and pursue our freedom forcefully.

**AA:** How would you advice young African scholars to go about doing a sociology of religion in Africa in an age of globalisation where African countries are still caught up in socio-economic and political quagmires? Can we actually teach sociology from an African point of view?

**EM:** These are actually two questions. The first one is easier to answer. The “age of globalisation” is, of course, shorthand for neo-liberal intolerance that reduces intellectual pursuits to instrumental reason. Young African scholars should not allow their intellectual curiosity to be constrained by the demands of those who say that Africa has more urgent problems to solve. The most urgent task at hand is actually finding out what the most urgent task is. In other words, the social

sciences in Africa face the huge task of formulating the problems of Africa, not of finding the solutions. Development aid has the solutions. We need to search for the problem. Like Gadamer said, there are more answers than questions in the world. It is our task to look for these questions. The second question is tough because it sounds like a trap. What does it mean to teach sociology from an African point of view? What is an African point of view? What is a point of view? What will get better from teaching sociology from an African point of view? Our understanding? Our concepts? Our theories? Our continent? Ourselves? May be we are faced with a different sort of problem. May be the problem is to learn to use the tools of scientific enquiry without these pangs of conscience that keep whispering to us the fine print of the copyrights which some people think their cultures to have over science. We need to develop this unconstrained attitude to modern artefacts celebrated by Kwame Anthony Appiah in his analysis of the sculpture of the “man on the bicycle” in his book on Africa in the philosophy of culture.

**AA:** It is really great talking to you again. Many thanks for your attention!

**EM:** You are most welcome!

THE END



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and Development Sociology  
University of Basel, Switzerland*



*Afe Adogame*

*University of Edinburgh*

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traditions are deeply embedded in social memory. However, they are not immutable but are influenced by developments in society and in the religious sphere. The impact of the Reformation is well documented not only in Max Weber's writings but also by historians (e.g. Jacques Le Goff and others of the *Annales* school) or by Claudio Valdés, the Chilean sociologist and historian who analyzed the impact of the Reformation, respectively of the Catholic Counter-reformation on the different institutional, legal and ideological developments in North and South America. Similarly, the developments in society, especially the Renaissance, caused changes in the Catholic theology and philosophy. The emergence of different, and often hostile, trends within a religion leads to re-interpretation of its traditions or tenets. The goal of the session is to analyze the institutional, cultural and in particular the religious factors influencing the collective memory of a nation, a society or a community.

*Le centre de cette session est la discussion du rôle de la religion dans la formation de la mémoire collective d'une communauté, d'une société ou nation. Elle inclut des références aux, ou même métaphores concernant des histoires de fondation ou maintien d'un univers symbolique. Pour la plupart celles sont formulées par des idées et représentations religieuses, bien que symboles séculaires – le drapeau national, armoires du souverain, etc., etc. – soient aussi inclus. (Beaucoup d'eux acquièrent une importance quasi-religieuse.) La tradition joue un rôle important dans la formation de la mémoire collective (ou sociale) surtout par perpétuer une collection des idées, légendes et mythes concernant une communauté ou société. Des études anthropologiques des sociétés pré-modernes démontrent leur rôle dans le*

*maintien de leur cohésion. Les traditions religieuses sont enracinées dans la mémoire sociale. Pourtant, elles ne sont pas immuables mais plutôt influencées par les développements sociaux et religieux. L'influence de la Réformation est bien documentée non seulement dans les études de Max Weber mais aussi par historiens (par ex. Jacques Le Goff et autres historiens de l'école Annales) ou par le sociologue et historien chilien Claudio Véliz qui analysait l'effet de la Réforme, respectivement la Contre-réforme Catholique sur les différences dans les développements institutionnels, légaux et idéologiques en Amérique de Nord et de Sud. Similairement, les développements dans la société, particulièrement la Renaissance, causaient changements dans la théologie et philosophie Catholique. L'émergence des courants différents, souvent hostiles, tendances au sein d'une religion mène à une réinterprétation de ses traditions et doctrines. Le but de cette session est l'analyse des facteurs institutionnels, culturels et surtout religieux ayant une influence sur la mémoire collective d'une nation et autres collectivités.*

## **The Second ISA Forum of Sociology: *Social Justice and Democratization* Buenos Aires, Argentina, August 1-4, 2012**

### **RC 22 -Research Committee for the Sociology of Religion**

#### **Call for Sessions:**

#### **“Religion, Justice and Democratization in contemporary societies”**

Programme coordinator: Eloísa  
Martín; eloisamartin@hotmail.com

The current debate on religion in the public space has been intense, extensive and sophisticated during the last decades. However, it has not paid enough attention to concepts such as justice and democratization.

The purpose of this RC 22 meeting is thus to explore the relationships between religion, justice and democratization –understood in a broad sense – in the public space and in everyday life. We invite RC 22 members to propose sessions that deal with these subjects, in their relationship with contemporary debates in the Sociology of Religion.

Sessions could focus on theoretical, methodological and/ or empirical approaches that address issues such as the different understandings of Justice -comprising, but not limited to social justice or law justice- and religion; religious pluralism and democratization processes; the role of religion as a carrier in the struggle for democracy; the legal recognition of religious minorities; religion and empowerment in everyday practices; struggles for religious freedom; lay State and the national (religious) culture; religiously inspired social movements; justice, religion and

wars; religion and human rights; popular religion and alternative practices of justice; etc.

#### **Submissions:**

To propose a Session, please send an abstract (no more than 300 words), your full name, institutional affiliation, e-mail and a short bio to Eloísa Martín (eloisamartin@hotmail.com) no later than **June 30<sup>th</sup> 2011**.

*Please, note that to submit a session proposal it is necessary to be a RC 22 member and that one cannot present a paper in the same session that one is chairing.*

In order to be included in the programme, all participants (presenters, chairs, discussants, etc.) need to be registered by the early registration deadline April 10, 2012. If not registered, their names will not appear in the Programme Book or in the Abstracts Book.

#### **Further Information**

**On the Conference:** <http://www.isa-sociology.org/buenos-aires-2012/>

**On ISA:** <http://www.isa-sociology.org/>

**On RC 22:** <http://www.isa-sociology.org/rc22.htm>

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