

Constructing Yoruba religion through the Internet: Between authenticity and fakeness

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There is no doubt that the internet, more than any media type, has widened religious landscape in the global world. As Lorne Dawson (2004) acknowledges, media are bearers of messages that influence our religious dispositions and way of thinking. Hence, they are not passive avenues for the dissemination of information. With the internet, new religious communities are being created and the existing ones are passing through transformation. Such media 'revolution' affects religious authority and localisation of religion. Since religions are transforming in the course of history, and more especially with the presence of internet, to what extent can we determine what is authentic or fake about a religion? Or does this transformation attenuate authenticity or leads to the fakeness of a religion? African Traditional Religion (ATR), like other religions, utilises the presence of the internet to gain recognition and visibility by undergoing transformation. But, this 'necessary' transformation through the new opportunity offered by the internet is viewed as fake at the local communities. David Chidester (2004) gives a compressive account of how Credo Mutwa's invention and appropriation of indigenous authenticity in African folk religion gained global recognition through the internet; and condemnation at his local community of South Africa. In this paper I want to evaluate the championing of Yoruba traditional religion through the internet a long side the case study of Mutwa as analysed by Chidester, in order to problematize authenticity and fakeness of ATR.

Introduction

Our intention in this paper is not to extensively explicate what ATR is. Much has already been done on that. (See Idowu, 1963, 1973; Metuh, 1981, 1985; Mbiti, 1988; Arinze, 2001; Arazu, 2005) We shall rather concentrate on the expansion of the frontiers by the internet medium for ATR to "authentically" flourish. For the sake of delimitation, we have chosen the Yoruba traditional religion to orchestrate our point. Another person could have chosen Igbo, Hausa or Voodoo religion. The Yoruba religion represents a prominent example of the construction of a religion through the internet. There are various websites (www.yorubareligion.org; www.ifafoundation.org; www.oyansoro.com; www.alawoye.com; www.asaforitifa.com; www.irunmole.org) on Yoruba religion operating in many parts of the world. This has informed our choice of Yoruba religion as one of the African indigenous religions that has gained global standing. My research will proceed with a general discussion on religion and the internet by paying attention to Peter Beyer. I will then dwell on the

construction of ATR by using Chidester's study on Credo Mutwa a long side my findings on Yoruba religion.

The Internet and Religion Visibility

There are many media types through which people advance the course of one religion or the other. Through the print media for instance, Christians and Muslims in Nigeria engaged one another in the wake of the controversy over membership of the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC). For detailed discussions on OIC through the print media see Yusuf (1999). Numerous religious activities are carried out using the television. Amidst all these media types, the internet remains unique and unprecedented. Lorne Dawson offers three reasons why the internet has wider audience than any other media types. Firstly, the internet is interactive and not merely a broadcast channel. Secondly, it takes little effort and finance for a great majority to launch onto the world wide net. Thirdly, the internet has an immeasurable global outreach; whereby the "world wide web is open in principle and in

Presenting Mutwa's Indigenous Religion Appropriation as Analysed by Chidester

Thus far, we have ruminated on the role of the internet in the construction of religion for visibility. In the same vein, with Beyer, we have shown that a religion like ATR that does not have the features of function systems may remain invisible. According to Beyer, if ATR is to become visible, it must necessarily play by the logic of function systems, which demands the transformation of its structures. As a corollary, Cochrane also opined that ATR which exhibits communal forms has to necessarily transform to achieve visibility; and this process entails transforming their traditions and practices. Nevertheless, neither Cochrane nor Beyer, bothered about whether this transformation would amount to authenticity or fakeness. It is rather, David Chidester in what follows, who would attempt a solution to the issue of authenticity and fakeness.

Chidester carried out an extensive study on Credo Mutwa in his work "Credo Mutwa, Zulu Shaman: The Invention and Appropriation of Indigenous Authenticity in African Folk Religion." The life and work of Mutwa were painstakingly reviewed in the above study. According to Chidester, Mutwa was born in 1921 to his father – a Christian and his mother – a Traditional religionist. The story has it that when Mutwa became seriously ill, he turned to the religion of his mother for solutions. Mutwa later understood his illness to be an incident ushering him into his mission as an "indigenous healer, diviner and seer." (Chidester, 2004:72) This singular event laid the foundation for Mutwa as an authentic representative of indigenous religion of the Zulu land. Mutwa consequently declared himself as the witchdoctor of the Zulu land. He claimed to have inherited this role from his maternal grandfather, where his aforementioned illness was cured. According to Chidester's account (2006:74), Mutwa became "officially known" as the high sanusi of Zulu people. With this appropriated title, Mutwa presents himself as an authentic high sanusi who possess "specialized indigenous knowledge that could be used in healing, divination, education, and social transformation." (Chidester, 2004:76)

He continued his mission of propagating ATR

far and wide within South Africa. His activities caught the attention of many observers at the time. In 1954 he got a job with a curio shop in Johannesburg that is devoted to providing African artefacts for tourism. Indeed, the reason for employing Mutwa at this centre was that the "employer, A. S. Watkinson, relied on him to authenticate these objects of African arts." (Chidester, 2004:72) The reliance on Mutwa for the authentication of these materials was because, Watkinson believes in him as an embodiment of the Zulu tradition. Mutwa later moved to Soweto to attend to another traditional African tourist centre.

Mutwa persuasively presents himself as an imaginative storyteller. These stories according to him were drawn from the authentic pool of Zulu traditional beliefs. These stories were so appealing that Watkinson sponsored the collection of them for publications. (Mutwa, 1964, 1966) But there is a kind of dilemma as to whether the imaginative presentation of the Zulu tribal history and tradition is not at variance with what is commonly known. This concern seems to cast doubt on the originality of Mutwa who laid claim to authenticity. Because the "extravagant and imaginative poetry and prose of these texts bore little if any relation to anything previously recorded in print about Zulu religion." (Chidester, 2004:74)

However, Mutwa's motivating goal is to develop an indigenous African tradition in the Zulu land that is totally different from foreign tradition. Most importantly for Mutwa, the South African Black race will maintain their authentic tradition through a separate life. In Mutwa's mind thus, apartheid was a good opportunity for the Zulu people to preserve their original tradition from dilution that will ensue when it mixes with the white culture. Mutwa (1966:319-323, 1998:13) says: "Apartheid is the high law of the Gods! It is the highest law of nature." For him thus "white men of South Africa are only too right when they wish to preserve their pure-bred racial identity." His message was negatively received by the blacks South Africans. Even though Mutwa may have a good mission to develop an authentic indigenous tradition in South Africa, the context of apartheid which he embraced was not convincing to his people. That may explain why Mutwa's enormous

practice to everyone.”(Dawson, 2004:386) With this undeniable global spread of computer mediated communication, individuals and groups can easily post their messages on the net. Consequently, interactive responses are generated which in turn advance discussions to an unimaginable level.

As a corollary to Dawson, Ihejirika Chikwendu emphasises the role of the different media types in religious conversion. For instance, his elaborate presentation of the Redeemed Christian Church of God’s use of different media types for evangelisation cannot be overstated. But he underscores a vital point that is in tandem with Dawson when he affirms that the internet offers more opportunities and accessibility to people patronising the Redeemed Christian Ministry than either television programmes or print media. He avers: “With the provision of free e-mail boxes, members have greater possibility of communicating among themselves and with the leaders of the church.” (Chikwendu, 2004:129) People can more quickly participate online in religious activities such as prayer and healing taking place at the Redeem church centres. Redeemed Church is only singled out here as one of the numerous examples used to demonstrate the religious use of the internet. It was founded in Nigeria by pastor Adeboye. Their website www.rccg.com contains information one needs to know. The interactive congeniality of the internet is also underscored by Muhammed Haron (2004: 154) when writing on the role of the media in both religious and social change within the Muslim communities of South Africa.

It is a truism today that through the net, a great number of people are able to read about religion and discuss about religion with other people without restrictions. Dawson enumerates different things that can be executed online. These ranges from searching scriptures with electronic indexes, viewing churches and religious centres, joining in rituals, meditation practice; watch religious videos, listening to religious music, sermons, prayers, and testimonies to discourses by religious leaders. The increase in the religious use of the internet is at such an astronomical pace that it has become very difficult to trace the number of users. It is because of this obvious reason that

Dawson (2004:388) calls for more time to be devoted into mapping out the origin and nature of the religious sites, in order to trace and examine who is behind what is put on the internet.

The critical analysis of what religious message is put on the net and who put them should be an urgent task of scholars of religion. This is because the internet is not an empty means of disseminating information. As Dawson acknowledges, the media are carriers of messages that impact on the life of people and consequently influence their way of thinking. In other words, people believe what they read on the internet to be real. One implication of this fact is that many people rely far less on the religious authority than what they get from the net. In some cases, different religions exist thanks to the internet. See for instance, www.godweb.org or the church ov MOO, <http://members.nbc.com/gecko23/moo/>.

However, there are some feelings of trepidation which people harbour about the religious use of the internet. Some works such as Bedell, 2000; Bunt, 2000; Gold, 2000-2001; Horsfall, 2000; Lawrence, 2000 have expressed these concerns. It for example, finds expression at the rapidity with which people discard religious authority as a result of the revolution of the internet. There is also a delocalisation of religion; a situation where the internet becomes the dint of contact for some religions called online religions. In fact, for such religion, one cannot talk of physical place of origin. Or that religion online may lead to misrepresentation of an authentic religion. We shall come to this point later. We are rather spurred by the great opportunity and freedom generated by the presence of the internet, for many individuals or groups who were hitherto denied the chance to practise and express their religion. Such restrictions are eroded by the availability of the internet for religious use.

Afe Adogame underscores the shooting out into globality of ATR as a result of the presence of the internet. For him, African indigenous religion in its global spread cuts across racial lines. For instance, it is not only the diasporic Africans that practise ATR; many non-African Americans have become priests and founders of neo-indigenous African religions such as Ifa and

Orisha religions in America. Interestingly, these priests easily “operate and communicate through their internet websites with old and new clientele as well as with wider public.” (Adogame, 2007: 531) According to Adogame, any other media type does not give African indigenous religion as much visibility as does the internet, especially at the international level.

Consequently, the construction of ATR through the internet could earn it the differentiation which according to Beyer is needed for visibility in the function systems in the global scene. In *Religions in Global Society* (2006) Beyer develops a view on modern religion as differentiated systems of communication, diverse in form and content and coexisting with other function systems of politics, economy, education and law inter alia. Beyer (2006:15) says:

The communication that constitutes any system, including the religious system, gravitates around or tends to become concentrated in various particular forms which are instrumental in rendering the system visible and above all in controlling the structure of communication that counts as religion

These other work (1994, 1998b, 2002) of Beyer can be joined in the discussion. As part of a differentiated global religion system, religions gain visibility through communication and controversy either across the religion-non-religion border or across one religion/another religion boundary. (Beyer, 2006:8) In other words, religions are constructed internally, through self-referential communication and/or externally by outsiders of different kinds (political, educational, law...). Nevertheless Beyer makes clear that not all reality that has the appearance of being religion is part of this system. Consequently, for a religion to be visible, it has to play by the logic of the function systems. While, according to Beyer, Christianity and Islam have developed into modern system religions, it is difficult to say that of ATR. For him this could explain the invisibility of ATR. For instance, one fact that may have facilitated the silencing of ATR is that it has no official spokespersons like Islam

and Christianity.

The future of any non-visible religion or tradition that desires to be visible in the way Beyer conceptualises it will depend on human agents and agency. If the human agents, desire the visibility of ATR as a function system, then there is the likelihood that the project will succeed. If ATR will play any critical role, then it has to re-invent itself so as to have the basic features of what Beyer identifies as the function systems in the modern state. This is crucial because no matter how vociferous the voices of advocates and adherents are for a space in public discourse, if ATR lacks the basic features of function systems according to modern views it will remain marginal, if Beyer’s view is correct. Of course, ATR has its own imaginations and vocabularies and values that are needed for the growth of the nation. Yet, it can only make sensible and viable contribution if it becomes an integral member of Nigeria’s modern religious Areopagus for example.

Beyer’s sociology of religion is mainly a tool to outline the existing situation in Nigeria and allows one to see how it has come into being. An obvious conclusion seems to be that a systematisation of ATR needs to be undertaken. Systematisation as used here is the process of making ATR visible. It entails transforming their traditions and practices. (See Cochrane, 2004; Everett, 1999) Nokuzola Mndende from the University of Cape Town (whom Beyer mentions in his book) strongly sees the need for ATR to be constructed in South African in view of visibility. She works tirelessly in South Africa, through sustained public lobbying and writing for ATR to be visible. For her, ATR should be constructed as an independent religion or set of religions. (Mndende, 1998) Consequent upon Mndende’s stance, I aver that when ATR systematises itself and its tenets and structures, then it will gain the characteristics of the function systems that make visibility possible. Features such as communicative resources, writing, spoke persons and specialised institutions augment visibility through differentiation. Beyer (2006:32) says: “Differentiation refers to the development of relatively independent institutional domains,

each of which focuses on a particular function or purpose. Adaptive upgrading points to the increased power and efficacy that this sort of differentiation permits and entails." The speed of such construction of ATR has accelerated through the availability of the internet. This is where Prince Olosun and Credo Mutwa are seen as an indispensable asset in the construction of ATR.

Championing Yoruba Traditional Religion through the Internet

Yoruba is one of the three major languages that make up the 250 or 350 ethnic groups in Nigeria. Each ethnic group practises its native religion slightly different from the other. It is this religious practice by the different ethnic group that is referred to as ATR. Yoruba traditional religion is that practised by the Yoruba ethnic group. One could also talk of Hausa or Igbo traditional religion.

During colonialism, ATR was suppressed as a religion. According to Jibrin Ibrahim (1991:116), the attack on indigenous belief and practices was so belligerent that "most practitioners could no longer publicly admit their adhesion to the religion of their ancestors." Since practitioners had no official channel to express themselves religiously, they found shelter under either of the two religions; which does not necessarily imply their commitment to it. Ibrahim demonstrates a clear view in this account: "Whereas, in the 1931 census, as many (or, perhaps, as few) as 50 per cent of those enumerated agreed to be registered as 'pagans', this figure had declined to 34 per cent in 1952 and to only 18.2 per cent in 1963. By way of contrast, during the same 23-year period the number of registered Muslims rose from 44 to 47 per cent, while the corresponding increase for Christians was from 6.2 to 34.6 per cent." This, in principle, is a proof of the gradual push of ATR to invisibility. However, in practice, ATR holds a strong influence on many people that are often professing Christianity. But unfortunately, the invisibility of ATR affected academic research into it.

Chima Korieh and Ugo Nwokeji (2005:10) make a background observation: "The scholarly neglect of indigenous religions has impeded the

possibility of harnessing knowledge of indigenous religions toward building and sustaining institutions and toward a framework for political culture, so starkly needed in the face of the glaring failure of the major world religions." The point at issue is that the two dominant religions in Africa (Nigeria) probably with their grand-narratives and exclusivist claims cannot mediate a peaceful country, because the way they have been invoked and used by politicians make them part of the centrifugal forces destabilising the country. Both Christians and Muslims appeal to religion in a very visible way through their various organs. But the rivalry between Christians and Muslims enfeebles the vitality of religion in nation-building. It is for this reason that ATR has unavoidably become a positive option to employ. The ATR, which has been presented (albeit somewhat romantically) as very tolerant can serve as a counterpoint between the religious gladiators i.e. Christianity and Islam in Nigeria. (Arazu, 1985:31; Madu, 1996:136) Chima Korieh and Ugo Nwokeji (2005:10) opine: "Indigenous religious thought, on the other hand, hold people responsible for their actions, The immediacy of damming sanctions that indigenous religions provide will not obliterate corruption and other vices but would constitute a check on public officers." The desirability of ATR for societal need is here demonstrated. But the possibility of its blossoming out remains an uphill task. One example of such obstacles facing ATR is the acceptability of Juju oaths taking in courts. It is against this backdrop that Abdumumini Oba (2008:157) avers that the criteria for acceptability of JuJu oaths taking under the aegis of ATR should not be set by Christian and Muslim orientated judges. It should rather be received on its own terms and logic. For him, traditional oaths taking is a valid system of arbitration and should not be castigated.

Most of the undermining factors as we can see, that pushed ATR into invisibility are giving way for ATR to flourish very fastly, due to the present of internet opportunity. We will observe the fact from the construction of Yoruba traditional religion through the internet.

At the initial time of my deliberating on how to go about the championing of Yoruba religion through the internet and I came across the

website – www.yorubareligion.org, I quickly sent it to Ray Sesan Aina, who is a Yoruba person and a PhD student of theological ethics at the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven for his comment. He sent me an e-mail with an evaluation of the information and claims available on the above site. Part of the response reads: *thanks for the info and the site. I have looked at it; and it has not dampened my scepticism which I expressed earlier today before I even checked the site. I admire the so-called high-priest's effort. Nevertheless, I think he is preying too much on oyinbo ignorance. For starters, one person cannot be a high priest [and there is even no 'high priest' in yoruba traditional religious system of belief; there is kekere awo -an initiate under tutelage - and there is agba awo -fully initiated and commissioned awo-] for many deities to the point of mentioning etc."* It is an exaggeration to state on the website that his father initiated him into

all the Yoruba irumole. There are 401 deities in the Yoruba pantheon and they do not command worship in all the places of Yorubaland. So how could his father have done this when he lived and died in Osogbo? His response raises the issue of authenticity or fakeness of the claims of the high priest who created this site.

Aina's response spurred me to book an appointment to see Prince (Babalawo) Adigun Olosun at his base in Germany for an interview. It also helped me to formulate the following questions which I finally presented to Prince Olosun at the IYA DUDU centre in Germany on the 8th of June 2008. 1) How was it possible that you could be initiated into the cults of many deities as you indicated on your website? 2) Does the concept of high priest exist in Yoruba religion? 3) Has the Yoruba religion been officially recognised in Germany? 4) What is the desirability of Yoruba religion in Germany? 5) How has the internet helped in promoting



An Interview with Prince (Babalawo) Adigun Olosun, MA, MA, PGDJ, PGCR At the Iya Dudu centre at Ostbevern, Germany

Yoruba religion globally?

Prince Olosun took his time to address my questions. Firstly, he started with a brief history of himself. He said he is a born leader of Yoruba Traditional Religion (YTR). Born as a high Priest and to a well known high Priest, Prince Iyanda Olayiwola-Olosun and Priestess, Anike Olayiwola-Olosun in YTR. Also lived with an Austrian woman, Susanne Wenger, who is also a strong devotee in the religion. When he was born, as the tradition among YTR practitioners demands, his parents divined to know what nature had in store (his *odu*) for him. It was revealed that he was born a high Priest of Ifa, Ogun, Sango, Obatala, Osun, Oke, Ori, and Egbe, etc. And that he must receive western education to the highest level and in order to prepare him for the modern challenges in YTR. His father then initiated him immediately to all the Irunmoles as a new born baby. And the father made sure that the son received adequate knowledge to equip him in his future roles as the high priest of YTR. That he was able to study Ethnology, Education, History, Journalism, Media and Yoruba in the Universities in Nigeria, Germany and the United Kingdom in fulfilment of his destiny. That in fact he is also a trained Yoruba teacher and worked in some schools in Nigeria teaching Yoruba and he continued the same thing in Germany, Europe and other parts of the world. According to him he published the first Yoruba religion language magazine "Akede Asa" in the early eighties, and today he is still the publisher and editor-in-chief of Ase magazine. That the YTR magazine aims to simplify YTR to practitioners and non-practitioners. The Ase is presently being published in German and in English.

After the brief introduction of himself he address my questions accordingly. His answer to question one was that the cult of most of the deities are in Osogbo and environs. That besides that, one does not need to go to the different shrines before he or she can be initiated. That the presence of a priest is what is required for an initiation. That as a child his father initiated him into all the Irunmoles in the presence of the priest. In answering question two, he said that the idea of *agbaowa* (ie. Elder priest) could be regarded as high priest in Yoruba religion. That not withstanding, that it was *ifa* which revealed

that he will be a high priest. He answered questions three and four together. That because of their famous activities and the desirability of YTR in Germany, it has now been officially recognised and accorded all the legal status. Germany has become the international headquarters for (his own brand of) YTR.

The fifth question was answered with greater enchantment. He underscored the pertinence of the internet in the promotion of YTR. According to him it was the realisation of the indispensability of the internet that spurred him to do media studies in Britain in 2001. He became the first person to open a website for YTR. As he said, without the internet they could not have achieved as much as they have done. For him, the Ase magazine has less outreach than the internet medium. That with internet they could reach out to wider audience and in some cases carry out online services such as divination, naming ceremony, marriages and others. Moreover, with their website (www.yorubareligion.org) one can get every information about this religion. The opportunity of the internet gives them the space and freedom to practise YTR. The limitation imposed by location and authority is reduced by the availability of the internet. One can locate them online and get their services and teaching. They often refer to themselves as *ibile* faith congregation online.

But the achievement and progress made by Prince Olosun and his congregation online does not convince Aina as we saw in his e-mail response which I already mentioned. One part of the e-mail which says *it is an exaggeration to state on the website that his father initiated him into all the Yoruba irumole*, questions the authenticity of the claims of the high priest. His criticism falls in the line of the local condemnation of a religious appropriation of indigenous authenticity. But I think Aina's response may change if he receives the report of my interview with Prince Olosun. Meanwhile, YTR is globally recognised. Their teaching and practices are being accepted at the international level. Hence, its headquarters is in Germany. The role the internet plays in the global recognition of ATR is also taken up by David Chidester.

achievement through his writing and activities for many years as a high Zulu witchdoctor did not endear him to his homeland people of South Africa.

The terrain only changed with the use of the internet. His message began to be displayed on different websites (<http://theafrican.com/AboutUs.htm>; <http://www.globaltradecentre.com/massmedia/massmedia.asp>; <http://www.livinglakes.org/stlucia/credomutwa.htm>; <http://www.credomutwa.co.za>) for the reach of many people. According to Chidester (2004:76), "Credo's Mutwa's indigenous authenticity had become global on the internet" and hence "played an important role in a new global cultural village on the internet." For instance, apart from the sponsorship Mutwa gets from the Ringing Rocks Foundation (established in Philadelphia in 1995), it has "promised Credo Mutwa with a healing center in the cyberspace." (Chidester, 2004:77)

Through the internet outreach Mutwa established himself as the authentic bearer of the African indigenous knowledge. Consequently according to Chidester, his authenticity was appropriated by many groups for their own projects. "For example, Credo Mutwa has been enthusiastically promoted by the African-American feminist Luisah Teish, who has her own website Jambalaya Spirit, celebrating feminist myths and rituals." (Chidester, 2004:82) Undoubtedly then, the internet has been inundated by the message of Mutwa as the authentic embodiment of the indigenous religious and traditional knowledge. The avalanche of the cyberspace mediating Mutwa's activities gained him global coverage, which invariably undermined his unpopularity at home. Chidester has noted that Mutwa's people in South Africa regard his activities as fake. They view his appropriation of indigenous authenticity of African folk religion as untrue. For them, whatever Mutwa is doing is not more than fake religion. Hence, the South African media portray Mutwa as "a fake, a fraud, and a charlatan," and did not represent an "authentic voice of indigenous African religion as he appears in cyberspace." (Chidester, 2004:83) It is here clear that while Mutwa's appropriation of indigenous folk religion attracted condemnation at his homeland it gained him recognition at the

global scene. According to Chidester (2004:83), the reason for the global acceptance of Mutwa's authenticity is that "*[i]n the cyberspace, any line that might divide folk religion from fake religion has been blurred.*" In other words, the dichotomy between authenticity and fakeness is too close to call in the cyberspace. With this vital contribution, Chidester has opened a leeway in addressing the divides between authenticity and fakeness.

Choosing Between Authenticity and Fakeness of ATR

The question of authenticity is vital in this paper, because the recognition of a religion (especially ATR) greatly tends to depend on its "authenticity". According Charles Long (1995), there is a presumption that religion in its primitive milieu is organic and unadulterated and as such is authentic. But that as soon as it is represented outside of its original settings can lose its authenticity due to manipulations. Since ATR is viewed as a religion practised by the local and simple people of the rural areas, it is supposed to be original. When we buy this notion of authenticity and the criteria for it, the work of Credo Mutwa and Prince Olosun logically carry the tinge of inauthenticity; because they have taken ATR (in the form of Zulu or Yoruba religion) outside of its primitive arena. Yet, the troubling question that needs further probing is whether we can actually talk of an authentic religion or an authentic ATR in particular? In other words, what constitutes authenticity?

We can identify three kinds of internet users or audiences. There is the group that embraces every material on the net to be acceptable. Roberba Brody (2008:1124) describes this first group as information naiveté. Another group regards most information on the net to be unacceptable; for the sole reason that they are located on the web. This second group are convinced that "the electronic information environment encourages the delivery of bits of information that have been removed from their contexts." (Brody, 2008:1125) The third group accepts what is on the net only after scrutiny. Rosalind Hackett (2006:73) bears out the mind of this group when she says: "As professors we are supposed to warn our students of the trivial,

if not duplicitous, content of many websites." Judging the authenticity of any material or religion would depend on the group which one belongs to. Thus, there is no unified standard for evaluating authenticity. According to Randolph Stan (2002:9), "there is no straight historical line leading to a strictly constructed doctrine of authenticity." Therefore, the question as to what constitutes authenticity on the net remains problematic. Nevertheless, a religion should not be called fake, just because it is represented on the internet. But that seems to be the reason for the local condemnation of Mutwa's appropriation of indigenous religion of the Zulus in South Africa and the championing of Yoruba traditional religion by Prince Olosun through the internet.

The presupposition that ATR should be an unadulterated religion may explain why they (Mutwa and Olosun) tried to underscore the originality of their election as high priests of indigenous religion. Evidently thus, they made their presentation and appropriation of indigenous African religion to appear very authentic on their website. Hence, their messages on the internet became appealing to readers. These readers are influenced by their messages on the internet, because the line between authenticity and fakeness is blurred. Chidester (2005:109) acknowledges that religious authenticity as against fakeness, is not an easy judgement to arrive at, especially, in the presence of numerous virtual religions. It proves our earlier point that religious information communicated through the internet are not empty. The presence of the internet for religious use has expanded the landscape in the study of religion. It has offered freedom to innovators of

religion to propagate the tenets of their religion. For me, judging from the collation of ideas from different authors mentioned in this paper, ATR is one of the greatest beneficiaries of the internet revolution. Its visibility is at an astronomical pace as a result of the cyberspace. According to Chidester, people like Credo Mutwa (and I will add Prince Olosun) are innovators for African indigenous religion. At least their work would be considered authentic in the cyberspace, in spite of the local condemnation. This is the new challenge the internet has posed in the study of religion. Scholars of religion must approach this new challenge with seriousness.

Concluding Remarks

The Yoruba traditional religion has gained a renewed and visible voice because of the availability of the internet. The internet, serving more as a tool, has created a free and conducive environment for innovators of YTR to practise and teach about the religion. This freedom was greatly limited in the absence of internet opportunities. There is no convincing argument for anyone to classify YTR fake because its innovators, like Prince Olosun, exploit the opportunities offered by the internet in making the religion more visible. As we have been able to show, the determination of authentic religion from fake is an uphill task; even more, when the line marking out the difference between authenticity and fakeness is narrowed by the presence of internet. Thus, in spite of local condemnation of the representation of YTR through the internet, there is conversely a global recognition.

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