

Editorial

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In his 'Interpreting Luguru Religious Practice through Colonialist Eyes: Child Sacrifice and East African Dance in Brett Young's *The Crescent Moon*' Frederick Hale states that Public perceptions of indigenous African religious life have been heavily influenced by its representation in imaginative literature and film, both before and after serious scholarly investigations yielded detailed analyses in little-read professional journals and other academic publications. While serving as a medical officer in German East Africa (present-day Tanzania) during the First World War, the increasingly popular English novelist and poet Francis Brett Young, who would eventually write nine books set in sub-Saharan Africa and die in Cape Town in 1954, described Luguru religious practices in his widely praised non-fictional account *Marching on Tanga* and his first African novel, *The Crescent Moon*. Hale argues that Brett Young severely misrepresented his subject, not least by ascribing child sacrifice to the Luguru. His presentation of this ostensible dimension of tribal worship as a vestige of transplanted ancient Semitic propitiation rituals is found to be unwarranted.

With her title, 'Focusing Rethinking Religion, Magic and Witchcraft in South Africa: From Colonial Coherence to Postcolonial Conundrum' Dale Wallace focuses on how religion, magic and witchcraft are conceptual, socially constructed categories, the boundaries of which have been contested under diverse religious, cultural and intellectual conditions in the west. Her article focuses firstly on the polemical relationship between religion and magic in the context of colonial South Africa, namely, the historical factors

that privileged the category religion and the multiple effects of the social and legal imposition of western epistemologies on colonised communities whose practices constituted ‘magic’, and, therefore, were synonymous with ‘witchcraft’. Secondly, examples of strategies to reinforce the religion/magic dichotomy, to collapse their subjective boundaries, and the complexity witchcraft discourses bring to both positions are provided in the context of the religious and cultural hybridity of postcolonial South Africa. A parallel discussion is on the influence Christian and Enlightenment thought had on category construction in the study of religion and questions the extent to which Religion Studies today engages in decolonising the categories religion, magic and witchcraft in ways that do not contradict religious realities in our society.

In their article, ‘A Study of Literature on the Essence of *Ubungoma* (Divination) and Conceptions of Gender among *Izangoma* (Diviners)’ Winifred Ogana and Vivian Besem Ojong point out that in South Africa’s KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) Province, the *isangoma* (diviner) remains firmly entrenched at the apex of the hierarchy of African traditional medicine (ATM). In their review article they raise central questions. The first interrogates the essence of *ubungoma* (divination), while the second focuses on gendered notions in this line of work. The latter question probes four issues: why *izangoma* (plural for *isangoma*) are mostly women; whether these females possess disproportionate power as compared to their male counterparts; and whether such womenfolk possess their power by virtue of being female or *izangoma* per se. The fourth aspect addresses sexual orientation of *ubungoma*. Plausible explanations for these questions were gleaned from a scanty – albeit fascinating information – collated through a literature search and personal communication. Female *izangoma* were found to have attributes that outclass their male counterparts. This review also interrogates the manner in which African beliefs have been represented in literature. Western epistemologies have tended to misrepresent the realm of African beliefs by dismissing them as mere superstition. Alternatively, they create boundaries of intellectual segregation by treating African beliefs as cognitive false consciousness. In contemporary South Africa this form of misrepresentation has not deterred Africans from seeking the services of *izangoma*.

Christo Lombaard’s contribution, forms part of the culmination of a research project on discernment, theologically considered, and the conceptual

and methodological insights gained in the preceding publications are here brought to bear on a biblical text as a means of applying these insights exegetically. His article is titled: ‘Discernment and Biblical Spirituality – An Application: Discernment in the Milieu and Wake of Nehemiah 8’. Pointing out that his application does not occur in an exegetical research vacuum, he also considers key moments in Hebrew Bible research history in brief review and placed within the light of the most recent insights on the sociological scenario within post-exilic Israel. Within this ancient context, the different modes of divine communication, namely mediated through Scriptures or experienced through direct revelation, was at times a point of intense contestation, as it is in the modern world. This prophetic-Mosaic dispute forms the theological background to Nehemiah 8, as a textual attempt in post-exilic Israel to find a median position between these two contested forms of discerning in the most valid way the divine will.

Michel Clasquin-Johnson, in his ‘Will the Real Nigantha Nātaputta Please Stand Up? Reflections on the Buddha and his Contemporaries’ points out that it is a venerable academic tradition that Mahāvīra, the founder of Jainism known in the Pāli literature as Nigantha Nātaputta, was a somewhat older contemporary of the Buddha. This article describes the role of Nigantha Nātaputta in Buddhist literature and how this identification of Nigantha Nātaputta and Mahāvīra has become accepted in both Buddhist and Jain scholarship. The article then proceeds to demonstrate that there are reasons to doubt this identification – while it is not possible to state categorically that they were different people, the evidence for their identity is quite meagre and there are textual references that show very different people going under the names of these two Indian religious figures. If we cannot simplistically assume that the figure named Nigantha Nātaputta in Buddhist sources was Mahāvīra, then this has chronological consequences for Buddhist studies, but even more so in Jain studies.

Maria Frahm-Arp’s article is titled ‘The Political Rhetoric in Sermons and Select Social Media in Three Pentecostal Charismatic Evangelical Churches leading up to the 2014 South African Election. She starts off her argument by pointing out that over the last three decades Pentecostal Charismatic Evangelical (PCE) style churches have used cutting-edge media technologies in their ministry. They have also become increasingly politically engaged. Her article shows how three PCE churches in Gauteng used select social media sites, particularly YouTube, Facebook,

Twitter and WhatsApp as well as sermons to explain what they believed a Christian's role was in the 2014 elections. By analysing the messages of these churches on some social media sites and in pastors' sermons the ideal of civic society and political engagement of these churches is brought to the fore. All three churches believed that Christians should be politically active, pray for the country's leaders, vote in the elections and obey the rules of government. The churches had different political reasons for supporting democracy which ranged from seeing political engagement as a way to access government and municipal grants, to seeing themselves as the 'chaplains' to those in the highest offices of government and thus able to influence the way in which the country was governed.

Jaco Beyers continues the study of the articulation of religion and politics in his 'Religion as Political Instrument: The Case of Japan and South Africa'. He points out that religion can be an effective instrument in politics. This has been a phenomenon all over the ages and different political contexts. Politicians utilise religion in order to gain political goals. His article investigates the reasons why religion is such an effective instrument within politics. The investigation is as much a historical investigation as it is descriptive. After careful analysis of contexts, a deduction is made to reach an understanding of the reasons for the political use of religion. The author identified through investigating two examples (i.e. politics in South Africa and Japan) several elements to consider when discussing religion within politics: (a) no separation between spheres of existence; (b) culture of religious participation in politics; (c) politics and religion touch emotional and sentimental chords; (d) religion contributes to national identity; (e) religion can provide a claim to divine approval of political decisions; and (f) religious communities are effective partners in implementing government policies. The author consciously decided not to investigate the relationship between Islam and politics as different elements play a role in such considerations.

Marilyn Naidoo's 'A REDCo Study: Learners' Perspectives on Religious Education and Religious Diversity in Catholic Schools in South Africa' points out that societies are changing rapidly, and in many countries there is an ongoing debate on the role of multiculturalism and religious diversity. REDCo, an international comparative research project set out to investigate whether developing ideas on multiculturalism and religious diversity influenced school pupils' views on these issues. A South African

project was conducted to understand how learners experienced religious diversity within a new approach to religious education in South Africa. To answer the research question, the REDCo II questionnaire was used in Catholic schools. The descriptive study revealed that learners are generally positive towards the role and function of religion in schools. This indicates that Catholic schools are approaching religious education from a multi-faith perspective where teaching about other religions does not threaten the identity of the Catholic schools. Further research of qualitative nature is required to deepen the findings and to formulate theoretical and practical approaches to teaching religion education for use in religious schools.

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