

**The quest for religious roots in contexts of globalisation and secularisation: identity and resilience, with considerations for post-colonial contexts. Observations from Germany in view of the African realm.**

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*Presentation at the: **2<sup>nd</sup> International Colloquium on Indigenous Religions of Africa. August 10<sup>th</sup>, 2021**, at the Institute of Cultural Studies, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria, In collaboration with:*

*Pan-African Strategic & Policy Research Group (PANAFSTRAG), Lagos, Nigeria*

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### ***Collective identity, sense of self, and psychological resilience – the role of religion***

Collective and individual identities are determined by memory. Remembrance of events and developments that have shaped the collective entities, to which we belong - our nation, our ethnic community, our clan, our region, our religious community, our institution of work, our families, etc. - are vital to our sense of self.

A secure, well-rooted, and developed, sense of collective identity, has been rediscovered, as vital to the psychological resilience of the individual, in recent decades. The context for this re-appraisal is research on the effects of Islamist terror attacks in Western countries. (The message of the jihadists appears to be, that Western countries are internally weak, with fragmented and diffuse religious and collective identities, and therefore

vulnerable to terror.) This has become a field for systematic research, in several disciplines.<sup>1</sup> The role of firm, well-developed collective identities for individual sense of self and resilience, is being researched.

On this background, the role of religion, as medium of collective identity, emerges anew. It may be pointed out, that after the burning of the cathedral of Notre Dame de Paris, the strongly secularised society of France understood, that a prime symbol and monument of its predominantly Roman Catholic identity and of its political history as a nation, had been nearly destroyed. This has been perceived as a wake-up call. In public debate, many incidents of deliberate arson and vandalism of France's churches were recalled. The immensely expensive reconstruction of Notre Dame became a collective effort of the state and of donors. This brought the significance of sacred shrines for collective identity and memory to general awareness.

By implication, the limits of France's political ideal of 'laïcité' - the banning of religion to the private sphere - became obvious. Shrines and sacred sites, as places of worship, and as symbols of collective identity, are of public importance. They serve to encode and to reinforce collective identities, from the local to the national level, and beyond. This includes the pre-Christian realm. Many churches and sacred sites in Europe were originally Pagan. They also re-present the Pagan stratum of European societies, and conserve them, to be remembered.

### ***The German damaged collective identity, and problematic sense of self***

On this background, the role of shrines – and of interest in Pagan sacred sites – for collective memories and identities can be evaluated. A view at the German situation and conclusions for the African situation can be considered because both are marked by insecure, and damaged collective identities, by the impact of cultural devaluation by military defeat and colonialism. Tentatively, the German condition may also be described as 'post-colonial' for specific reasons.

The German crisis of identity, lasting since the crushing military defeat in World War II, that resulted in the loss of more than a quarter of its territory, and the partition of the country, for decades, was compounded by the moral catastrophe of the genocide committed

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<sup>1</sup> Schlegel, Linda, "Community cohesion is the health of a nation": On psychological resilience to terrorism", [blog entry] in: *Modus ZAD*, 21.10.2019, <https://modus-zad.de/blog/community-cohesion-is-the-health-of-a-nation-on-psychological-resilience-to-terrorism/>

against the Jewish people of its dominion. Among the genocides of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, of which that of the Armenians in Turkey, in 1915, and that of the Tutsis in Rwanda in 1994, stand out, the mass murder of the Jews certainly is the most noted. The mass murders of the world wars and of political dissidents in the Soviet Union and in revolutionary China, counting in the millions too, did not have the same moral effect.

In short, the ‘dismemberment’ of the country as the figurative ‘national body’, and the moral catastrophe of the ethnic mass murders, shook German national identity, to the point of virtually shattering it. It cut many Germans off from their cultural and national roots, as sources of sense of self, and of national identity. To many Germans, ‘living history’ extends no further than to this catastrophe. The British historian and BBC correspondent, Peter Watson introduced his voluminous cultural history of Germany, with an assessment of this identity crisis:

“Opinion polls in Germany showed that while 80% of Americans were proud to be Americans, and 50% of Britons were proud of being British, only 20% of Germans were proud of being German. Michael Stürmer, another historian, argued that only by restoring their history to themselves could Germany recover their pride again. He added that Germans were ‘obsessed with guilt’, and that this obsession was interfering with their ability to develop a sense of national identity, which by implication had political and cultural consequences. He resented the implication, he said, that Germany ‘must be viewed continually as a patient in therapy.’<sup>2</sup> As historian Charles Maier put it, ‘There has been no closure to this debate, only exhaustion.’<sup>3,4</sup>

P. Watson is certainly right to quote the metaphor of the patient in therapy. The deeply disturbed sense of self has not been healed – judging by standards of individual psychotherapy, to the extent that the patient has regained a positive sense of self, with all the insights into debilitations and ‘shadow aspects’ that are faced in psychotherapy, and which the patient should learn to integrate into his or her realistic concept, as the basis of a nevertheless positive identity and sense of self. It may be safe to assume that the pathology of the national psyche is not healed. The widely observable tendency of Germans to flee this

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<sup>2</sup> Maier, Charles, *The Unmasterable Past: History, Holocaust and German National Identity*, Cambridge, Mass., 1988: Harvard Univ. Press, p. 101

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 55

<sup>4</sup> Watson, Peter, *The German Genius. Europe’s Third Renaissance, the Second Scientific Revolution, and the Twentieth Century*, London, 2010: Simon & Schuster, p. 12

predicament by embracing vicarious identities, such as being a 'European', to supplant their problematic Germanness, may confirm it. The burden of a sense of history, that reaches no further than the 1940's catastrophe is evidently unbearable to many.

It is only after German reunification, that indications of healing of German sense of identity, are becoming more observable.<sup>5</sup> This partly due to the different 'culture of identity' practiced in East Germany. East Germany understood itself to be the heir to the socialist and communist parties and social movements, organised since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. They had engaged actively in the resistance against National Socialism. In the late decades of the East German republic, a programme of 'heritage research' ("Erbe-Forschung") was conducted. By its progressive movements in German history, since its beginnings, were researched. This included the literature of the classics. It even included some religious movements, like the Anabaptists, or Martin Luther's Reformation, and Halle Pietism. By this cultural policy, a positive sense of identity, and of being rooted in German culture and history – despite its shadows and catastrophes - was created, that persists to this day. East Germans have a perceptibly more secure sense of national identity, and are more affirmative about it, than the average West German.

After the reunification of Germany, these traditions persist, even accounting for different voting behaviour, that express some distance towards (West) Germany's 'Westernization' after the war. This difference creates lively political controversy at times, and perceptible cultural difference, that persists. With reunification, West Germans became aware of this distinct German identity, that persisted, even if irritated. It continues to question their option to escape the burden of their history, by radical 'Westernisation', that is, of identification with the culture of the victors, at the expense of their own.

### ***The post-colonial devaluation of collective self-image and its consequences: Instability and identification with the victor***

This flight from a national identity perceived as bankrupt or deficient, may be typical of post-colonial collective psyches. By the mechanism of 'identification with the aggressor' relief from the experienced 'devaluation of the self' is sought – at its expense, as may be added in the perspective of individual psychotherapy. Now, the notion of Germany as being

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<sup>5</sup> Wilds, Karl, *Identity Creation and the Culture of Contrition: Reconfiguring National Identity in the Berlin Republic*, (Diss.), Sheffield, June 2000. <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/77023172.pdf>

in a 'post-colonial' state may appear overdrawn. However, it should not be forgotten, that after its defeat and partition, both (remaining) parts of Germany existed in a state of severely limited sovereignty. (German reunification required the permission of the victors.) Even after German reunification limitations to sovereignty remain: The United States have retained the right to station their troops and weapons in Germany, without requiring permission.

A disputed anecdote may illustrate it: Upon his first visit to Germany, President Obama apparently tested the waters. He is reported to have said, at a visit to an American Army base at Rammstein: "Germany is an occupied country and will remain so." Expectably, this was not confirmed. However, it expresses a legal truth. Chancellor A. Merkel was painfully reminded of it, some time later, when she found out that her cell-phone was tapped by the American secret services. Embarrassingly, she had to learn, that under continuing conditions of 'limited sovereignty', the United States retain the right to free intelligence surveillance in Germany, and to access to German intelligence. Framed as 'integration' and 'co-operation', this remains quite taboo in public debate. The assessment of a post-colonial political condition may thus no be far-fetched. It is limited by the political reality of a country that has re-asserted itself in many ways, politically and economically since 1945. Nevertheless, it may justify a comparison of Germany to African countries in the perspective of a 'post-colonial condition'. Factors of globalisation compound it.

### ***The healing role of symbols of collective heritage, including sacred sites of pre-Christian origins. Regrowing roots and re-affirming identity***

On this background, some decisions to the restoration of symbols of German historical, cultural, religious, and political identity are highly significant. They can be assessed as moves of 'symbolic healing'. All of them were preceded by controversial debates, with decisions succeeding often by a most narrow margin. The first step, upon German reunification, was the decision to move the capital to Berlin. It had been the capital of the united Germany since Bismarck's days. Followed the rebuilding of the city's palace, the site of many historical events. The reconstruction of the main church of the Kingdom of Saxony, the 'Frauen-Kirche' in Dresden, that had been completely destroyed, at the end of the II World War, and of other monuments and churches followed. It is an ongoing endeavour.

In this context, since reunification in 1989, another movement began: Interest in pre-Christian sacred sites. Some of these had been taken over by the Christian Church, during Christianisation in the early Middle Ages, from the 5<sup>th</sup> century onwards, others have been rediscovered and excavated by archaeologists.

In the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, 'Geomantie', emerged in the German-speaking realm, as a theory and divinatory practice of identifying 'sites of power', based on assumptions of perceptible 'energies' at special sites (Kozljanić, 2009, pp.12-32). Gisela Graichen was one of the first in Germany to describe such sites for the whole country, in a well-researched researched popular book.<sup>6</sup> A whole genre of such books has developed since then. They were complemented by theoretic expositions about the 'spirit of the place', the 'genius loci', as by Olivia Kleinknecht.<sup>7</sup> The concept, and phenomena, as well as perceptions, of special 'energies', perceptions and phenomena, at such sites, have been attested throughout history, and have been discussed and retrieved repeatedly in the past centuries.<sup>8</sup> I myself have contributed to this genre in collaborative books, describing such (sacred) 'sites of power',<sup>9</sup> sometimes retrieving their Pagan origins, and to their theory.<sup>10</sup> People buy these books as guides, to visit such sites, as by pilgrimage, to 'connect' to their natural and spiritual 'powers'. However, a cultural aspect of interest is also important. The guides describe horizons of cultural and of religious history, often going far back, into Paganism and to the Germanic people, or others, like Slavic or Celtic people, that lived in some regions before. It is a quest for the reaffirmation of identity.

Such interest is not confined to Germany. There are similar publications elsewhere, as in South Africa, e. g. by M. A. Masoga.<sup>11</sup> Systematic features of 'sacred space' and sites

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<sup>6</sup> Graichen, Gisela, *Das Kultplatzbuch - Ein Führer zu den alten Opferplätzen, Heiligtümern und Kultstätten in Deutschland*. Augsburg, 1999: Bechtermünz Verlag

<sup>7</sup> Kleinknecht, Olivia, *Das Gedächtnis von Gegenständen oder die Macht der Dinge*. Würzburg, 2012: Königshaus & Neumann

<sup>8</sup> Kozljanić, Robert Josef, *Der Geist eines Ortes – Kulturgeschichte und Phänomenologie des Genius Loci, vol. 2: Neuzeit – Gegenwart*. Munich, 2004: Albunea Verlag (Diss. Phil., Darmstadt).

<sup>9</sup> Körner, Wolfgang (ed.), *Kraftplätze in Franken – Geomantischer Guide zu Kultstätten und energetischen Orten*. Schesslitz, 2016: Vivita Verlag

<sup>10</sup> Kleinhempel, Ullrich R., (2017). "New Ways to Sites of Power - Retrieving a spiritual landscape in Franconia", in: Anczyk, Adam and Joanna Malita-Król (eds.), *Walking the Old Ways in a New World. Contemporary Paganism as Lived Religion*, Katowice, 2017: Sacrum Publishing House, pp. 67 – 100. <  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.15496/publikation-52011>>

<sup>11</sup> Masoga, Mogomme A., and Nel, Philip, "Sacred Space and the Ritual of the Anthill: southern African Reflections", in: Post, Paul; Nel, Philip and Van Beek, Walter (eds.), *Sacred Spaces and Contested Identities: Space and Ritual Dynamics in Europe and Africa*, Trenton N.J., 2014: Africa World Press, pp. 71-88.

have been investigated for African Traditional religion here.<sup>12</sup> This includes research into the histories and meanings of specific sites.<sup>13</sup> Such sites have cultural, political, and spiritual or religious significance. In South Africa, where most of the land is still owned by whites, 'land ownership' is a highly sensitive and symbolic issue. To identify traditional sacred sites, and to provide access to them, is thus important in many ways. Visiting such sites can connect emotionally and existentially with what they symbolise. If such sites are visited as elements of the own history, this means to reinforce one's identity by reconnecting with its roots. It is also a way of connecting spiritually with the land in which one lives, of which one visits.

In this perspective, sacred sites have meaning not only to the adherents of the faith that they are presently dedicated to: Pagan sites are visited, as by pilgrimage, by Protestants and Catholics, Agnostics, and Esoterics, alike, along with the few Neopagans that might be around, Catholic churches and sanctuaries are visited by adherents of other denominations too. (I have observed a similar phenomenon in a largely Islamic country, in Syria. There Muslim women come to pray at the shrine of the Christian St. Thecla (Mar Taqla), situated in a grotto, in her Orthodox monastery in Maaloula.)

Such shrines, churches, and historical monuments 'speak their own language'. In this regard, the reconstruction and renewed evaluation of Germany's national monuments of previous centuries, of its churches, and of its sacred sites from Pagan times, have an eminent function for the restoration of the historic sense of self, for the healing of a broken or damaged collective identity, for the retrieval of roots, and for the restoration of an emotionally affirmed sense of self, individually and collectively.

A critical function of such sites should also be noted: In Protestant areas of Germany, statues of saints in mediaeval churches remind of the Roman Catholic past. Pagan sites remind of the pre-Christian culture and identity. Fundamentalists attacks on such shrines predating the arrival of their faith are going on: the destruction of Pagan temples in Syria, and the devastation of shrines of Umbanda in Brazil, are sad attempts to 'purges of identity'.

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<sup>12</sup> Nel, Philip (2014). "African spirituality and space". In: Post, Paul; Nel, Philip and Van Beek, Walter (eds.), *Sacred Spaces and Contested Identities – Space and Ritual Dynamics in Europe and Africa*, Trenton, N.J., 2914: African World Press.

<sup>13</sup> Ngobese, Dalifa H. D., and Masoga, Mogomme A. (2019) "A Cultural-Historical Appraisal of Three Selected Sacred Spaces of the Eastern Free State: A Phenomenological Approach", in: *Alternation Special Edition 25* (2019) 292 – 314.

The emotional experience of visiting such sites, and of connecting to what they represent, has its intrinsic effect, and shapes perceptions, even if merely subliminally. In terms of 'politics of identity' they are most important. It can be observed, that changing attitudes to such sites, as by initiatives to their restoration, indicate changed politics of identity, even before the official discourse changes to follow suit.

### ***The evolution of German identity from anticolonial resistance against Roman imperialism***

For Germany, the oldest sites have a special significance of identity: German culture developed out of the successful anti-colonial struggle against the Roman Empire for five centuries. In the early stage of this resistance, two Germanic chieftains who had been educated in Roman literature culture, administration, and military, were eminent: Marbod and Arminius. The Romans intended to use them as functionaries, to rule their tribes, either by indirect rule, or even directly, as Roman administrators. Both chose to defend the liberty of their peoples, at great personal risk. They succeeded by astuteness and sheer good fortune, at times. Without their courage and determination, the German language would probably have vanished by assimilation, after the Roman Empire would have conquered the whole of Germany, like the Celtic language in France or the Dacian language of Romania. Their attempts at building states based on the Roman model, with firm institutions and a culture of writing, failed, for the next 450 years, until the Frankish kings of the Merovingian dynasty managed to wrest power from the collapsing Roman empire during its economic decline, by the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> century. Having served in the Roman military and administration, they managed to preserve certain features of Roman statecraft.

With their conversion to Christianity, they commissioned the Roman Catholic Church with the introduction of a culture of writing and the preservation of the Roman heritage of science, literature, philosophy, and system of education. The Roman Catholic Church founded institutions of learning, that evolved into universities, developed institutions of social welfare, and structures of communication and of administration, and a host of other features, that lay the foundation for the development of the Medieval Christian culture, in the realms of Germany, France, and neighbouring countries. These combined Germanic and Roman features. It is important for German cultural history and identity, that continuity of the Germanic language, and of many features of law, culture, and political system, survived, and became the foundations for the integration of the Roman heritage. The struggle for the



preservation of the German language, however lasted for centuries, against the power of Latin that dominated the realm of education well into the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Martin Luther's translation of the Bible into a poetically beautiful, conceptually well considered, but readily understandable form of central German, contributed enormously to the success and recognition of the German language. His Bible translation became a medium of German national identity, uniting different regional forms and strongly diverse dialects of German.

This role of Martin Luther as a 'cultural hero' is firmly preserved in the collective memory of all of Germany, foremostly in the mostly secular-atheistic eastern provinces of Germany, but also in the predominantly Roman Catholic parts of the country, well beyond the Lutheran realm of northern and central Germany.

This excursus may highlight the role of Christianity, and of its two denominations, that predominate in Germany, almost equally, the Roman Catholic, and the Protestant, mostly Lutheran Churches, for German identity. After the Reformation, a long and fierce power struggle between Roman Catholic and Lutheran territories of Germany ensued, that lead to a devastating civil war, a century after the Reformation, crippling the country politically for centuries. Nevertheless, regulated forms of coexistence and cooperation in the common German Empire were eventually negotiated. In centuries of increasing territorial fragmentation of the nation's political unity, the two Churches remained essential to embody the cultural identity and traditions of the country, besides the academic institutions, and the forms of folk culture, that remained intact up to the age of industrialisation. The common folk culture, the national language, and the collective memories of a common past, before confessional division, and even before the advent of Christianity, remained important, as symbolic bonds, uniting the nation, despite its religious differences. Even Martin Luther compared his own anti-Roman Reformation with the resistance of Arminius against Roman colonialism. Thus, he activated the mythological power of this Pagan national hero for the cause of the Reformation, framed as a struggle for national liberation.

***Johann Gottfried Herder as philosopher and theologian of cultural, linguistic, and religious diversity: appreciating Folk cultures, and Pagan religions as manifestations of the Divine***

With the onset of modernity and industrialisation, at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the folk culture, including its Pagan elements, received enthusiastic attention and diligent sturdy in the spirit of 'national Romanticism', all over Europe. These forms of culture, with their

semi-pagan festivals, rites, songs, and symbolism, were appreciated as ‘symbolic languages’, and as unique individual forms of God’s creation – as the Lutheran dean and philosopher of culture, Johann Gottlieb Herder (1744 – 1803) proclaimed it.<sup>14</sup> As a philosopher he asserted that each language conveys its particular modes of thought, intrinsically valuable. As a young scholar and theologian, he worked in Latvia, a small country bordering on Prussia then, whose indigenous population had been held in serfdom for centuries by then. Herder recognised the beauty and wealth of the Latvian folk culture and language, and published a collection of Latvian folk songs, along with his theoretical defence of its intrinsic value:

“While initially surveying German literary aesthetics and criticism, Herder developed a formative interest in the origin and nature of language, and in particular the lesser-known attributes of oral poetry. With the conceptualisation of the ‘Volkslieder’ (Herder's neologism that is usually translated as ‘folk-songs’ or ‘traditional songs’), he brought to fruition a two-volume anthology of international examples, and among these he published Latvian ritual song texts. The lengthy Volkslieder project of the 1770s advanced Herder's thinking regarding the historical individuality and cultural worth of the common people, and in this respect, it was a precursor of his later monumental historical treatises.”<sup>15</sup>

His recognition of the beauty and worth of Latvian and Estonian folk songs and poetry, was combined with his fierce criticism of the oppression and servitude that these peoples were held in, since their conquest in Middle Ages. The Latvian festivals in which the ancient songs with their pagan mythological motifs are sung, have contributed much to survive 700 years of colonial domination, preserving the language and identity of this small nation. They remain alive to this day.<sup>16</sup>

J. G. Herder was immensely influential as philosopher of culture ever since, developing ‘hermeneutics’ as the art and science of interpreting a text from its own features and horizons of culture, language, religion etc. He applied this to the

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<sup>14</sup> Forster, Michael, "Johann Gottfried von Herder", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2019 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2019/entries/herder/> .

<sup>15</sup> Jaremko-Porter, Kristina, “The Latvian Era of Folk Awakening: From Johann Gottfried Herder's Volkslieder to the Voice of an Emergent Nation” in: Campbell, Matthew, and Michael Perraudin (eds.), *The Voice of the People. Writing the European Folk Revival, 1760–1914*, Publisher: Anthem Press, 2012, pp. 141 – 156. <https://doi.org/10.7135/UPO9781843313533.010>

<sup>16</sup> Latvian Song Festival 2018 - "Saule, Pērkons, Daugava"+Reprise (English Translation/Subtitles), 20<sup>th</sup> oct., 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sT8WenpR8NI>

interpretation for the bible as well as to languages and cultures. Thus Herder, a Lutheran theologian, shaped the attitudes and value systems of those missionaries, who did not only regard 'language' as a pragmatic tool to for communication, but as something of intrinsic and divine value. In this spirit they studied the languages of the people to whom they were sent to spread the gospel, writing grammars and dictionaries, translating the Bible, and studying the Pagan cultures of the people with whom they lived, often for a life-time. 'Mission' in this sense was not a unidirectional endeavour, but a giving and receiving, based on the conviction of the truth of Christianity, but firmly appreciative of the value of the languages and cultures of the people with whom they worked. Evidently, the two values were often in tension. Out of this spirit, some of the best studies of African Traditional Religion arose, that exist to this day. One may think of Axel Ivar Berglund's study of Zulu religion,<sup>17</sup> or of Placide Tempel's study of Bantu philosophy.<sup>18</sup>

To Herder, as to his many followers, in the realms in the realms of theology, philosophy, linguistics, and cultural studies, 'religion' and 'culture' are closely connected. This paved the way for most engaged and thorough studies of the folk cultures of many small and big peoples of Europe, by which a vanishing heritage was salvaged from oblivion and obliteration by the forces of industrialisation. This led to a revival of Pagan studies too, and to a re-evaluation of the Pagan heritage as essential symbolic expression of a multitude of ethnic and cultural collective 'personalities'. Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and foremostly in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, these studies of folk culture and religion in Europe contributed to a cultural and spiritual revival, of entire societies, in fields such as music, the visual arts, literature, and cultural philosophy.<sup>19</sup> Some of this revived and continued since the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, manifest in folk festivals, and popular literature.

It goes without saying that the renewed interest in sacred sites of pre-Christian origin in present culture derives from these roots. In the contexts of transformations

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<sup>17</sup> Berglund, Axel Ivar, *Zulu Thought-Patterns and Symbolism*, London, 1976: C. Hurst & Co. Publ.

<sup>18</sup> Tempels, Placide, *Bantu Philosophy*, Paris, 1959: Présence Africaine, [translated from the Dutch original, 1945]. <http://www.aequatoria.be/tempels/FTEnglishTranslation.htm>

<sup>19</sup> Nelson, John, "Lending support to Russian dual faith (dvoeverie) as a facet of identity – aspects of belief in Rimsky-Korsakov's operas", in: Schopf, Fiona Jane (ed.), *Music on Stage*, Newcastle upon Tyne, 2016: Cambridge Scholars Publ., pp. 144 – 170, p.162 (18).

[https://www.academia.edu/8898933/Lending\\_support\\_to\\_Russian\\_dual\\_faith\\_dvoeverie\\_as\\_a\\_facet\\_of\\_identity\\_aspects\\_of\\_belief\\_in\\_Rimsky\\_Korsakov\\_s\\_operas](https://www.academia.edu/8898933/Lending_support_to_Russian_dual_faith_dvoeverie_as_a_facet_of_identity_aspects_of_belief_in_Rimsky_Korsakov_s_operas)

by globalisation, colonialism, and other forces, including rampant secularisation, this appreciation of the symbols of cultural diversity and of cultural, ethnic, and spiritual roots, serve an eminent function for the restoration and healing of collective sense of self. They unite people of diverse religious, spiritual, and even non-religious convictions. By their connection to the environment and life-world, they facilitate the integration of those who have immigrated to a country, and help them in bonding with the country of their residence. In this way, the research, retrieval, and re-appreciation of the 'spiritual landscape' and sacred sites of a land, serve, to restore the sense of self, and of the value of the indigenous culture, including its ancestral religion. This appreciation may be shared by members of different faiths, on appropriate theological foundations. It is a heritage to be defended against fundamentalisms of all sorts.

***The global context: the cultural macro-regions and 'clashes of cultures' as context***

In 1996, Samuel P. Huntington published his influential book "*The Clash of Civilisations*", in it, he argued that religions shape cultures, and create macro-regions of distinct civilisations, with different sets of values, that compete for power. In his definition of cultural-religious macro-regions, sub-Saharan Africa is defined as a region of its own, distinct from the north Atlantic 'West' (including Australia), from Latin America, and from the lands of Islam. The distinction of sub-Saharan Africa is certainly owed to the ongoing power of African Traditional religion, that continues to shape the development of Christian churches here, and of culture in general.

Huntington claimed that the secular ideologies that ordered the world in the time of the Cold War, have diminished in power, and have ceased to define identities. The religious-cultural forces have resurfaced, as defining powers of long duration.

Whatever the deficits of his somewhat superficial categorizations, his theory remains notable. It highlights the role of African Traditional Religion and Philosophy, in defining a distinct cultural realm, that extends in the Americas, overlapping with others. This defining power persists. Active recourse to African Traditional Religion and Philosophy as defining powers of collective identity is required. They define a 'macro-region', encompassing their manifold differences, and individual forms, in the extraordinarily rich diversity of African cultures. To preserve and restore them from colonial and post-colonial devaluation (and self-depreciation) is an eminent task, whose importance needs to be communicated, in

predominantly Christian and/or Islamic societies, and even secularist milieus, to counter the rampant assimilation to colonial languages, resulting in the loss of proficiency of indigenous languages observable in African cities. This language shift in urban milieus - to English, French, Portuguese, and Arabic - can be identified as a symptom, that indicates a wider loss of the symbolic languages of indigenous religion, culture, value systems, aesthetics and so on. For the situation of the Caribbean, in the Latin American, and the North American diaspora, where African languages are factually lost, the symbolic languages of African culture(s) are all the more important. On his background, a firm sense of collective identity, roots in knowledge of ones own (ancestral) culture, can serve to understand, and to appreciate the contributions, hat the own culture has made to those of other realms, eminently to Africa's influence on the arts and music.<sup>20</sup>

***Applications for African societies:***

- 1) Africans have experienced similar devaluation of their cultural identities, by the victorious colonisers. This needs to be addressed in approaches of psychology of religion, cultural and social psychology
- 2) The large-scale movements to escape 'damaged identity', and devalued collective self, by relentless assimilation to the culture of the victors and colonisers, may be a general human tendency. The implantation of dominant languages, and loss of indigenous cultures, often after merely some decades of imperial rule, can be observed throughout history, resulting in creolised cultures.
- 3) However, movements of successful integration of the heritage of the former colonisers into a renewed national sense of identity and renewed national cultures, are also evident. In these cases, the preservation of original indigenous languages, and religion – or elements of religion and their symbolic expressions, are essential.
- 4) The multi-cultural composition of most African states presents a challenge: besides the protection of different languages, and their distinct cultures, the common elements also need to be identified.

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<sup>20</sup> Kleinhempel, Ullrich R., Africa's influence on European culture: conditions, impact and pathways of reception and Placide Tempels' Bantu Philosophy / A influência da África sobre a cultura europeia: condições, impacto e vias de recepção e Filosofia Bantu de Placide Tempels", in: *Numen: revista de estudos e pesquisa da religião*, (Univ. Federal de Juiz de Fora), 2019. No. 22, issue 1. Pp. 125 – 146.

- 5) The recognition of the role of Christian Churches and Islamic congregations for community building, does not preclude an appraisal of African Traditional religion.
- 6) It also requires investigating the continuing role of African Traditional religion in shaping the rites and beliefs, the theology and liturgy of African Christian Churches.
- 7) The cultural importance of retrieving African Traditional Religions – as heritage of identity - with their festivals, symbols, shrines, sites of power, rituals, and world views, needs to be promoted. They encode common roots and shared identities.
- 8) The re-evaluation of the distinct cultural and religious heritage serves a vital function for the sense of identity, and of community. It is not to be misunderstood as detachment from global culture and developments, but as its necessary complement.
- 9) The retrieval of ATR / AIR should take the globalisation into view as a challenge, and to mediate the distinct heritage with it. It requires to reflect on what the heritage of traditional culture and religion(s) can mean in the present. This 'retrieval' includes elements of innovation and new interpretation. This has implications in various dimensions: the cultural, the psychological, the religious, the educational and the social-ethical.