

God in Oral African Theology: Exploring the Spoken Theologies of Afua Kuma and Tope Alabi

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Abstract

In this essay, we explore the conceptualisations of God in African oral theology (focusing on the traditions of the Akan people of Ghana and of the

Yoruba of Nigeria). We examine the spoken-word works—prayers and songs—of two African women, Afua Kuma and Tope Alabi.¹ We hope to begin to lay out an agenda for an intentional Africanisation of Christian Theology in Africa and the African diaspora in ways that, on the one hand, honour the spoken theologies of the many Christians in the continent who shape other people’s thoughts about God in various ways while, on the other, highlights the role of African women doing theology.

Introduction

A typical definition of theology says it is the knowledge of God. The term “theology” comes from the Greek word, *theologia* (θεολογία), which comes as a result of combining *theos* (Θεός, translated ‘god’) and *logia* (λογία, ‘utterances, sayings, or oracles’). *Logia* gives us the Greek word *logos* (λόγος, which is generally translated ‘word, discourse, account, or reasoning’). Its Latin root is *theologia*, which got translated into French as *théologie*, and into German as *theology* before eventually becoming ‘theology’ in English. In a nutshell, theology is a subject about the knowledge (*logos*) of God (*theos*). This *knowledge* is often said to be gained in the process of the *study* of God (or, generally, God’s word) which is believed to take place in classrooms, libraries, seminaries, and universities, with the help numerous textbooks, some hundreds of years old and others being currently written). We agree that this understanding of theology is valid and is important for the development of the church. However, because of its tendency to hide in books usually behind the red brick walls of ivory towers of academic institutions and, therefore, its dependence on the interpretation of well-read experts, (and historically, a great number of these experts have been white and male), it lends itself inaccessible to the majority of world Christians who do not have a way to read or write theological books, most of whom are women. As a result, we find Agbon Orobator’s definition of theology as “talking sensibly about God” helpful and have made it the foundation of our propositions in this essay.²

We have several convictions that serve as a base for the argument

being made in this essay. First, we believe that all Christians do theology. Of course, all Christians have some thoughts (knowledge, reason) about God but, surely, this does not make all Christians theologians (in the professional sense of the world). We do believe that this knowledge about God does not necessarily need a classroom, a library, a seminary, or a professor, but it is nonetheless, knowledge about God that is for the edifying of the Body of Christ. In a religious context like sub-Saharan Africa, even people who do not identify as Christians have their notions about God that can be said to be expressions of theological thought. Yes, we do talk about Muslim theologians as well. Even the religiously unaffiliated³—the *nones*—do engage, directly or indirectly, with the God-question prior to committing to either category.⁴ This engagement with the God-question—or, to put it simply, ‘thinking and/or talking about God’—this essay posits, is the basic unit of theology.

This first conviction leads to the second one; while we appreciate the significance of written theology (and we are doing this in this paper), we also believe that to understand a people’s theology, it is often helpful to get to hear their God-talk in their most natural context – in the stories they tell and the songs they sing. People shaping that God-talk in communities, congregations, and denominations function as their theologians even though many of them may not have studied theology. It is in this sense that we consider both Afua Kuma and Tope Alabi theologians. They ought to be considered among the ranks of great African women theologians like Mercy Oduyoye, Musa Dube, Esther Mombo and Isabel Phiri. They are the same—African women theologians—but of a different kind—and their kind is just as important. Of course, the same can be said of other African women worship singers whose lyrics espouse and propagate theological nuggets that go on to live in people’s hearts, giving them the words that they use to express their faith. We speak here of the likes of Sinach, Ada Ehi, Mahalia Buchanan, and many others helping Africans believe God fervently. Public theologians like Afua Kuma and Tope Alabi remain only a footnote in the grand theological discourse shaped in the ivory towers of European and North Amer-

ican seminaries and universities. Thankfully, African theology is a seeded ground. In spite of the gradual erosion of popular theology that is infused into African culture and family life,⁵ reservoirs of authentic African theology—*written*, *symbolic* and especially, *oral*—still abound.⁶ As such, thinking and ‘talking sensibly about God’⁷ in Africa, for the most part, occurs as oratory, usually in *unacademic* contexts. *Oral* African theology, we therefore argue, should inform *written* and *symbolic* African theology and this should go back to inform oral theology. Both Mbiti and Bediako readily acknowledge that ‘academics [are] not the only theologians’ and, as such, should draw their attention to the ‘informal or ... implicit theology’⁸ found among people of little or no theological education as ‘song, sermon, teaching, prayer, conversation, etc.’⁹

Our final conviction is that Africa is—or, at least, *should be*—the principal domain of theology in today’s world. The reasons for this are here for all to see. John Mbiti’s declaration back in the 1960s that “Africans are notoriously religious” was right.¹⁰ Religion permeates all of African life, thus making *thinking and talking about God* ubiquitous on the continent.¹¹ In spite of the immense variety that exists within African cosmology and across African ethnicities, religion remains the blood of the African life. Besides, to the astonishment of different predictions, Africa is now the continent with the most Christians.¹² At the point of this writing, Africa mostly likely has 150 million more Christians than Europe. We, therefore, share Andrew Walls’ concern about the West’s continued dominance of theological discourse around the world. We are further concerned that the influence of Western theological thought shapes a great deal of the theology coming out of Africa.¹³ Yet, as the African proverb goes, ‘Until the lions can tell their side of the story, the tale of the hunt will always glorify the hunter.’ It is to this domain of African oral theology that we now turn with the goal of exploring the act of theologising—specifically regarding the conceptualisation of God—by critically engaging with the *oral* works of these two notable non-academic female African theologians across two generations: Afua Kuma (from Ghana) and Tope Alabi (from Nigeria).

Madam Afua Kuma

Afua Kuma¹⁴ (1900-1987) came from the Akan tribe in Ghana. She joined the Church of Pentecost in her later years where, as a 70-year-old traditional midwife, she began to 'sing the praises of Christ in the exalted language of praise songs to traditional rulers'¹⁵—a form of Akan poetry called *Apae*¹⁶—and this she continued to do till her death seventeen years later. Some of her praise-language prayers were translated and compiled by John Kirby into *Jesus of the Deep Forest*.¹⁷

Tope Alabi

Tope Alabi¹⁸ (born in 1970),¹⁹ is a contemporary Nigerian gospel singer,²⁰ actress and film music composer²¹ from the Yoruba. Unlike Kuma, Alabi is well-educated and is still alive. In 2019, she was crowned as 'Queen of Yoruba language'²² and celebrated for her 'vast knowledge in [Yoruba] language as well as her ability to capture the attention of non-Yoruba speaking Nigerians.'²³ Except for brief mentions in journal articles,²⁴ not much had been written of her work in academic contexts in spite of her significant influence both in the world of Yoruba movies²⁵ and in the Christian *Oriki* music genre specifically. This essay will make a novel contribution towards the latter and critically consider the works of these two women with a view to unpacking an African conceptualisation of the Christian God.

Conceptualising God

Sticking with Orobator's definition of theology as 'talking sensibly about God', what people like Kuma or Alabi do through their oratory is nothing short of theology. One could not read Kuma's *apae* in *Jesus of the Deep Forest* or listen to Alabi's *oriki* of God in *War*,²⁶ *Kabi O Osi* (The Unquestionable One)²⁷ or *Oba Aseda* (The Creator-King),²⁸ without being led to imagine the images being painted and what they tell us about God. They communicate, through a very pictorial language, an invitation on a journey which lead their listeners to *think*

about God—to *conceptualise* what God is like. Before proceeding to highlight and analyse some excerpts from their works, it needs to be mentioned that both the Akan and the Yoruba generally, besides Kuma and Alabi specifically, share many things in common in terms of cosmology, geography and identity.

First, both among the Akan and the Yoruba, as among most Africans, not only is belief in God predominant, so is also the belief ‘that God and other invisible beings are actively engaged in the world of men...[and that] the universe is created and sustained by God.’²⁹ Besides, both the Akan and Yoruba have a similar traditional political structures where, as Anyidoho submits, ‘authority [is] vested in the traditional political rulers, the royals, who also occupied the top position in the social hierarchy.’³⁰ Among the Yoruba, Salami writes, the traditional ruler (usually a king or high chief) is viewed as ‘*iku baba yeye*’ which literally means ‘*death, father-mother*’ (often interpreted as ‘the awesome power that is the father and mother of death’). It is this king/chief ideology that provides both Kuma and Alabi the framework for conceptualizing deity.³¹

Second, the *apae* among the Akan and *oriki* among the Yoruba serve similar purposes. *Apaes*, for the Akan, are a form of traditional praise appellation performance used for eulogizing political rulers by crediting them with unrivalled powers, obligations and competences so that others may revere them.³² This is done, Anyidoho adds,

by chronicling their royal ancestry, their military manoeuvres and exploits, their unrelenting stand against their enemies, their annihilation of non-conforming subjects, as well as their affluence and magnanimity.³³

Likewise, for the Yoruba, *orikis* are both attributive names or appellatives expressing who a child is (or hoped to become)³⁴, and praise-chants for kings, titled men and other people containing a recitation of their feats recounted in order to amplify their self-image and sense of identity in themselves or their groups.³⁵ These *orikis*, Akiwowo adds, are supposed to incite the recipients to even greater

accomplishments.³⁶ For Kuma and Alabi, therefore, these language tools—the *apae* and *oriki*—become, as Salami puts it, ‘the crucible where God is forged.’³⁷

Third, specifically, both Kuma and Alabi share an identity complex given the peculiarities of their contexts. Kuma lived two-thirds of her life in the colonial era which, virtually everywhere in Africa, influenced the sociocultural make-up of different communities. This undoubtedly necessitated, for Kuma, a negotiation between staying true to her cultural identity with its practices on the one hand and exposing herself to the influence of Western cultures and beliefs (including, of course, embracing the Christian faith) on the other.³⁸ Alabi, however, grew up in post-colonial Nigeria, albeit in a traditional Yoruba setting in the ancient city of Ibadan.³⁹ Her education, transition from Catholicism to Pentecostalism, working at Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) and being involved in Nollywood⁴⁰ equally demands similar identity negotiation to Kuma’s—more so in a context of decolonisation. What Anyidoho says of Kuma, therefore, could be said of both of them, that there is ‘a simultaneous existence of multiple value system, beliefs, thoughts, and ways of life ... (as indeed can be said of almost all Africans).’⁴¹ This, no doubt, shaped their theologising process.

A final point of similarity is their blurred distinction between the *Persons* of the Godhead. Kuma’s emphasis is chiefly Christological; the opening words of her book expresses this clearly:

We are going to praise the name of Jesus Christ.
We shall announce his many titles:
they are true and they suit him well,
so it is fitting that we do this.⁴²

In the book there is no specific mention of ‘God the Father’ or ‘God the Holy Spirit’ except for few references to God as ‘Jehovah’ (*Onyankopcn*), hence Young’s assertion that Kuma seemed to have ‘collapsed the Trinity into an Akan variant of Oneness Pentecostalism’ which her robust appellations of Jesus extol.⁴³ The same could be said

of Alabi. While she appears somewhat trinitarian in her songs,⁴⁴ she makes overlapping allusions and descriptions such that there is no distinction between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. For both Kuma and Alabi, therefore, their conceptualisation of God, on one hand, transcends the trinitarian models of systematic theology while, on the other hand, acknowledges the oneness and unity of the three *Persons* of the trinity. Given the abundant materials that had been written based on Kuma's prayer compilation and Alabi's large discography, a lot could be said about their conceptualisation of God, however, due to volume of writing, only two thoughts are hereby presented.

1. Everything Points to God

D.O. Fagunwa's classic, *A Forest of a Thousand Daemons*,⁴⁵ gives an inkling into the pre-Islamic, pre-Christian and pre-colonial religious worldview of people who live in such contexts as Kuma's and Alabi's⁴⁶—that their farms, forests, water bodies and air space, while being the domain of farming, hunting or fishing, are also the domain of spirit-beings and that God can be seen, metaphorically, figuratively, emblematically or otherwise in everyday items, sceneries and occurrences. Hence, Salami writes,

The Yoruba, like many other people with similar worldview [including the Akan], seek to see and create an invisible world wherein lives God in the structures of the visible in which they live. In other words, the conception of their relation to God is underlain by their concrete material relations in the visible world (as below, so above).⁴⁷

Such worldview supports the idea that everything—persons, animals, places or things—can, and should, point humans to God. Bearing this in mind highlights a central theme to the theology of these African voices, viz: God is the ultimate being who finds ultimate expression through anyone and/or anything that had ever commanded man's attention in creation.

Thus, Kuma says of Jesus:

The great Rock we hide behind
the great forest canopy that gives cool shade
the Big Tree which lifts its vines to peep at the heavens,
the magnificent Tree whose dripping leaves
encourage the luxuriant growth below.⁴⁸

She uses word-pictures from her everyday sceneries—rocks, forest, trees, heavens and fertile forests⁴⁹—and descriptors that reveal that people find their occupation (*kente* weavers,⁵⁰ farmers, hunters and, by inference, everyone), security ('the great rock we hide behind'), *help* (lifted vines...encouraged to grow) and enjoyment ('the great forest canopy that gives cool shade') in the Jesus that she is praising just as subjects of a ruler find their satisfaction in the security of their ruler's commands. In one of Alabi's eulogies, too,⁵¹ the same imagery appears:

The rain of heaven that truly satisfies
The brilliant sun keeping everything in its time⁵²

Or in another where she visualises God as a highly intoxicating and expensive wine:

You excite me and You lift up my spirit
You intoxicate me and I stagger
like one drunk with expensive wine
You rock me back and forth in excitement
In You I find joyful pleasures, *Kabiesi!*⁵³
My Chief and Bridegroom.⁵⁴

The fascination of the Yorubas with intoxicating drinks and their high alcohol-tolerance is not unknown in literature.⁵⁵ What is, however, noteworthy is why Alabi chose 'expensive wine' over 'palm wine' (which could be fermented to varying degrees of alcoholic

content). For her, likening the influence of God to palm wine would not be superlative enough because there are far more intoxicating (and more expensive) wines out there.

2. *God as Ultimate Power*

The second and most significant point to make about the conceptualisation of God by these African women is the power-dimension. The African worldview readily acknowledges that cosmic powers—both good and evil—are involved in regulating the experiences and behaviour of humans.⁵⁶ It is, therefore, typical of *apaes* and *orikis* to engage the use of metonyms, metaphors, and similes that describe the recipient (in this case, God) as being the embodiment of superior power—superior in royalty, majesty, reliability, dependability, protective ability, justice, mystery and relatability. In fact, for the Yoruba, Salami notes, ‘God is seen not only as *powerful*, but God is also conceived as *power itself*.’⁵⁷ A close examination of the works of Alabi and Kuma will reveal that this, in fact, is their motif—to identify God as the ultimate ‘powers that be’ in their trado-cultural understanding and amplify God as being transcendent beyond any powers ever known on earth. This feeds into their conception of God as King, Healer, Deliverer, Liberator, Friend, Diviner, to mention but a few.

This conception of God is achieved in a number of ways, only a few of which are highlighted below. First, by comparing praiseworthy earthly figures, ancestors or divinities (as in the case of Yoruba *orikis*) to God and distinguishing the latter as being incomparable. For example, Kuma says,

Mere chiefs and kings are not his equals,
 though filled with glory and power,
 wealth and blessings, and royalty
 in the greatest abundance.
 But of them all, he is the leader,
 and the chiefs with all their glory follow after him.

He is the one for whom
women lay down their cloths on the path,
and pour sweet-smelling oil on his feet.
They run to and fro amidst shouts of praise before him.
It is true: Jesus is a Chief!⁵⁸

In this preceding excerpt, not only does Kuma call Jesus ‘a Chief’, she made it clear that he surpasses all human chiefs in glory and power—and this she does without belittling the fact that human chiefs—in her context—are, indeed, very glorious and powerful. In *Ka Bi O Osi*,⁵⁹ Alabi recreates a Yoruba coronation event to show that God is far greater than any earthly king.

You weren’t rushed home
Where they placed the crowning leaves on Your head
No one had to conspire to crown You King
Who were those who stood to cast their votes
Deciding it was Your turn to reign?
Who are Your King Makers?
Let them stand to be counted.
Who is Your forerunner that brought You into heaven?
Who is that person who suggested
That You should come [and] create the earth?
Can someone please show us Your Father or Mother?
Impossible!
You are God unquestionable!
‘The Ancient of Days’,
‘The Ageless God’ is His Name
You are God unquestionable!⁶⁰

Another way these African theologians deify God in their chosen instruments of eulogy is to describe him in very colourful terms as the one capable of ‘astonishing reversals of so-called natural laws and unexpected outcomes of simple actions.’⁶¹ For Kuma, for instance, Jesus is a hunter whose trap is capable of catching more than mere

visible animals; it "catches the wind", which he then bundles up "with lightening and ties the load with the rainbow"—an ordinary rope will not do.⁶² Rather than catch fishes from the ocean, he catches them from tree tops and rather than hunt for birds on tree tops, he catches birds from the ocean.⁶³ With these and many other allegories, she credits Jesus with supreme power capable of conquering natural forces. Alabi's work is replete with this approach as well. In *War*, she conceptualises God as a mighty warrior who is capable of illogical feats of power:

Our powerful warrior!
 Going ahead of us yet shielding our back from the enemy...
 The powerful shadow that turns away the day of death.
 Your dew softens the enemy's bullet and makes it of no effect
 Your rain beats every mountain till they crumble
 Yet, you are the everlasting mountain!⁶⁴

It makes no logical sense for one warrior to shield his army both from their front and behind nor for dew to turn bullets into soft harmless balls, nor for rain to beat mountains into crumbles momentarily. All of these allegories paint a picture, in Yoruba imagery, of power at its peak.

Another way both Kuma and Alabi conceptualise God as being 'ultimate power' in their use of *apae* and *oriki* is to often employ (self-coined) praise names for Jesus (or God) in the dialect of their everyday reality using complex noun formations to create fascinating interesting imageries. For example, Kuma uses words like:

Ôkatakya – Hero, brave one!⁶⁵
Akyerâkyerâkwan – You-who-show-the-way⁶⁶
Adubasapôn – Strong-armed One⁶⁷
Okuruakwaban – Source-of-great-strength⁶⁸
Owesekramo – the untiring Porter⁶⁹
Ôdôkôtôbonnuare – Hard-working Farmer⁷⁰
Okokurokohene – powerful Chief⁷¹

Okwatayi-mu-agyabenaa – one who is not limited to a single place⁷²

Woyâ saremusâe – Lion of the grasslands⁷³

while Alabi uses words like:

*Olodumare, Ekun Oko Oke*⁷⁴ – *Olodumare*,⁷⁵ The Indomitable Tiger

*Arugbo-ojo*⁷⁶ – Ancient of days

*Ad'agba-ma-tepa*⁷⁷ – the old one who needs no walking stick

*Alagbada-ina*⁷⁸ – one who wears fire as his *agbada*⁷⁹

*Alawotele-oorun*⁸⁰ – one who wears the sun as his underwear

*Ari-iro-ala*⁸¹ – one who needs not know your dream before offering an interpretation

It needs to be said, however, that these self-coined praise names sometimes have no literal meaning but brilliant sound mimetics. Their utterance, in spite of their literal meaninglessness, naturally commands a sense of awe and wonder in the listener, appealing to their 'auditory and visual sensibilities' in the hope that it will 'appeal to the emotion of their God.'⁸² In revisiting his English translation of Kuma's prayers three decades later, Jon P. Kirby SVD describes the experience as being transported back into the world where he first heard those words and relived 'its thrilling staccato beat, [...] assonance and lingual gymnastics'.⁸³ He notes,

The Twi is courtly language and often archaic, so readers don't always know exactly what the words mean but their hair stands on end, nonetheless. For them it is not the past; it is their hidden soul.⁸⁴

This is a tool Alabi also uses frequently in her eulogies of God. She is known to have used words like:

Gbengbeleku-tin-da-nibi-owu

Atabatubu

Arabata ribiti aribitirabata
akaba karabata gbaa
Porimapopo-babanlaku-babami-iparekete

While bits and syllables of such compound names mean one thing or the other, the name as a whole is meaningless, but the gesticulation of the performing artiste and the rhythm of the words often describe immense greatness and mystery.

Sometimes, these praise names or eulogies are directly imported from the invocations, incantations and praise-prayer songs originally intended for historically known ancestors and/or divinities,⁸⁵ albeit amplified and Christianised. For example, in *Eru Re To Ba*,⁸⁶ Tope Alabi sings,

You are to be dreaded
 The king who speaks and fire emerges
 You are to be dreaded

A Yoruba listener will readily identify the imagery here being that of Sango, one of the *orisas* (divinities) in Yoruba cosmology⁸⁷ who was a monarch—the fourth Alaafin of Oyo⁸⁸—who, in various myths, is described as *Onina-l'enu* (One who could eject fire from his mouth and kill his enemies with lightning).⁸⁹ To make the distinction, however, Alabi goes on to use biblical imagery to put this ‘Sango-like’ God she’s praising in a class of his own—a superlative class that will make the Sango of history only of infinitesimal fraction in power.

The God who speaks fire...
 You who spoke and the red sea dried...
 You who fed a whole king to maggots...
 You who made Esther queen suddenly...
 You brought water from a rock
 Who is like you?⁹⁰

By that rhetorical question, she makes her point: Sango may be

powerful, but he is no match for the 'King of kings'.⁹¹ It makes sense for Alabi—and other Yoruba Christians—to conceptualise God as being both *like* and *much more* powerful *than* ancestors. In conceptualising God as such, Kuma and Alabi are making the point that, whereas they would have worshipped these ancestors and/or divinities in their pre-Christian past, now they know that all power truly belongs to God. Their listeners are therefore admonished, inconspicuously, not to mistake God for anything *less*, and not to settle for the worship of anything *less*; God alone is deserving of worship. An example of this is found in Alabi's *War*:

...You go so far fighting the battle of your children
that people mistake it for witchcraft...
The door! The key! The inner chamber! You are the access!
You are the access to come out and to go into everything.
You are the way!⁹²

In this short excerpt, not only is she making the point that witchcraft is a *lesser* power to God's, but she's also painting the image that everything a witch would do—enter into an 'inner chamber' from where s/he could have spiritual access to someone else's life—find their truest and purest reality in God.

Conclusion: Their Legacy

Through the aforementioned language tools and many others, both Kuma and Alabi are leaving African Christians a legacy of a robust and dynamic African identity such that Africans don't have to stop being African to be Christian; they can be both. Though unschooled in theology, they uphold a reality which must inform the scholarship of *writing* African theologians—and this is already happening. Bediako's position, for example, that 'Christianity in Africa [is] a historical reality in African life'⁹³ aligns with and celebrates the pioneering work of such oral theologians like Kuma. And together with the cloud of witnesses of African theologians in the land of the living dead—

Afua Kuma, Lamin Sanneh, John Mbiti, Kwame Bediako, Ogbu Kalu, to mention but a few—the likes of Tope Alabi invite other African Christians to begin to *think* and *talk* sensibly about God consistently with our *Africanness* so that we may continue to speak about the Africanisation of Christianity in the same breath as we speak of the Christianisation of Africa. May this be so.

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1. Afua Kuma was a Ghanaian Christian woman who made use of traditional Akan poetry in public prayer. Tope Alabi is a Nigerian musician and Christian worship leader of Yoruba heritage. More will be said about them in the course of the essay. In this essay, we use 'Africa' to describe the continent as a whole and 'African' as an all-inclusive way of describing people of the continent, whatever their ethnicity. We do include the African diaspora in our use of Africa, but we do often spell it out just for clarity's sake. When we speak of African cultures, though, we have in mind mostly the cultures of sub-Saharan Africa which is the part of Africa that has become increasingly Christian in the past century.
2. Agbonkhanmeghe E. Orobator, *Theology Brewed in an African Pot* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008).
3. This includes those who describe their religious identity as 'atheist', 'agnostic' or 'nothing in particular'. As of 2010, this group accounted for 16% of the religious distribution of the world 2% of which was found in sub-Saharan Africa. See Pew Research Center, "Global Christianity: A Report on the Size and Distribution of the World's Christian Population," *The Pew Forum on Religious and Public life* (2011): 24-25, <https://doi.org/10.13140/2.1.5098.1761>.
4. Hence, as Nnaemedo rightly posits, "the divergent voices concerning the nature of God as represented by theists, atheists and agnostics" necessarily implies "thinking" about God. See Bartholomew Nnaemedo, "Philosophical inquiry into God-definition question: The context of mercy," *Igwebuiké: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities* 4, no. 3 (2019): 147-48.
5. Culturally, it is an essential parental duty to pass on the ideas of worship and culture to the children. Through their words and deeds, fathers mentor their sons while mothers mentor their daughters in the trado-religious make-up of their societies. The increasing rate of globalisation, however, is progressively eroding this channel of theology on the continent—unfortunately so.
6. John S. Mbiti, "The biblical basis for present trends in African theology," *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 4, no. 3 (1980): 119.
7. Orobator, *Theology Brewed in an African Pot*, 3.
8. Andrew F. Walls, "Kwame Bediako and Christian scholarship in Africa," In memoriam, *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 32 (2008): 192-93.

9. Unfortunately, as Mbiti rightly observed, such theology is 'often unrecorded, often heard only by small groups, and generally lost to libraries and seminaries.' Mbiti, "The biblical basis for present trends in African theology," 119.
10. John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 2nd rev. and enl. ed. (Oxford: Heinemann, 1990), 1.
11. While it is not untrue that there are Africans who will self-identify as being a *none*, it is nothing short of strange. See Matthew Parris, "As an atheist, I truly believe Africa needs God," *The Sunday Times* 2008, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/as-an-atheist-i-truly-believe-africa-needs-god-3xj9bm80h8m>.
12. Todd M. Johnson et al., "Christianity 2018: More African Christians and Counting Martyrs," *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 42, no. 1 (2018): 21.
13. The gravity of this reality dawned on me when, in a recent conversation with two graduates from notable African seminaries, they both admitted to have never been exposed to the works of African theologians in their studies at the seminary.
14. Also known as 'Christiana Gyan' (also spelt 'Gyane'). For a detailed biography, see Akosua Anyidoho, "Techniques of Akan Praise Poetry in Christian Worship: Madam Afua Kuma," in *Multiculturalism & Hybridity in African Literatures*, ed. H. Wylie and B. Lindfors (Africa World Press, 2000), 71-75.
15. Walls, "Kwame Bediako and Christian scholarship in Africa," 193.
16. *Apaè* is courthouse praise poetry of the Akan folkloric tradition.
17. Afua Kuma, *Jesus of the Deep Forest: Prayers and Praises of Afua Kuma*, trans. Jon Kirby (Accra: Asempa Publishers, 1981). This was compiled originally in Twi language through the help of a Roman Catholic priest, Father Kofi Ron Lange, who knew Afua Kuma personally and recorded her prayers for posterity. A sequel is currently being put together and titled *The Prayers and Praises of Afua Kuma II*, the manuscript of which we were privileged to peruse; *Jesus of the Deep Forest* has gone on to become a much-cited work especially in the area of what Oduyoye calls 'Oral Christology' in an African context. See Mercy Amber Oduyoye, "Jesus Christ," in *The Cambridge companion to feminist theology*, ed. Susan Frank Parsons (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 154; See also Anyidoho, "Madam Afua Kuma," 73; Joseph Kwakye and Jon P. Kirby, *The Prayers and Praises of Afua Kuma II*.
18. For a full biography, see Rachael Odusanya, "Tope Alabi's biography and achievements," *Legit*, 2018, <https://www.legit.ng/1194921-tope-alabis-biography-achievements.html>.
19. The same year Afua Kuma discovered her gift of praising Jesus *Apaè* style
20. John Shepherd et al., *Continuum Encyclopedia of Popular Music of the World, Volume 1: Media, Industry, Society* (A&C Black, 2003), 171.
21. Odusanya "Tope Alabi's biography and achievements".
22. OakTv, "Tope Alabi crowned luminary of Yoruba artistry at #UBAat70," 2019, <https://oak.tv/newstrack/commentsection-tope-alabi-ubaat70/>.
23. OakTv Tope Alabi crowned luminary of Yoruba artistry; By her own admission, her preference for singing in Yoruba, besides being versed in the language, is that God speaks to her oftentimes through Yoruba adages and then unpacks the deep meaning of the adage to her. See Channels Television, "Artiste of the week: Singer Tope Alabi talks on her inspiration Part 2," (YouTube, 2012). <https://youtu.be/h6osdNNVLvc>.

24. See Onyeka Uwakwe, "Students, Internet Use and Information Dissemination in Nigeria: Towards the New Media," *Communication Panorama African and Global Perspectives* 1, no. 1 (2015); Floribert Patrick Calvin Endong, "Religiosity versus spirituality in the contemporary Nigerian gospel music," *Human and Social Studies* 5, no. 2 (2016); A. O. Oikelome, "'Pop Goes the Gospel' - The Growth of Gospel Music in Nigeria," *International Journal of Multi-disciplinary Research* 3, no. 1-2 (2010); J. O. Adeoye, "Patriotic Music: A tool for sustaining national security in Nigeria," *Journal of Science and Science Education, Ondo* 4, no. 1 (2013); George Olusola Ajibade, "New Wine in Old Cups: Postcolonial Performance of Christian Music in Yorùbá Land," *Studies in World Christianity* 13, no. 2 (2007); Austin Emielu and Grace Takyi Donkor, "Highlife music without alcohol? Interrogating the concept of gospel highlife in Ghana and Nigeria," *Journal of the Musical Arts in Africa* 16, no. 1-2 (2019); Damilola Mayowa Babarinde, "Emergent Issues in the Hybridisation of Christian Gospel Music in South-West Nigeria," *Calabar Journal of Liberal Studies* 21, no. 1 (2019); S. T. Adeyemi, "The culture specific application of sound in Nigerian video movies," *Nigerian Music Review* 5, no. 1 (2004); S. Joseph Bankola Ola Koyi, "Creativity, Film and Democratic Practice in Nigeria," in *Theatre, Creativity and Democratic Practice in Nigeria*, ed. Ameh Dennis Akoh, AbdulRasheed Abiodun Adeoye, and Osita C. Ezenwanebe (Maiduguri, Nigeria: Society of Nigeria Theatre Artists, 2014).
25. Prior to becoming a well-known artiste in Nigerian 'Gospel Music' genre, she had been involved in composing soundtracks for Yoruba movies—by 2010, she had composed soundtracks for more than 2,000 Nigerian movies. See Channels Television, "Artiste of the week: Singer Tope Alabi talks on her inspiration," (YouTube, 2012). <https://youtu.be/zSlbU5gXAAQ>; See also Adeyemi, "The culture specific application of sound in Nigerian video movies," 51.
26. Tope Alabi and T.Y. Bello, "WAR (Spontaneous Song)," (YouTube, 2019). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NGzDvEDOUZY>.
27. Tope Alabi and T. Y. Bello, "Kabi O Osi (Spontaneous Song) - Video," (YouTube, 2019). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yp864FzGBEE>.
28. Tope Alabi, "Oba Aseda," (YouTube, 2017). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lh1hvLEFm0w>.
29. John S. Mbiti, "African views of the universe," in *African History and Culture*, ed. R. Olaniyan (Ibadan: Longman, 1982), 196.
30. Anyidoho, "Madam Afua Kuma," 74.
31. Oladipo Salami, "Creating God in our image: The attributes of God in the Yoruba sociocultural environment," in *Explorations in the Sociology of Language and Religion, Amsterdam: John Benjamins*, ed. Tope Omoniyi and Joshua A. Fishman (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing, 2006), 102.
32. Anyidoho, "Madam Afua Kuma," 78.
33. Anyidoho, "Madam Afua Kuma," 78.
34. In this sense, in traditional Yoruba families, there is an *oriki* for every child born into the family. Mothers and grandmothers tend to be versed in these poetic and highly descriptive adulations which they recite to the child as he grows—sometimes to placate him/her and other times, to remind him/her of his worth.
35. Akinsola Akiwowo, "Understanding interpretative sociology in the light of oriki of Orunmila," *Journal of Cultures and ideas* 1, no. 1 (1983): 144.
36. Akiwowo, "Oriki of Orunmila," 144.

37. Salami, "Creating God in our image," 104.
38. Anyidoho therefore posits, "Her two names, Afua Kuma (by which she was identified in her community) and Christiana Gyan (acquired after her Christian baptism, and which appeared mainly in the church records) are symbolic of the multiple influences in her life." Anyidoho, "Madam Afua Kuma," 74-75.
39. Odusanya "Tope Alabi's biography and achievements".
40. Odusanya "Tope Alabi's biography and achievements".
41. Anyidoho, "Madam Afua Kuma," 75.
42. Kuma, *Jesus of the Deep Forest*, 5.
43. Richard Fox Young, "Clearing a Path through Jesus of the Deep Forest: Intercultural Perspectives on Christian Praise and Public Witness in Afua Kuma's Akan Oral Epic," *Theology Today* 70, no. 1 (2013): 43; This is corroborated in the yet-to-be-published sequel, "The Prayers and Praises of Afua Kuma II," where she writes: "The priests called the name of Jesus, / and the Holy Spirit drew near." See Kwakye and Kirby, *The Prayers and Praises of Afua Kuma II*, 26.
44. For example, *Iwo Lawa O Mabo* (It is You We Shall Worship) seemed to have been dedicated to God the Father; *Logan Ti O De* (Immediately He Arrived) to God the Son and *Emi Mimo* (Holy Spirit) to the Holy Ghost.
45. D. O. Fagunwa, *The forest of a thousand daemons*, trans. Wole Soyinka (London: Thomas Nelson Ltd, 1968).
46. Both in Ghana's Eastern Region and South Western Nigeria, one will find lushly vegetated forested hills with many different birds and animals and a similar cosmology undergirding how people view these creatures and all of life.
47. Salami, "Creating God in our image," 106. (Word in brackets ours.)
48. Kuma, *Jesus of the Deep Forest*, 5.
49. Kuma, *Jesus of the Deep Forest*, 39.
50. Kuma, *Jesus of the Deep Forest*, 39. 'Kente' is a type of cloth intricately woven and admirably colourful. It is common among the royalty of the Ashanti people.
51. Tope Alabi and T. Y. Bello, "Iwo Lawa O Ma Bo (Spontaneous Song) - Video," (YouTube, 2019). https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mra_dVAj7lQ.
52. As translated in the subtitle of the music video. See Tope Alabi and T.Y. Bello, "Awa Gbe O Ga (Spontaneous Song) - Video," (YouTube, May 17, 2020 2019). <https://youtu.be/9DaHRD2q1ek>.
53. A word used in saluting Yoruba kings. It literally means "The Unquestionable One" albeit used in the same context as the English will use "Your Royal Majesty".
54. As translated in the subtitle of the music video. Tope Alabi and T. Y. Bello, "Iwo Lawa O Ma Bo' (Lyrics and Translation)," *T Videos*, 2019, <https://tweb.live/videos/watch/1vOByu0Ujdc>.
55. For example, see Stephen Neill, *Colonialism and Christian Missions* (Lutterworth Press, 1966), 317-19. According to Neil, the missionaries that served in Southern Nigeria historically had a major issue with the natives' alcohol use and the very high rate of importation of gins and liquors. This became a disturbing issue for Western Missionaries working in the Southern part of Nigeria necessitating the Archbishop of Canterbury, in 1905 and 1907 to raise a debate about this in the House of Lords. (p. 318)
56. See Robert B Fisher, *West African religious traditions: Focus on the Akan of Ghana* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998), 100-02.
57. Salami, "Creating God in our image," 106.

58. Kuma, *Jesus of the Deep Forest*, 20.
59. Alabi and Bello, "Kabi O Osi."
60. Based on subtitle from the music video. Translated by Oreofe Williams. See Alabi and Bello, "Kabi O Osi."
61. Oduyoye, "Jesus Christ," 154.
62. Anyidoho, "Madam Afua Kuma," 78.
63. Anyidoho, "Madam Afua Kuma," 78.
64. Alabi and Bello, "WAR."
65. Kuma, *Jesus of the Deep Forest*, 5, 7, 10, 17, 39.
66. Kuma, *Jesus of the Deep Forest*, 7.
67. Kuma, *Jesus of the Deep Forest*, 7.
68. Kuma, *Jesus of the Deep Forest*, 7.
69. Kuma, *Jesus of the Deep Forest*, 9.
70. Kuma, *Jesus of the Deep Forest*, 10.
71. Kuma, *Jesus of the Deep Forest*, 11.
72. Kuma, *Jesus of the Deep Forest*, 39.
73. Kuma, *Jesus of the Deep Forest*, 46.
74. Alabi and Bello, "Iwo Lawa O Ma Bo."
75. While there is no consensus on the exact meaning of *Olodumare*, a suggested etymology is *Olodu Omo Are* which, put together, could mean 'an entity that is very enormous, yet whose location cannot be ascertained. *Odu* means 'a very big clay pot'; *Are* means 'location unknown'.
76. Alabi and Bello, "Kabi O Osi."
77. Alabi and Bello, "Kabi O Osi."
78. Alabi and Bello, "Kabi O Osi."
79. What *kente* is to the Asante people of Ghana, *agbada* is to the Yoruba males. It's a kind of clothing
80. Alabi and Bello, "Kabi O Osi."
81. Tope Alabi, "Eje Ka Gbadura Episode 13," (YouTube, 2019). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6uDE56bQezE>.
82. Salami, "Creating God in our image," 115.
83. "Afua Kuma: Praying in Her Own Words | T I C C S NEWSLETTER #33," SVD Curia, 2006, accessed May 17, 2020, <https://www.svdcuria.org/public/formatio/news/ticcs/ticcs0633.htm>.
84. Kirby (SVD), "Afua Kuma: Praying in Her Own Words."
85. Yoruba traditional religion, for instance, have five fundamental beliefs including a belief in *God (Supreme Being)*, *divinities*, *ancestors*, *spirits* and *mysterious powers*. See J Ọmọṣade Awolalu and P Adelumo Dopamu, *West African Traditional Religion* (Ibadan: Onibonjo Press & Book Industries, 1979), pp. 34, 240. As such, the invocations, incantationns used n) and ayajo (charming), prayer songs which incorporate praise (oriki) and petition.
86. Tope Alabi and T. Y. Bello, "Eru Re To Ba (Spontaneous Song) - Video," (YouTube, 2019). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HAp1i632qM8>.
87. Also known as 'the deity of thunder and lightning'.
88. Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas* (London: Routledge, 1921), 34.
89. Jonathan Olumide Lucas, *The religion of the Yorubas: being an account of the religious beliefs and practices of the Yoruba peoples of southern Nigeria, especially in relation to the religion of ancient Egypt* (Lagos: CMS Bookshop, 1948), 104.

90. Alabi and Bello, "Eru Re To Ba."
91. Another example of this will be *Owo kembe rebi ija* (the one who wears baggy trousers to the war front)—a name Alabi frequently uses which, however, was the *oriki* for Ogunmola, a Yoruba ancestral warrior. See Alabi, Lamidi Kolawole, 2017; Alabi, "Eje Ka Gbadura Episode 13."
92. Alabi and Bello, "WAR."
93. Kwame Bediako, "The roots of African theology," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 13, no. 2 (1989): 58.