RELIGION AND SONIC PRACTICES: SIMILARITIES AS A SOURCE OF CONFLICT BETWEEN PENTECOSTALS AND ADHERENTS OF INDIGENOUS RELIGIONS

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Religious Conflict; Pentecostalism; Indigenous Religions; Sound and Performance; Music and Sonic Practices

Introduction

Silence plays a critical role in many Christian traditions as an important platform for prayer. However, the lived experiences in Pentecostal-Charismatic[173] Christianity are seldom quiet. Indeed, participating in a Pentecostal church service involves exuberant activities such as calls-and-responses, clapping, dancing, singing, and shouting. Sound and bodily movement are fundamental because central to their belief is the idea that the Holy Spirit fills adherents, making every action spirit-filled. These practices tend to be controversial and create tension with a section of the population in Ghanaian cities around the year, but they come to a full expression during the implementation of the annual ban on drumming and noisemaking preceding the celebration of the Ga festival of *Hɔmɔwɔ* in Accra.

Using their traditional calendar, the Ga traditionalists impose a thirty (30) day ban on noise generating activities in and around Accra every May-June, as part of the rituals in preparation for the celebration. The ban is enforced immediately after Ga traditional priests (*Wulɔmei*) have planted sacred corn or millet (*`maaduwɔr*) in specific sacred locations. The time between the planting and the germination of the crops is the period of the ban. It is believed that during this period, the gods (*dzemawɔdzi*) and ancestors come to inhabit the communities to oversee the

173 I am aware of the discussions around the classification of Pentecostal groups. In this paper, I use both Pentecostal-Charismatic and Pentecostal interchangeably to refer to both classical and neo-Pentecostals.

growth of the plant, and this require an environment that is quiet and free from disturbances.[174] While it is difficult to show the link between the gestation of the plants and noisemaking, this ban is considered critical among the traditionalists because the planted seeds denote life in Ga cosmology. On the one hand, when the plants grow well, it is believed to be a sign of a bumper harvest for the following year. On the other hand, when the crops fail, it signifies a poor and disastrous year ahead. Therefore, the noise ban is enforced vigorously by the traditionalists in order to avert any misfortune. Accordingly, the implementation of the ban carries great religious and sociocultural implication as well as strong emotional attachment, to the extent that it captures John Mbiti's view that people are very often ready to die for their culture.[175]

Thus, technologically amplified sounds coming from Pentecostal-Charismatic churches within the city during the noise ban is deemed not only as noise but also as disturbing the equilibrium of the Ga spiritual universe. On the other hand, the Christian groups assert their freedom of worship as enshrined in the Ghanaian constitution. These positions assumed by the two communities lead to the annual clashes between them, which have been a prominent feature on the religious and political landscapes since 1998.[176]

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174 An interview with Nuumo Okai I, the *Korle Wulɔmɔ*, October 24, 2015. The *Korle Wulɔmɔ* is one of the principal chief priests among the Ga. He is the priest of the Korle deity in Accra.

175 John Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*. (London: Heinemann International, 1994): 194.

176 For a more detailed treatment of the subject, see Rijk van Dijk, Contesting Silence: The Ban on Drumming and Musical Politics of Pentecostalism in Ghana. *Ghana Studies Series, 4*, (2001): 31-64; Marleen De Witte, Accra's Sounds and Sacred Spaces. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research, 32*(3). (2008): 690-709; J. K. Asamoah-Gyadu, J. K. African Traditional Religion, Pentecostalism and the Clash of Spiritualities in Ghana. In S. Hoover, & N. Kaneva, *Fundamentalism and the Media*. (London/New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2009):161-178; Justice A. Arthur, The Politics of Religious Sound: Conflict and the Negotiation of Religious Diversity in Ghana. (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2018). Mariam Goshadze, The Varieties of Sonic Experience: "Quiet" Versus "Not-Noise" in Ghanaian Harvest Festival. *American Anthropologist. 124 (1).* (2022): 165-174.

Approaching the nexus of religion and conflict through sonic practices, this article examines how the aural practices of the Pentecostal-Charismatic churches, and the Ga traditionalists become the conduit for confrontations between them. Comparing the two communities, the paper argues that (i) the conflict is primarily a spiritual struggle between the two groups and (ii) behind the seeming antagonism between Pentecostal Christianity and indigenous religions is a significant resemblance in their sonic practices in relation to the spiritual, which is a key source of the conflict.

In the following paragraphs, I argue that a critical factor in the violent clashes between the indigenous religious group and the Pentecostal-Churches is the clash of their beliefs. I would do this by first, considering the theoretical baseline that underpins the discussion. I would then look at a description and nature of the existing demarcations by exploring how religion and culture are framed in this conflict. Subsequently, I would examine the means through which boundaries are expressed, interpreted, and enforced by considering the sound and sonic practices of the groups, showing the centrality of drums and considering the role of music and performances in the two communities.

Boundary Making, Sound and Religious Conflict

The conflict in many ways shows that boundaries are constructed and affirmed between religious groups. The boundary making framework, which originated in the seminal work of Fred Barth: "Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organisation of Cultural Differences" is relevant in explaining how religious boundaries lead to conflict between the Pentecostal-Charismatic churches and the Ga traditionalists.[177]

Lamont and Molnár have subsequently extended the concept of boundaries beyond just ethnicity into other areas such as religion, language, and social and collective identity. They argue that boundaries can be understood as distinctions

177 Barth, F. *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference.* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1969).

between groups anchored in societal institutions, which play out in everyday practices and interactions.[178] Thus boundaries suggest categorical dimensions that divides the social world into social groups showing 'us' and 'them'.[179] Boundaries can be categorised into social and symbolic demarcations. Social boundaries deal with social differences that are expressed in unequal access to and distribution of social opportunities and resources while symbolic boundaries are conceptual distinctions made by social actors to classify objects, people, and practices.[180]

Religious conflicts tend to be the result of the construction and negotiation of intra or inter-religious symbolic boundaries.[181] Indeed, conflict itself presupposes the existence of boundaries among different actors. In the case of the Pentecostal-Charismatic churches and Ga traditionalists, there is a "drawing of lines" between 'us' and 'them' on both sides and declaring of the other to be "wrong, morally inferior or theologically in error".[182] Therefore, while the demarcation between the two groups shows different levels of boundary making, it is the spiritual and practice related ones that are predominantly expressed in their encounters.

Sound is fundamental in the boundary making process between these two groups. Indeed, sound is central to the negotiation of space and lived experience in big cities like Accra. As Schafer has highlighted, the world is full of sounds, even more so in the city setting.[183] Nevertheless, sound is more complex than often considered as it ranges between silence on the one hand

178 Lamont, M., & Molnár, V. The Study of Boundaries in the Social Sciences. *Annual Reviews Sociology, 28*, (2002):167.

179 Wimmer, A.. The Making and Unmaking of Ethnic Boundaries: A Multilevel Process Theory. *American Journal of Sociology, 113*, 4, (2008, January): 975.

180 Lamont and Molnár. *The Study of Boundaries in the Social Sciences.* 168.

181 Bouma, G. D. Religious Resurgence, Conflict and the Transformation of Boundaries. In P. Beyer, & L. Beaman, *Religion, Globalization and Culture*. (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2007).

182 Bouma, *Religious Resurgence, Conflict and the Transformation of Boundaries*, 190.

183 Schafer, R.M. *The New Soundscape*. (Canada: Universal Edition No. 26905, 1969).

and noise, commonly defined as "sound out of place"[184] on the other hand. It is not only a measure of decibels but also a critical factor in the lives of religious people. While sound can have an overpowering physical impact on people, it also engenders a collective sense of space and aural communities;[185] serves as an identity marker and structures power relations.[186] Sound is relational because it gets transformed by negotiation between groups[187] and it is never a neutral phenomenon as proven by the numerous disputes over 'noise'.[188]

Significant to the discussion on boundary making is the idea that "aural space is both tactile and ephemeral: it cannot be contained within fixed boundaries."[189] It has no favoured focus; a sphere without fixed boundaries.[190] This is so because sound can be amplified by developments in audio technology, replicated and dispersed like "dust over the entire cityscape."[191] Thus, sound easily defies spatial boundaries moving from "public and private, presence and absence, visibility and invisibility."[192] It is these characteristics that create the foundation for sound of religious nature to be an essential factor

184 P. Bailey, Breaking the Sound Barrier. In P. Bailey, *Popular Culture and Performance in the Victorian City*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998): 195; That is, sound transforms into noise when it is heard where it is not supposed to or when it is perceived as contravening a social order.

185 D. Garrioch, Sounds of the City: The Soundscape of Early Modern European Towns. *Urban History* 30, (2003) 5–25; Marlene de Witte, Encountering Religion through Accra's Urban Soundscape. In J. Darling, & H. Wilson, *Encountering the City: Urban Encounters from Accra to New York* (133–150). (London and New York: Routledge, 2016).

186 Sophie Arkette, "Sounds Like City," *Theory Culture Society 21* (2004): 159-168

187 Van Dijk, *Contesting Silence: The Ban on Drumming and Musical Politics of Pentecostalism in Ghana.* 31-64; Justice A. Arthur, *The Politics of Religious Sound: Conflict and the Negotiation of Religious Diversity in Ghana.* (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2018).

188 Van Dijk, *Contesting Silence: The Ban on Drumming and Musical Politics of Pentecostalism in Ghana*. 31-64; De Witte, *Accra's Sounds and Sacred Spaces,* 690-709; Arthur, *The Politics of Religious Sound: Conflict and the Negotiation of Religious Diversity in Ghana*, 1-5. Mariam Goshadze, *The Varieties of Sonic Experience: "Quiet" Versus "Not-Noise" in Ghanaian Harvest Festival*. 165-174.

189 Arkette, "Sounds Like City," 167

190 Carpenter, Edmund. *Eskimo Realities*. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1973). 35.

191 Arkette, "Sounds Like City," 167

192 De Witte, *Accra's Sounds and Sacred Spaces*, 692

by which conflicts between religious groups are sometimes defined. The tensions between groups occasioned by sonic practices are in many ways inevitable as sound cannot be contained within a particular geographic location.

Framing Religion and Culture: A Description of the Boundaries

A consideration of the actors in this conflict shows that the notion of religion is framed differently depending on which side a person belongs – whether a traditionalist or Pentecostal. Their conceptualisation of religion in effect also influences how the conflict is framed. There are two predominant views regarding how religion is defined. First, to the Ga traditionalists, there is no strict separation between religion and culture – they are one and the same idea. Therefore, a separation of the *Kpele* religion from other aspects of Ga culture is not only impossible but clearly unacceptable according to the emic view of the traditionalists.[193] Second, for the Pentecostal-Charismatic groups, there is a strict demarcation between religion and culture. This becomes even more obvious for Pentecostal-Charismatic Christians who are Ga themselves. While I understand that religion and culture are considerably intersecting categories, I choose to separate them while bearing in mind that they are constantly interacting with each other. For instance, in the Ga *Kpele* religion, culture serves as the channel through which religion is expressed.

This framing of religion and culture helps to describe the boundary construction process among the two main actors in conflict. It also brings into sharp focus the ongoing discussion on whether the implementation of the ban on drumming and noisemaking is a religious (spiritual) endeavour, cultural activity or just another means by which the Ga *Wulɔmei* assert their customary authority over the city of Accra. From the perspective of the Ga traditionalists, the noise ban is not the

193 An interview with Nuumo Okai I, the *Korle Wulɔmɔ*, September 3, 2017. *Kpele* is a Ga indigenous religious belief system which is based on the systematic conception of the organisation of the universe.

result of an 'ordinary' silence imposed on the city. It is one that is instituted in the name of the *Dzemawɔdzi*, the Ga deities and it is a vital requirement of the Kpele religious system. This is corroborated by a *Wulɔmɔ*:

> The ban is an essential part of our existence and culture. The entire Ga state is required to obey and observe complete silence for this period, in fulfilment of our shared expectation for the impending year according to our traditional calendar. The 30-day period is marked with prayers to the gods and ancestors to grant the Ga lands peace and prosperity in the year ahead. We pray for a bumper harvest of fish and crops. So, any noise in the land distracts not only our act of worship but it also disturbs the gods and ancestors who come to inhabit the communities. It is also a distraction to us the *Wulɔmei* who require total peace and quiet to commune with the gods. These are the reasons why we insist on silence, so that the gods will be merciful and grant us prosperity in the coming year. We have lived like this for generations, and we will not allow anyone to interrupt our way of life.[194]

Generally, there are three common narratives surrounding the noise ban and the subsequent celebration of the annual *Hɔmɔwɔ* festival. First, it is observed as an annual thanksgiving ceremony to the *Dzemawɔdzi* for ensuring a bumper harvest in the previous year as well as the subsequent one. It is also a celebration marking the intervention of the deities in the historical past when their ancestors encountered a severe famine in the Accra plains. Second, that the ban on drumming and noisemaking, which precedes the festival, is to bring the required environment that will enable the deities who come to visit the city to oversee the 30-day gestation period of the planted corn and millet in the sacred fields. An added layer to this second narrative, as articulated by the chief priest is that the noise ban is also to allow the *Wulɔmei*, the human representatives of the deities to communicate with the

194 An interview with Nuumo Nuumo Akwaa Mensa III, the *Nai Wulɔmɔ*, February 17, 2014. The *Nai Wulɔmɔ*, is considered the senior among the Ga chief priests and occupies a very prominent position among the Ga-Dangme people.

Dzemawɔdzi. These two narratives shows that the noise ban and the festival largely have spiritual implications. However, the final narrative deals with the socio-cultural implications of the festival. It is a period when many Ga people, regardless of their religious affiliations return to their ancestral homes (We) in Accra to celebrate with other family members. It is during this period that disputes among kinsfolk are settled and ethnic solidarity is exhibited in anticipation of a good year ahead.[195] This final narrative is clearly an affirmation of Durkheim's idea of the integrative role of traditional ritualistic gatherings.[196] Thus, besides seeing the noise ban as a religious act, festivals generally have a unifying role among the kith and kin.

Also, it is clear from the perspective of the *Wulɔmei* that the spiritual[197] implication of the ban supersedes any social-cultural inference, albeit the socio-cultural aspects have consistently been highlighted by the Ga traditionalists. It is this emphasis on the social-cultural nature of the ban that contradicts the churches' framing of the ban. The Pentecostal-Charismatic groups underscore the spiritual nature of the ban and therefore interpret the clashes as religiously motivated. The former General Secretary of the Ghana Pentecostal and Charismatic Council (GPCC), the oldest and the largest ecumenical body of Pentecostals in Ghana affirms this view below:

> I think the Ga traditionalists have the freedom to worship the way they want to. This includes strictly following any requirements within their religion to observe a period of silence. The challenge is when they extend that to people of other religious persuasions – that is clearly an infringement of their freedom of worship enshrined in our national constitution. I believe that it is the Ga

195 It must be stated that majority of Ga people are Christians, but there are significant Muslim and indigenous religious adherents among them. It is also common to find double and multiple religious belonging among the Ga.

196 Emile Durkheim. *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life.* (K. E. Fields, Trans.) (New York: The Free Press, 1995).

197 While I am aware that 'religious' and 'spiritual' are often treated as separate categories among theologians, I use religious and spiritual interchangeably in this essay to refer to belief related actions or activities.

> indigenous religion that demands them to observe the one-month period of silence. It is not a cultural demand as it is popularly proclaimed by the priests and chiefs. I don't see any reason why people will fight and confiscate property if it were indeed a cultural issue. It is simply because they believe their gods mandate them to do so, that is why they enforce the ban aggressively and extend it to everyone. It is definitely a religious issue and that is the exact source of the conflict, if you ask me. Clearly it has become a conflict between religions since they overstep their territory. Don't you wonder why the ban is enforced by the priests and not the traditional chiefs? The simple answer is that the priests are the representatives of the gods. Therefore, from the point of view of churches, the conflict is purely a religious one.[198]

The perspective of this Pentecostal-Charismatic church leader is that the noise ban is intrinsically linked to the religious lived experience of the adherents of the Kpele religion. This view could also effectively be considered as a universal one among the churches. They consider the noise ban as a completely religious action and not a mere ban on silence. These notions have serious implications for both the adherents of Kpele and Pentecostal Christianity. It also explains why the churches have difficulty following the noise ban when it is implemented. The reason is they believe the silence is imposed by indigenous religious authorities they see as representatives of the Ga deities, in the name of deities and ancestors they do not believe in.

The idea of clash of religions is not something the *Wulɔmei* champion in public discussions. In public, they stress the notion of the noise ban as a cultural given, something that brings the Ga families together as a unit. Even the religious aspects are interpreted as being a fundamental part of the way of life of the Ga – their culture. The confusion is further deepened by the state, which through the National Commission on Culture, considers all traditional festivals including the *Hɔmɔwɔ* as cultural events.[199]

198 An interview with Apostle Samuel Antwi, a former General Secretary of the GPCC, January 30, 2015. Apostle Antwi is currently one of the key executive members of the Church of Pentecost, perhaps the biggest Pentecostal Church in Ghana.

199 See Rijk van Dijk, *Contesting Silence: The Ban on Drumming and Musical Politics of Pentecostalism in Ghana*, 31.

The framing of the noise ban and the festival is critical because it helps to describe the sources of the boundaries that exist between the two actors in conflict. Taking together, the views of the *Wulɔmei* about the deities and ancestors who inhabit the city during the gestation period of the sacred plants and the Pentecostal-Charismatic interpretation of the noise ban as religious, this conflict can be framed as a battle between the gods for spiritual hegemony in the city. In this case, a battle between the Christian God and the Ga *Dzemawɔdzi*. It could also be seen as a competition of belief systems over legitimacy. Therefore, despite the multidimensional nature of the conflict, it should be seen predominantly as a battle between the unseen, but real transcendental beings present within the city.

Conflict Engendered by Similarities: Boundary Expression, Interpretation and Enforcement

Generally, conflicts presuppose the presence of significant differences between parties. In this conflict however, both differences and similarities exist concurrently. I argue that it is rather the similarities between the parties that give rise to the clashes. This is in many ways unusual because conflict studies literature is inundated with evidence of differences rather than similarities been the source of conflicts in multicommunal contexts.[200] These similarities are a means by which the boundary between the Ga traditionalists and the Pentecostal churches is expressed. Some typical similarities include how both groups approach worship as a practice of mediation between adherents and the divine, anchored on certain forms of material media such as sound, touch, bodily experiences and objects like drums, anointing oil, plants among others to render the invisible divine being(s) concrete or make God's presence real. That is, they both require certain authorised forms of media to make manifest the divine.

In other words, both the Ga traditionalists and the Pentecostals

200 Gary Bouma. (2007). Religious Resurgence, Conflict and the Transformation of Boundaries. In P. Beyer, & L. Beaman, *Religion, Globalization and Culture*. (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV., 2007): 187-202; Samuel Huntington. *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2011).

primarily rely on a form of mediation as a mechanism to encounter God, albeit the particular form of media may vary depending on the group. Along with utilising mediation to encounter the divine, it is obvious that these two groups live in the same urban space, they share similar notions of how to create communities through religious practices, share common ideas about family and occasionally, they share the same ethnic identities.[201]

In line with a similar notion of mediation between these two groups, it is critical to highlight that media such as sound and sonic practices, the drum as a sacred instrument, music and performances are not only similarly employed by both groups, but they are also the means through which the boundaries between them are enforced. The following are empirically grounded illustrations of how essential these media forms are and the ways in which they are employed in relation to the divine.

Sound and Aural Practices of Pentecostals and Ga Traditionalists

The confrontations between the two parties are about sound or the absence of it. It is important then to consider how sound and sonic practices of the two communities lead to the annual clashes. Sound is central to both Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity and indigenous religions – be it loud sound, noise or silence. Churches were generally places to preserve a quiet environment as they respected the need for quiet contemplation.[202] Today, this could be true for some historical mission churches like the Presbyterian Church of Ghana and the Methodist Church where the need for silence is embedded in their liturgy. Unlike these churches, Pentecostal liturgy is characterised by sound that is heightened

201 There are members of the Ga communities, who are Pentecostal-Charismatic Christians as well. Some among the native Ga, who despite being Christians also participate in traditional rituals – a clear case of double or sometimes, multiple belonging. Moreover, there are Ga people, usually Pentecostal Christians who do not want to be associated with the rituals championed by the traditionalists.

202 Arkette, "Sounds Like City," 167

through amplification via modern public address systems.[203] Pentecostal-Charismatics usually refer to their church halls as auditoriums, which implies the place and significance of sound and performances. It also indicates the centrality of experience in their services. These churches as sonic vessels tend to give worshippers what Arkette calls a "multisensory experience of the sacred." Sounds in Pentecostal-Charismatic services include but not limited to calls-and-responses, handclapping, sounds of moans and groans in prayer, shouts of joy and music. For them public noise is a necessary requirement as it gives significance to their beliefs and doctrines, without which they lack expressive forms.[204] The loud sonic practices are mostly anchored on several biblical texts, but the commonly utilised ones are Old Testament texts such as "make a joyful noise unto the Lord"[205] and "…praise him with loud clashing cymbals."[206]

Similarly, sound whether in the form of silence or noise is a precursor for all celebrations in Kpele indigenous religion and the wider Ga society. Sounds are used in rituals such as libation where a customary call-and-response approach is employed. Sounds are vital for spirit possession of mediums common in Kpele religion. Indeed, the confrontations between the Ga traditionalists and the churches is one that deals with silence and noise. The clashes are mostly seen as showing the difference between the two actors but, it also reveals the remarkable similarities between them – the centrality of sound to both religions. It is this significance of sound that leads to the clashes between them. On the one hand, the aural boundaries of the churches clearly go beyond the confines of their church buildings and travel as far as possible. This spill over of sound

203 This does not mean silence is completely absent in these churches. It is just not prominent at the congregational level. At the individual level, there are seasons of quiet time for prayer and Bible study.

204 Isaac Weiner, *Religion Out Loud: Religious Sound, Public Space, and American Pluralism.* (New York: New York University Press, 2014).

205 Psalm 66:1-4 and Psalm 100:1, 4; Psalm 66:1-4 for example, extends an invitation to all the earth to worship. Pentecostals believe that in this context, worship is to be expressed by shouting with joy as the worshippers sing in the name God.

206 Psalm 150:4-6

outside the walls of the churches results from their tendency for loud forms of worship, preaching, prayer and music. On the other hand, during this 30-day period, the traditionalists require silence for the deities and ancestors to work on behalf of the Ga community. It is this similarity in the deployment of sound that causes the tension between the Ga traditionalists and the churches.

During the ritual period, the boundary between what is tolerable sound and noise is at the discretion of the traditionalists. Therefore, the Pentecostals' have sometimes complained of been targeted by the traditionalists because at the time they are clamping down on the churches, loud sounds of the Muslim call to azaan (adhan) coming from mosques within the city escapes the crack down.

Additionally, loud sounds coming from eateries, bars, vehicular traffic and industrial areas are not classified as noise worthy of distracting the deities. This makes what the traditionalists refer to as noise very complicated to define. It is anchored in the relationship they have with a particular group. In this sense, the meaning of noise is not fixed as it becomes valuable in negotiating the boundaries between these two actors. What the Pentecostals consider as religious sound is seen as nuisance by the Ga traditionalists during the period of the noise ban. Thus, the noise ban is vigorously implemented by the traditionalists to demarcate the outsiders from their community.

The Drum as a Sacred Instrument in Indigenous Religions and Pentecostalism

The sound of drums is an integral medium to both Pentecostals and Ga traditionalists relative to their encounter with divinity. Drum generated sounds are clearly a source of scaredness in Kpele religion of the Ga because it heralds every key religious event. As part of the implementation of the noise ban to usher in the celebration of the *Hɔmɔwɔ* festival, special talking drums (Obonu) are played to welcome the deities and ancestors

into the city of Accra, to look after the maturation of the planted sacred crops. This is critical because in Ga traditional cosmology, if these plants sprout and do well, it signifies a good and prosperous year ahead. On the other hand, if the planted sacred crops fail to germinate, it is a sign of a bad impending year. Also, the end of this 30-day ban on drumming and noisemaking is marked by the sounds of the Obonu, the most sacred drums of the Ga traditionalists.

The Obonu drums are so sacred that they are played only twice in a year to mark the beginning and lifting of the noise ban, what is known as the Odadaa. Thereafter, the Obonu is kept in a secret sacred place until the next year. It is believed that the sound of the Obonu drums sets the Ga universe in equilibrium. Margaret Field, the British anthropologist states that in the past, no one beat secular drums, whistled, beat a cooking pot with a spoon or played an instrument during the noise ban in Accra. There was no wailing for the dead, no private dance, shouting, or celebration allowed within the city once the Obonu has been played.[207]

Therefore, sounds coming from the Pentecostal-Charismatic churches at the sacred period is considered as noise and a distraction to the Ga universe. To put it differently, the sounds are seen as what Bailey calls, "sound out of place"[208] to the Ga traditionalists. Accordingly, the forceful implementation of the noise ban can be framed as a response to the Christians interrupting the order in the religious space. The application of the ban indicates the continuous clout the traditionalists still have even in a cosmopolitan city space. That is, because of the first comer status, the traditionalists' claim the capacity to regulate who and what can be heard within the boundaries of Accra at a particular time. This is usually opposed by the churches who lay claim to the national constitutional provisions on their rights to worship. This disagreement is what eventually

207 Margaret Field, *Religion and Medicine of the Ga People.* (London: Oxford University Press, 1937).

208 Bailey, *Breaking the Sound Barrier*, 195.

results in clashes between the two groups.

Similarly, drums are very important musical instruments in Pentecostal-Charismatic spirituality. The sounds of drums whether traditional or western play an essential role in their worship, albeit traditional drums are usually sanctified and dedicated to God before it is played in church.[209] Drums permeate Pentecostal liturgy, to the extent that, even in churches where a complete set of musical instruments is absent, one is likely to see a set of drums. It is the first go to musical instrument among small and budding churches in this movement. Drum appellation, a traditional practice where the sound of the drum is used to evoke ancestral spirits and deities have been adopted by Pentecostal churches as part of an inculturation process. Drum appellations are used in these churches to invoke the presence of the Holy Spirit during worship. This shows the centrality of drums as a sacred instrument in both indigenous religions and Pentecostal Christianity. The similarity in the role of the sound of the drum rather than bringing the two groups together leads to a conflict because of the tendency of both groups to build boundaries between 'us' and 'them'.

Music as Sound[210] and Sound as Performance

The term performance is used today to refer to diverse activities including the functioning of a car and the state of an investment. It was originally used in reference to a presentation of music, a play or even a text. This is the context within which I use the term: "the act of presenting something."[211] Pentecostal liturgy[212] and indigenous religious rituals are inseparably linked with performance, which involves verbal and non-verbal movement

209 It is believed that some of the trees that are fell for traditional drums are inhabited by deities. Therefore, these drums needed to be prayed on and sanctified for God's use.

210 Music is a manifestation of sound; it is organised sound.

211 E.C.F.A Schillebeeckx, (2000). 'Naar een herontdekking van de christelijke sacramenten. Ritualisering van religieuze momenten in het alledaagse leven.' *Tijdschrift voor theologie 40* (2000): 164- 87.

212 In Christian liturgical studies, church liturgy is also considered as a ritual.

of the body. This gestural behaviour indicates an expression of thought. Sound is made through people's actions during ritual times in both cases, whether through playing a musical instrument, singing, handclapping, chanting, or stamping of feet etc. Sound in all its manifestations including music (organised sound) requires performance. Music, performance and ritual are therefore inextricably linked.

Music and performances are important conduits for community mobilisation in Ghana. Among the Ga traditionalists, music and performances like dance are critical means of establishing a sense of belonging, exposing social miscreants[213] and admonishing indecorous members of the community.[214]

Indeed, music and performances are utilised to safeguard social cohesion among the Ga communities.[215] In part, the noise ban serves as a way of depriving the Ga communities of music and dance as they prepare for the most important celebration on the Kpele religious calendar, the *Hɔmɔwɔ* festival. This culminates in a sense of release when the festival gets underway. Thus music and performances coming from Pentecostal churches is seen as not only breaking social and religious order but also an anti-climax to the celebration of the festival. Performances by spirit mediums are also a common feature on the Ga traditional calendar. So, music and performances play an important role during ritual periods in indigenous religions.

Also, in Pentecostal-Charismatic churches, the services are alive with different varieties of music and performances. It is one of the main means of encountering the Holy Spirit in a service. Pentecostal worship is, in effect, a channel of communication to God, who is present in the service. Moreover, music and performances are important avenues for building communal cohesion and offering a sense of release to members. Mookgo

213 Marion Kilson. *African Urban Kinsmen: The Ga of Central Accra.* (London: C. Hurst & Company, 1974).

214 Margaret Field, *Social Organization of the Ga People.* (London: The Crown Agents for the Colonies, 1940).

215 Field, *Religion and Medicine of the Ga People,* 48.

Kgatle has even argued that music is a form of therapeutic agent for Pentecostal Christians; it offers emotional therapy.[216] Additionally, being 'born-again' in the Pentecostal context is about a rapture with the past.

Therefore, Pentecostal-Charismatic churches encourage their members to stand back from 'worldly music', night clubs and other sources of sound that are deemed secular and demonic. Accordingly, the music and dance offered in churches, in many ways, serve as alternatives to the 'wordly' sources by delivering the same sense of emotional release. Music and performances are therefore not only considered critical in encountering the divine for both the Ga traditionalists and the churches, but also socially relevant for both communities. These commonalities rather than engendering a peaceful coexistence between the parties, become the channels through which boundaries are constructed and enforced between them. This is so because of the tendency of the churches to classify indigenous religions as inferior to Pentecostal Christianity and the Ga traditionalists' predisposition to always see Pentecostals in the city as 'foreigners' who have invaded their land. The apparent mutual exclusivity of their claims leads to the inevitable conflict and deadlock.

Conclusion

The relationship between the Pentecostal-Charismatic churches and indigenous religious groups in Ghana is generally complicated. Although many of their practices are clearly influenced by indigenous cultures, this group of churches tend to have a rather rocky relationship with indigenous religions. The ban on drumming and noisemaking in Accra during the *Hɔmɔwɔ* festival presents a good platform to interrogate the relationship between Pentecostal-Charismatic churches and the Ga traditionalists. First, despite the multifaceted nature of the confrontations, it could be inferred that the conflict is a

216 Mookgo Kgatle, Singing as a Therapeutic Agent in Pentecostal Worship. *Verbum et Ecclesia* 40 (1) (2019): 4

spiritual battle between the Ga deities and Yahweh, the God of the Pentecostals. These transcendental beings are largely unseen, but they are considered real, powerful, and present in the city by their respective adherents. Therefore, the strength of the belief in their respective divinities is what translates into the physical confrontations.

Second, there are obvious similarities in the way the two groups approach worship mainly because they both require media in order to make the invisible transcendent beings visible. Sound and performances are critical media that cause the divine beings to materialise in order for the adherents to experience the divine. They both require sound and performances to encounter the divine - albeit during this particular ritual period (noise ban), the Ga traditionalists require silence and the Pentecostals produce noise. Silence and noise are both forms of sound, which can be considered on a continuum. Similarities are usually considered as the foundation for pursuing dialogue between groups while differences usually lead to conflicts. Nevertheless, in the clashes between the Pentecostal-Charismatic groups and the Ga traditionalists, it is not the differences that lead to conflict but rather the similarities between them. The groups clash because they see each other as obstructing the mechanism for making the invisible transcendent visible with the 'wrong' form of sound. It ultimately amounts to one party preventing the other from experiencing the presence of their respective transcendental being(s). This explains why the parties in conflict build boundaries instead of bridges.

Abstract

Pentecostal-Charismatic churches in African cities are noted for exuberant around-the-clock church services and evangelistic activities. While most cities are themselves very loud spaces due to commercial activities, religious sounds from this Christian community occupy a prominent place in the urban soundscape. The sound practices of the Pentecostal churches in Accra are not only a source of controversy throughout the

year, it also leads to clashes with Ga traditionalists in the city during the implementation of the annual ban on drumming and noisemaking, prior to the celebration of *Hɔmɔwɔ*,[217] the customary festival. Approaching the nexus of religion and conflict through sonic practices, this paper examines how the aural practices of Pentecostal churches and Ga traditionalists become the conduit for confrontation between the two groups. Comparing the two communities, the paper argues that (i) the conflict is primarily a spiritual struggle between the two groups and (ii) behind the apparent antagonism between Pentecostal Christianity and indigenous religions are similarities in their sonic practices in relation to the spiritual, which is a significant source of the conflict.

217 *Hɔmɔwɔ* translates as 'hooting at hunger'. It is the most essential celebration in the *Kpele* religion of the Ga of Ghana, who are the indigenes of the Greater Accra Region.