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The Legitimation and Professionalization of Ritual Service in South Togo

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Abstract. – Indigenous religious organizations in southern Togo represent organized means of professionalizing and legitimating indigenous religious specialists that provide ritual services such as healing to congregations and communities. Drawing upon interviews with religious specialists and observations surrounding these organizations, this article ethnographically details a particular organization whose principal aim is to codify and enforce social sanctions that originate in Vodu law. The article concludes that in this case study processes of formalization and professionalization signify processes of "NGOization," the adoption of the "NGO form" that allows for the representation of beliefs and people not typically represented by the state or market. *[Togo, NGO, vodu, social change, professionalization, ritual]*

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In 2013, I was conducting research in Gbedala, a small fishing hamlet of approximately 1,600 ethnic Ewe individuals, along the coast in southern Togo. I was specifically studying the ritual economics of Vodu, which is practiced by almost all members of the community. On a hot July morning, I wandered to the compound of a man named Teteh Kodzipui, whom I had known for some time and interviewed on several occasions. Teteh is a *sofoga* (master priest) of Vodu and manages the main Vodu shrine in Gbedala. Aware of how Vodu is perceived around the world and also of the ongoing, rancorous battles over representation fought against Christian missionaries and local converts, Teteh always took time to educate outsiders such as myself on the "truth" of Vodu.

Walking through the sandy maze of thatched walls, I passed through the ceremonial courtyard and then the entrance to the shrine itself. Here, the god-fetishes are housed and rituals of healing, divination, and sacrifice are held daily. I found Teteh sitting in a chair in the sand, waiting. He stood, moving slowly because an old training injury gained from his stint in the Ghanaian military, and motioned for me to follow him into his sitting room. Inside, I questioned him about religious practices at his shrine. He patiently talked me through the logics of animal sacrifice, the influence of Islam on Vodu ceremony, and so on. He seemed bored and much relieved when a visitor appeared. An elderly man came to seek Teteh's council. While they spoke, I perused Teteh's eclectic collection of books, papers, and objects: a Qur'an, a book on Taoist geomancy from a religious conference in Accra, numerous pictures of Hindu gods given to him by a European visitor, a pink Crucifix hung around a hurricane lamp. My attention settled on a pile of small booklets. I set them on my lap and began turning over thick pages of titles, photos, signatures, and seals. They were membership booklets. Suddenly aware that I may be prying, I looked up to see the elderly gentleman was leaving and Teteh turning his attention to me. "Aaaahh," he said. "Do those interest you?" He gently took them from me. "This one is my membership in the fishermen's union. I don't fish anymore but I've been a member for decades. This is my membership in the Young *Sofo's* Association from years ago. I helped start that." His inter-

est intensified as he sifted through the multiple organizations that he was a member of or with which he was connected.

As we talked, Teteh's younger brother, Atsu, came into the sitting room. I had come to know Atsu quite well. A handsome man with a gregarious and intelligent air, Atsu was an emerging community leader and one of those key research participants to whom anthropologists go when they find themselves exasperated by their own lack of comprehension. As we shook hands, Teteh briefed him on our discussion. Atsu said, "You're interested in all of this?" Teteh added, "Atsu is the representative of the community to the Federation of Togolese Traditional Religions!" Atsu tried to remain humble, but beamed with pride at this prestigious status.

In the conversation that followed, there erupted that mélange of acronyms familiar to anthropologists that study NGO lifeworlds. My fieldnotes became a jumbled mess as I delineated names, dates, associations, organizations, and offices. This article represents the analysis that emerged from such interviews, encounters, and observations surrounding religious organizations in this community in South Togo. These organizations of indigenous priests (*sofos*) conform to the cosmopolitan "NGO form" in many ways, yet they are grounded in cultural history and meaning that are reflected in particular forms of organizational practice and purpose. Specifically, indigenous religious organizations here represent public, organized means of professionalizing and legitimating the religious specialists that provide ritual services such as healing, conflict resolution, and adjudication to community members. Through this analysis, I will contribute to theorizations of "NGOs" as innovative social forms, capable of representation and empowerment of ideas or people not typically represented by the state or market. First, I will briefly explore anthropological inquiry regarding West African organization and regional histories of Vodu. Next, I ethnographically detail a particular organization in a particular context whose principal aim is to codify and enforce social sanctions that originate in Vodu law. The effect is to formalize and professionalize those that provide ritual services. This article concludes that in this case study, these processes of formalization and professionalization signify processes of "NGOization," the adoption and adaptation of the "NGO form" that allows for the production of recognizable, legitimate, and credible organizations in the eyes of the state and local Vodu adherents. In a social and historical context where Vodu practitioners must often defend themselves and their beliefs, such an organizational form becomes a powerful weapon of representation.

Anthropology and the "NGO"

Early anthropological studies of voluntary and common interest associations in West Africa adopted a Marxist, functionalist, or structuralist approach, creating typologies of associations that were generally understood as adaptive mechanisms to social and technological changes inherent to widespread rural-urban migrations occurring in West Africa throughout the mid twentieth century.[1] For these migrants, kinship and territory were not efficient social groupings in diverse urban environments and so common interests based on occupation or religious practice became a new basis for organizing. Giving shape to new class identities, these organizations proved more open and flexible and so were understood by anthropologists as better adapted to the modernity of urban life.

By the 1980s and 1990s, organization studies in sub-Saharan Africa grew more political and turned their attention to the emerging nongovernmental (NGO) sector and its potential as a "magic bullet" for human rights and democratic participation. Inspired by state/civil society analytical lenses, scholars focused on the explosion of "popular organizations": occupational groups, religious organizations, women's and students' organizations, and so on. Generally speaking, these studies understood that economic and political crises in the 1980s led to a retreat of the state, creating sociopolitical spaces in which associations and NGOs have grown, become more assertive, and in some instances more significant to the lives of local people than institutions of the state (Bratton 1989; Shaw 1990).

Following this "NGO Decade" of the 1980s (Hearn 2007) and the "NGO Boom" of the 1990s (Alvarez 1999), NGOs became established institutions around the globe and anthropological interest has quickly followed. Critical NGO studies emerged out of analyses of social movements and development studies of the 1990s that typically took as their theoretical foundations poststructuralism, postcolonial studies, and theories of

1 Gugler and Flanagan (1978); Kerri (1976); Little (1959, 1965); Soen and Comarmond (1971).

globalization and neoliberalism.[2] By the 2010s, explorations in areas of new moral economies (Fassin 2012), meanings of "doing good" (Lashaw et al. 2017), "aidnography" (Mosse 2011; Lewis and Mosse 2006), and feminism (Bernal and Grewal 2014) pervaded NGO studies in anthropology. These studies situate organizations into the complexities, ambiguities, and contradictions inherent to the lives of the members that comprise them and recognize that the life histories and motivations of individuals shape the nature and activities of NGOs (Fechter and Hindman 2010; Yarrow 2008). These studies also share an implicit understanding of the "NGO form" (Bernal and Grewal 2014: 6–9). Given the immense diversity of NGOs, it is difficult to assess what they are. There is a better agreement on what they are not: governments or market-driven private corporations. The designation "nongovernmental," vague and deceptive as it is, allows organizations an alternative status, making NGOs a desirable form for representing groups and ideologies that cannot be achieved through the state or market. To make these groups and ideologies recognizable and legible to states, donors (often corporations), other NGOs, and media, the NGO form mimics bureaucratic state and corporate organizational forms: the formalization of hierarchal statuses and roles, bureaucratic accounting and administrative procedures, barriers or conditions to formal membership, and so on. This mimicking is what makes the NGO less radical and more acceptable by states and the general public than social movements or alternative forms of representation such as unions (Bernal and Grewal 2014: 10).

The processes by which alternative forms transform into, or are overtaken by, the NGO form represent processes of "NGOization." Working in Ghana, Hodžić (2014: 223) scrutinizes the "NGOization" of feminist social movements, critiquing the "NGOization paradigm" as a black-and-white, closed circuit of truth claims based on anti-institutionalism (223). Yet she defines observable NGOization processes. For actors in her study, NGOization is viewed negatively as the professionalization, formalization, and de-radicalization of organic, militant, and anti-hierarchal social movements. The informal becomes professional. Participants become staff. Experience-oriented movements become project-oriented organizations. In other words, political feminism becomes recognizable, legible, and, therefore, credible in the eyes of state and transnational institutions and organizations. In this article, I borrow Bernal and Grewal (2014) and Hodžić's (2014) terminology yet deploy these concepts in a more expansive manner to demonstrate that in southern Togo, the adoption of a NGO form by ritual service providers can be an empowering means of social representation in a context where repression and regulation has historical precedent.

Regulating Vodu

Following the Asante Empire's defeat and collapse in the dying years of the nineteenth century, nascent colonial processes came to fruition as the Gold Coast Colony came under domination by the British and Togoland was rendered a German protectorate. With the consolidation of colonial control, new gods dedicated to destroy witchcraft exploded onto the religious landscape of the Volta region. These gods originated in the northern savanna territories of modern Ghana, an area imagined by coastal peoples such as the Ewe as wild, uncivilized, and possessing immense spiritual power. Ritual entrepreneurs carried these gods to the coast where their shrines quickly grew in size and popularity. In order to survive and grow, priests of these new gods involved themselves in a range of activities that provided socio-economic support in addition to spiritual services. Social rejects and those of low social status flocked to these new shrines as they provided a platform for expressing individual interests and adaptation to quickly changing socio-economic contexts (Venkatachalam 2015: 111f.). By the 1940s, the gods (*trowo*) were assembled into the pantheon today known as Gorovodu: Kunde, king, father, keeper of the law; Ablewa, mother, spirit of markets, and women; Sacra Bode, steed, slave, God of Earth; Bangede, soldier, hunter; Sunia Kompo, daughter, linguist, doctor; and Nana Wango, Grandmother Crocodile, spirit of the Delta, and fishermen. The gods represented the ultimate defense against colonial regimes: passive-aggressive movements that weaved in and between lines of colonially imposed rules. They blatantly defied and ridiculed, by their persistence to exist, colonially imposed borders, languages, religions, and especially, legal authority. They also represented new pathways towards empowerment by offering those who venerated them through sacrifice, prayer, and libation, their preventative and curative powers over disease, witchcraft, misfortune, and injustice. A key aspect of gaining the power

2 Escobar (1995); Ferguson (1994); Hilhorst (2003); Leve and Karim (2001); Wallace (2004).

of these gods was obedience. Obeying religious law and observing taboos bounded devotees (*tronsi*), priests (*sofo*), and shrines (*tronfome*) together.

Recognizing these threats to their power, colonial authorities banned indigenous healing and ritual as early as 1878. Citing quackery and charlatanism, these prohibitions were a means to restrict traditional authorities and label them as seditious. By the 1930s, however, it was obvious that repressing the gods caused people to resist such bans, leading them to resist the colonial regimes themselves. The only alternative for colonial authorities was "managing" religious orders and ritual specialists in order to minimize their subversiveness. In the Gold Coast Colony, ritual specialists negotiated with authorities to translate "fetishes" into "medicines" and themselves from illegitimate "fetish priests" into "native healers" in order to gain legitimacy in the European imposed social orders (Parker 2011: 258). European administrators also sought to assert their own worldviews and representations. One method, popularized in the 1940s, was certifying ritual service delivery through a financially lucrative licensing process. Prior to this time, indigenous healers, diviners, birth attendants, and herbalists formed loose associations to share knowledge and support their interests. These associations were rooted in local geographies and often grouped around a charismatic leader or practitioner of great reputation (Twumasi and Warren 1986: 120). Seeking to minimize the influence of these associations through institutionalization, the colonial government empowered local government councils to issue licenses to "practitioners of native medicine" in order to bring them under the eyes of authorities (Allman and Parker 2005: 225). Ritual specialists did not avoid or resist, but actively sought these official stamps of approval to legitimize their beliefs and practices in the eyes of their ritual clients, Christian missionaries, medical doctors, scientists, and peers. Those who were licensed soon sought stricter requirements for newcomers to prevent charlatans and "gunk people," as Teteh called them, from becoming licensed and endangering its prestige and legitimacy. A culture of professionalism emerged: collective bodies were organized, distinct bodies of knowledge were cultivated to generate defined expertise, codes of conduct were established, reporting abuse was encouraged, and applicants were vetted.

Following independence, postcolonial governments found themselves navigating similarly complex relations with indigenous shrines, orders, and organizations. In some instances, efforts by governments and transnational groups to reduce Vodu to tradition and folklore in order to "modernize" the West African society intensified in the postcolonial era. For example, following the demise of the Marxist-Leninist regime in Benin that suppressed religious cults of all stripes as feudal and reactionary institutions, Vodu experienced a strong revival. In the 1990s, the Democratic Renewal government sought to secure greater legitimacy and so cultivated relations with indigenous authorities, soliciting their participation in political life. Leaders in the religious community saw an opportunity to legitimate their religious practices. A symposium was held in 1991 and the "Community of Beninois Vodun Cults" was created the same year. Its purpose was to make Vodu a visible and modern institution in public life and create an institution through which local shrines may win government financial support (Forte 2010: 131). Government officials saw other opportunities, particularly in tourism. Vodu was partially renovated into national heritage and "tradition," a palatable marvel for foreign tourists. Use levers of financial support, the government sought to reduce Vodu to the safe, depoliticized realm of folklore. To give a second example from Ghana, local Pentecostal churches pushed the narrative that Vodu shrines practiced sexual slavery and exploited the poor for money. These narratives received tacit support and publicity from sympathetic government authorities and material support from transnational Christian-based NGOs. Facing potential criminalization of their religious practices, shrines in Ghana responded in 1982 by organizing the Afrikania Renaissance Mission (ARM), a socio-religious movement and organization through which members could launch a counter-campaign. At root was the representation of indigenous shrines in the face of ongoing mission activity. By the 2000s, narratives and counter-narratives were fought over in the media and government. Pentecostal NGOs pushed the narrative women were slaves to the shrine-keepers, while ARM pushed the narrative of women as socially privileged role models in their kin lineages. Both built cosmopolitan networks with transnational actors for support and publicity, both sought to push their narrative as a human rights issue, both sought support from the government, and both accused the other of fraudulent representation and misleading the public. Finally, both made use of the cosmopolitan organizational form, "NGO," since NGOs are more likely recognized as legitimate and credible to the state, transnational institutions, and the public than localized forms of associations or unions (Jenkins 2016).

In the southern Togolese community of Gbedala where I conducted ethnographic research, there is a consensus that evangelical protestant converts are waging a campaign of misinformation and demonization against Vodu and other "traditional" religions in order to undermine their legitimacy and efficacy in the eyes of local practitioners (*vodounsi*). During interviews with both *tronsi* and *sofos*, participants repeated that periodic bouts of intense proselytizing in the community by evangelicals from the city is resented, since it is founded on a sense of Christian moral superiority that seeks to somehow shame *vodounsi* away from their religion. Many *vodounsi* in Gbedala note this shaming is not extended to Muslim neighbors, who are treated with more respect. For their part, *vodounsi* view these converts as losing knowledge of their ancestors and traditions. Unlike Muslims, Christians do not kill animals properly, they do not kneel to God when they pray, and they have no respect – for themselves, other people, other beings, and especially their own history and culture.

Teteh and Atsu embody this history and current social change. They are members of numerous organizations that represent professions, values, and strategies needed to support them. Histories of mutual aid, occupational associations, and NGOs all serve as a living catalog of contestations over resources and representation. Organizations are becoming the vanguard of religious representation to "Others" who wish to undermine, exploit, or destroy local belief and practice: scientists exploiting the knowledge of healers and stealing their medicines, missionaries vilifying priests, and development industry projects aimed at "modernizing" Africans away from their "superstitions." Teteh and Atsu are aware that the NGO form is a weapon of legitimation, accepted and understood as a credible means of representation to both outsiders and ritual constituencies.

Professionalizing Ritual Service

In Gorovodu, the border between the material and spiritual worlds is fluid and permeable. The continuous exchange between these worlds is made possible by the agency of religious specialists such as diviners (*bokono*), assistant or sacrificial priest (*bosomfo*), or seers (*amegasi*). The most common specialist is the priest (*sofo*). Defined as herbalists, medicine men, witch doctors, or traditional healers, *sofos* defy typologies because of the multifaceted roles they play in communities and the independence of most religious shrines from any formal authoritative hierarchy. They may be better defined as a social institution through which congregation members engage religiously inspired social structures. The individual is called to serve the gods through a variety of means. One may learn of their future vocation through divination, revelatory illness, or, most often, spirit possession. Once known, the individual apprentices under a senior *sofo* and proceeds through extensive training in herbalism, ritual, prayers, sacrificial practice, and acquiring the knowledge necessary to serve the needs and aspirations of both gods and community.

When visiting Teteh, there is sometimes a line of individuals waiting to see him for matters of divorce, finding work, or mediating an argument. His principle occupation, like all *sofos*, is healing, which may be defined physically, psychologically, emotionally, or spiritually. Gorovodu encompasses and internalizes many aspects of social life including healing and law, which are intricately bound together. The gods demand regular veneration in the form of prayer, sacrifice, and obedience to their moral mandates. In return, the gods bestow spiritual vitality, health, and good fortune. Mediating this spiritual reciprocation is understood through the metaphor of healing. Conflict resolution, dream interpretation, curing disease or psychological ailment, eradicating witchcraft, and so on are all understood as various aspects of healing. Healing is done through ritual and the application of herbal medicine and what defines the reputation of a priest-healer is, in part, his or her knowledge of plant-based medicines and the pharmacopeia they have at their disposal (Montgomery and Vannier 2017). Teteh's medicinal herbs are cultivated in the community's Sacred Forest and then kept in an antechamber in the shrine. No one except himself or an assistant under very close supervision may use them. These precautions are a means of quality control that assure his clients and patients that his treatments are effective. Comparatively, hospitals nearby in Lomé have done little to win the confidence and regular use of local people. Those run by private companies are too expensive. Those run by non-profit organizations are scarce. Government health workers make infrequent visits to inoculate children from polio, measles, yellow fever, and cholera and so shrine-based *sofos* remain the most accessible option for local health care.

I asked Teteh about pay rates for ritual services. He quickly corrected the question,

We don't measure in this way. Any *sofo* that charges you set rates is an imposter. The money is not for me, it is for the shrine to appease the gods. If I take too much, what do you think Kunde will do to me? When you go to a *sofo* and you need Kunde's power, they ask you to provide items and they are provided by you. If they do it and it doesn't work, there is something missing, but if it is done correctly, you will see the positive results. Then you will in turn help me as I helped you. Why am I a *sofo* in this area and not rich? For me, my sources in life depend on my adepts, those who come to me to be baptized into Vodu. If I don't do well by them, the spirits will not do well by me.

Sofos serve the gods in order to serve their ritual constituencies. In doing so, they are expected to demonstrate humility and exercise self-control. It was emphasized during interviews with *tronsi* and *sofos* alike that *sofos* should never use their status to gain money, take bribes, or otherwise influence others outside of their role as *sofo*. This inevitably happens. *Sofos* may become ordained and establish a shrine as a business just to enrich themselves. Some may be initiated in order to set up a tourist business that caters to foreigners seeking the exotic. The unscrupulous take advantage of the desperate and the pursuit of financial gain or uncontrolled sexual desire has felled more than one *sofo* in the region. One reason given for failure in morality or self-discipline is that the life of a shrine-keeper is expensive. Maintaining relationships with the gods through libations and sacrifice is expensive and revenue from religious services is meager due to the poverty of the typical worshipper. Ritual service providers organize to collectively alleviate rising costs and shrinking revenues and provide an institutional means of mediating the rewards and difficulties that accompany the veneration of the gods.

Such an organization is best demonstrated through the membership of which Teteh is most proud, the Traditional Association of Kunde (*Association traditionnelle de Kounde*, ATRAKO) originated in Gbedala in 2004. ATRAKO formally began when Teteh and several others voted on an executive committee with himself as president and the other *sofos* of Gbedala assuming formal committee roles of vice-president, secretary, assistant secretary, treasurer, assistant treasurer, three councilors, an honorary president, and three men-at-arms. The reason for such exact formal offices is that they are required by the *Fédération des religions traditionnelles du Togo* (FRTT). To be recognized by other organizations, professionals, and the government as a legitimate, accountable, representative organization, it is essential to register the organization as a member of the FRTT, an umbrella organization that represents all "legally constituted" religious association or shrines. The purpose of the FRTT is to promote solidarity and mutual assistance among the indigenous religious sects that comprise its membership and promote rigorous adherence to religious law at shrines around the country. To accomplish these goals, the FRTT is very active throughout Togoland. It organizes training seminars, press conferences, television specials, cultural events, and conferences to raise awareness of religious issues facing Togo.

Upon paying the fee of CFA 7,000 (US $14), a bottle of gin for libation, and four passport photos, an individual becomes a member of ATRAKO and is issued a membership card complete with a kola nut and Togolese flag on the cover. "It seems easy enough," I said after this explanation, "follow the rules and be a member." Teteh and Atsu assured me that the gods, and Kunde most of all, are demanding in their service and obedience. In addition to expectations regarding the cleanliness of one's shrine and an ongoing commitment to the study of herbs and healing, members of ATRAKO are expected to "obey the laws of the fetish," that is, live a moral life according to guidelines outlined by Kunde. To render this mandate unambiguous, ATRAKO sets forth very explicit definitions of right conduct and specific sanctions for failing to observe such standards. These sanctions and standards vary depending on the different social expectations placed on the statuses of priests and adepts. Lesser priests such as *bosomfo* face less expectations and are fined smaller amounts given their smaller incomes. Greater priests such as *bokonosofos* (divining priest healers) and *sofoga* (master priests) are seen as community leaders and are expected to adhere to rigid standards of conduct. When Teteh was president of ATRAKO, he would typically hear of disobedience when *tronsi* from surrounding communities would come and formally complain about a *sofo*'s behavior. Once accused, the *sofo* would be brought to Teteh's shrine and divination would be cast in front of the fetishes. If the *trowo* (gods) confirm that the law had been broken, the organization would charge the appropriate fine. There were certain cases of serial transgressors or egregious crimes in which Teteh, as president and *sofoga,* unstooled (i. e., defrocked) them, sometimes going to their shrines and confiscating the fetishes.

There are many laws outlined by ATRAKO, for example, adepts that have had sexual relations or handled carcasses of any kind and not washed are

considered impure and must not enter the shrine or pray until they purify themselves; a *bosomfo* cannot replace a *sofo* in the performance of ceremony duties; and *tronsi* that want to adhere to another Gorovodu shrine must pay a fine to do so. Yet Teteh and Atsu emphasized three prohibitions that were the most common and the most mediated by the leadership of the organization. These, I argue, best represent efforts to professionalize ritual service providers.

First, during a religious ceremony in which the gods come to dance the bodies of adepts in possession-trance, members are not allowed to quarrel or cause disorder of any kind in front of the gods. Viewed as part of human nature, *maso-maso* is the general term for social conflict between individuals and groups. It stems from a variety of factors, the most often mentioned by research participants being jealousy (*n'bia*). *N'bia* and *maso-maso* must be minimized or it can tear apart the social fabric that serves as the foundation for an entire community. Disorderly or quarrelsome individuals will be banished the ceremony and perhaps those in the future depending on the seriousness of the offense.

Second, petty theft is a common crime despite the dire spiritual consequences. Those who steal typically end up in front of Kunde's fetish because they sense his power or have been "caught" through possession-trance, divination, or waking revelations. People who come to confess their sins often allude to horrible nightmares where the spirit is punishing them or mysterious misfortunes that bring them to confess at the shrine.

Finally, the most common sanctions deployed by the organization are against adultery. Cited by almost all West African traditional religious organizations as a major transgression (Nukunya 1969: 182), adultery is a grave sin throughout Ewe society. Formerly, traditional authorities such as the head priest or chief had the power to execute adulterers. Colonial courts put an end to this practice, necessitating the rise of associations with the authority to impose sanctions. When I interviewed other members of ATRAKO, they explained sanctions against adultery in terms of community health. An individual having sex with multiple partners risks suffering from *alopli*, which means, "becoming skinny" but commonly refers to suffering from AIDS. Adultery, even promiscuity in general, is viewed as doorways to pollution and disease, both materially in the body and metaphorically in the community. Though spouses of both sexes will often take ritual precautions against the infidelity of their partners, the onus of sexual morality falls heaviest on unmarried women. Identified as a source of *maso-maso* between men and sexually transmitted diseases in the community more generally, unmarried women identified as serial seducers may be driven out "for their own good" (i. e., before Kunde kills her as punishment). Failure to confess infidelity or lying in front of the gods when accused can result in divine punishment such as illness or even death. Cases of rape or adultery that ends in abortion are the most rare and most serious offenses in the eyes of Kunde. Again, guilty *sofos* face destooling or excommunication.

These sanctions are outlined in the association's bylaws and openly detailed by members. I argue they represent religious laws that historically defended against disruptive forces within a lineage, but are now formally codified to encompass the religious community more generally. Formerly, ancestors know the hearts of the living and require their descendants to live in peace by punishing squabbling and incest within the lineage and adultery more generally. Failure to observe religious-kinship mores resulted in serious illness for rule-breakers. Thus, spiritual ancestors enforced sanctions for accepted social norms and provided a religious structure for corporate solidarity within the lineage (Nukunya 1969: 27). With the strengthening of the colonial system came the establishment of British Courts, which eroded the power of traditional authorities, including lineage heads (Nukunya 1969: 180). Sanctions such as exile from the lineage, withholding money, or other redistributed resources, or even, in some cases, execution, lost their mettle or were banned altogether. In this vacuum, religious associations such as ATRAKO emerged to enforce rules and standards that were formerly enforced through kinship. Also, laws enforced within the lineage extend only to those members and must be recognized by only the same. Organizations extend these laws to members of the community more generally and must be recognized by all adherents of the shrine. Rules are themselves legitimated through the authority of the organization's members, typically the highest status priests and adepts, and the authority of the vodus. For Teteh and Atsu, organizations that exist above the lineage and even community level and that are able to enforce these sanctions are crucial to maintaining the credibility of their shrines, reputations as healers, and a positive image of Vodu more generally. Pro-Christian media and authorities are often eager to pounce on misdeeds by shrine-keepers in order to paint Vodu as a system of exploiting the ignorant and superstitious. Professionalizing ritual specialists in a man-

ner recognizable to the media, government, and general public is a powerful counterbalance.

NGOization and Vodu

In Gbedala, there are few basic social services provided by the state. Visiting health clinics are rare and courts that provide justice are viewed as socially and morally distant from the community. Hence, communities' members turn to religious authorities for social services such as health care, law enforcement, and adjudication. Repressed under colonialism as seditious charlatans feeding on the ignorant masses, at independence these authorities sought to bring themselves respectability in the eyes of successive governments and local ritual constituents (Warren et al. 1982: 1873–1875). Towards these ends, organizations arose that provide members a legitimacy that originates from processes of formalization and professionalization that are recognized by ritual clients and state institutions. Formerly, associations were typically informal, local, and experience-based. Today, organizations such as ATRAKO have formalized offices, strict rules that govern the professional behavior of members, and explicit sanctions for failing to adhere to these rules. I argue these processes of formalization and professionalization represent nascent processes of NGOization, adaptations of the NGO form. NGOization represents regulation and legitimation, and, therefore, credibility and reputability for the organization and its individual members. A *sofo*'s attachment to an organization signifies this credibility and legitimacy for a shrine's ritual constituency or other consumers of ritual services. Adherence to the strict moral codes insisted upon by the gods demonstrates piousness, faithfulness, and power.

Under colonialism, licensing processes established by the colonial government were means by which indigenous religious practices and practitioners were brought under the management of governing authorities and the means by which these same practices were legitimated and made credible in the eyes of ritual constituents. Today, in communities such as Gbedala, organizations such as ATRAKO represent a formal, grassroots, collective means of establishing legitimacy and professionalism for *sofos*, so that religious adherents seeking the healing or mediating powers know with whom they are dealing and as a means of defending the religion against outside representation, which frequently means demonization and disparagement. Teteh and Atsu are well aware how their religion and religious practices are viewed. Vodu's extinction has been the goal of many outsiders for over a century. As he would say on the topic, "The hunter is always the one to tell the story, not the hunted." By organizing in and through transnationally recognizable organizational forms, *sofos* such as Atsu and Teteh are seeking to tell the stories of the hunted.

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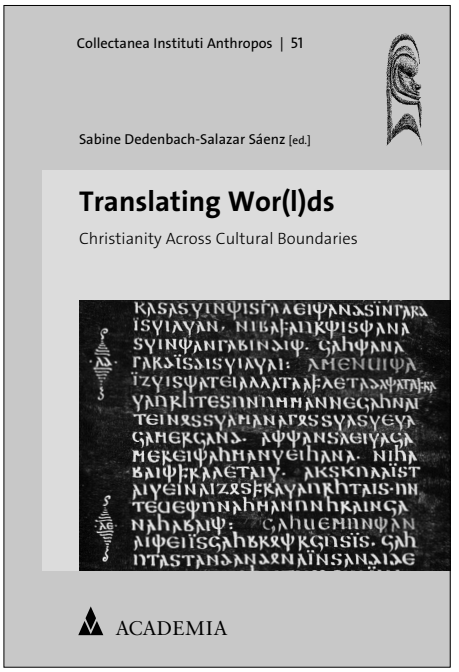
Translation of Religion Across Cultural Boundaries



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This book addresses the translation of culture in the context of religion. The contributions, which analyse texts in literary, ethnohistorical and/or linguistic terms, show how different cultural traditions and languages are communicated across boundaries. They include studies of the missionary context of the Early Middle Ages and of colonially dominated cultures in Latin America, India, China, Africa and Australia, from the 16th to the early 20th century; and they analyse literary works with respect to how they transmit and translate culture: one a Christian play in the context of Islam, the other one a novel of the Haitian diaspora in the USA; another contribution presents the challenges of how the concept of religion itself is conveyed in contemporary scholarly contexts. By using different methodological tools, the authors show the manifold and innovative ways in which this field of the translation of culture can be approached.

With contributions by

Gwilym Colenso, Fiona Darroch, Sabine Dedenbach-Salazar Sáenz, Pär Eliasson, Sarah Irving, Alison Jasper, David Moore, Brian Murdoch, Richard H. Roberts, Frauke Sachse, Roxana Sarion.

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