Editorial

We are delighted to present issue 48.4 of the *Journal of Religion in Africa*. The journal has gone through a transition in leadership, and we want to take this opportunity to thank our former executive editor, Professor Robert Baum, for his excellent service during his tenure. Robert did much of the work to get the essays in this issue sent out for review, and we very much appreciate that as a result we can now invite you to enjoy the rich articles presented here. I must also recognize the Brill staff for their patience and dedication during the transition. Many of them have devoted long hours during COVID-19, and I appreciate their commitment. The editorial board has been very supportive, and our managing editor, Dr. Dianna Bell, has put in countless hours to help me navigate the system.

In the essay “Staging Touba,” Kate Kingsbury discusses the hierophantic vision of Cheikh Amadou Bamba that led to the beginning of the Mouride tradition and the creation of Touba as a holy city. Kingsbury charts the spiritual journey of one family, and discusses Touba’s splendor and spirituality and the pilgrimage that draws millions of pilgrims to visit it. The work ethic of the religion has distinguished the Mourides, and is seen as further evidence of their spiritual, social, political, and economic power. Their celebrations draw political leaders, prompting others to see in the performance of rituals a combination of religion, political theatre, and entertainment.¹ The spiritual performance of the Mourides is not homogenous but is made by differences that reflect generational, gender, geographic, specific order differences, distinctions within the different Mouride orders. Kingsbury rightly argues that this reflects the ‘heteropraxy and heterodoxy’ of the global spread of the Mouride faith community. The performance of piety offers the faithful an opportunity to experience the meaning embedded in the symbols that surround them. Their worship activities create a Mouride identity and provide opportunities to build the traditions of the religious community. The faithful members of the Mourides at Touba are ‘active agents in a dramaturgical cosmological construction of reality’.

Laura Tilghman’s article “The Dead are Dead/Ancestors Never Die” discusses migration, rural linkages, and religious change in northeastern Madagascar. Tilghman’s study addresses two types of spiritual approaches to honoring the dead who have become ancestors. She argues that Catholics, who have a more

tolerant view of burial rites than Protestants, maintain a more vibrant connection with rural areas than Protestants who have stricter rules and question those practices. Tilghman analyzes the growing influence of Pentecostalism and millenarian churches that oppose certain cultural practices, and compares these to the Catholic Church's continued support of certain cultural traditions. Tilghman explores the linkages between urban and rural areas in Africa. She argues that religious beliefs and practices can be an area where Africans' ties to rural areas are tested since such beliefs tend to influence how migrants relate to their home. Pentecostal groups wield significant power on these relationships, given that their teachings reject ancestral practices. Tilghman also argues that Pentecostal and Millenarian churches in urban settings have influenced the beliefs of urban dwellers by convincing them that ancestors are 'dead corpses or conduits of Satan'. These churches argue that Satan causes Christians to engage in cultural and ancestral practices that impede social and economic blessings. Tilghman contrasts this with the local Catholic view that ancestors never die because they are part of their descendants, who now offer prayers to God through the ancestors. Tilghman explores in detail why religious beliefs and affiliation make such a difference, and offers perspectives on the future analysis of rural-urban relations in the context of religious change.

Tom Kwanya's essay discusses the stigmatization of indigenous knowledge in the practice of night-running. The practitioners of this "sport" are believed to run naked in the darkness and cause havoc in villages in Western Kenya. The essay begins with discussions of indigenous knowledge as local knowledge that has been held in a community for a long time. Because it involves skills in different areas of life, the practice of night running is considered part of local knowledge. The study maps night-running's history, the mysteries that surround it, the positive and negative views of the practice, and the impact stigmatization has had. The behavior can be inherited from ancestors, or can be learned. Some people associate night-runners with people who take drugs. Others believe some foreign agent possesses participants and forces them to engage in night-running, or that the participants are under some compulsion to practice it. The supposed benefits of the "sport" include the belief that night-runners provide additional security to their neighborhoods and can attract tourism. However, Kwanya also discusses the harmful consequences of night running, such as damaging villagers' property and frightening the residents. He argues that the drawbacks far outweigh the benefits. Night running has been stigmatized because it is 'harmful, backward, immoral, and antisocial'.

These essays invite critical reflection on religious and cultural practice as it is appropriated and adapted in an urban context, as is the case with the Mourides and their holy city. Tilghman's essay demonstrates that religious practitioners view rituals of the past in different ways. Kwanya's essay discusses a different kind of ritual, one carried out by individual community members with special abilities. These practices, even if seen as rituals, are being criticized today. The essays demonstrate a reality that undergirds religious experience, that is, rituals and religious practices are always contested and adapted in each generation.

Elias Kifon Bongmba

Editor in Chief

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Notes

- 1 O'Brien, 2003, Coulon, Guéye, 2002.