Walter C. Ihejirika[1]
University of Port Harcourt,
Nigeria

AUTORITA' AND AUTOREVOLEZZA: EXPLAINING CONTESTATIONS BETWEEN POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS LEADERS IN THE AGE OF THE NEW MEDIA

Abstract

In many African countries, since the nineties, there is a subtle contest going on between religious and political leaders. At the heart of this contest is what Rosalind Hackett described as the redefinition of the categories of power and status, which cease to be primarily tied to material wealth or political connection, but rather to spiritual authority and revelation. This is a struggle for the hegemonic control of the society in the Gramscian sense of the term. While political leaders may use the coercive arms of the state – military might as well as their control of the financial resources of the state to impose their authority, religious leaders on the other hand assume the posture of moral icons, personalities endowed with superior knowledge based on divine revelation. As these contestations are played out in the public sphere, the way the leaders are able to portray themselves to their public will determine their followership. This explains the importance of mediation in the process of politico-religious contestations. In the eyes of the public, political leaders have the physical or raw power - the Italian concept of *autorita*; while the religious leaders have the moral power - *autorevolezza*. This paper uses these concepts as metaphors to present a general explanation of how the contestation between religious and political leaders plays out in the public sphere of the new media.

Key words: Religious power; political power; politics of recognition, public sphere; new media; mediated religion, hegemony; sacred canopy.

1. Introduction

An incident which happened in the month of August 2010 in Imo State, one of the states in the Eastern parts of Nigeria will help situate this paper: A Catholic priest, returning from an evening activity, was alleged to have obstructed the convoy of the State Governor who was travelling on the same route. [2] The first report by a Catholic

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1   Wlhejirika@yahoo.com

2   In Nigeria, it is common occurrence for political leaders to be accompanied by long convoys, preceded by siren blaring outriders, escort cars and truck loads of gun-toting police men and soldiers. High ranking military personnel, expatriate workers are also accorded this 'unusual' privilege. Despite public announcements by the police indicating the categories of people who can be

newspaper which brought the incident to public attention narrated thus:

The security aides of the governor ordered the priest out of his car, forced him into their jeep and drove him to the Government House Owerri, where they handed him over to the Governor's Chief Security Officer (CSO). After interrogating the clergyman, the CSO took several photographs of him before handing him over to the State Security Service (SSS) where he was thoroughly dehumanized, despite explanation that he had no intention to obstruct the Governor's convoy and that the road was too narrow with a ditch at the sides, adding that within the circumstance, he parked well enough which enabled other vehicles in the convoy to pass. According to the priest, though he was not physically assaulted, he was psychologically and emotionally humiliated as he was ordered to remove his soutane, trousers and inner wear, except his underwear (shorts), before he was thrown into the cell at about 9 pm. He remained in the cell till 8 pm on Monday, when the Director of SSS released him on bail with an order to report back the next day at 11 am. When he returned as instructed, he was ordered to write an apology for obstructing the Governor's convoy as a condition for granting him further bail. When the priest failed to do that, he was again detained. (Leader Newspaper, 15-22 August, 2010, p.1)

After this newspaper report, the Catholic population of the State - (made up of more than 50% of the citizenry) was enraged. The event became the topic of discussion in every part of the State. It was carried in some national dailies and discussed in internet chat-rooms used by Nigerians at home and in the Diaspora. As the news spread, more anecdotal details were added.

With the tempers running high, the Governor went with a full entourage of his cabinet to the Catholic Archbishop of the capital city and apologized. He claimed that the arrest and detention were made without his knowledge. The apology was accepted, and the matter would have rested.

However, a day after the private apology, a local news tabloid, *Newspoint,* which is believed to have links with the government, published a front-page news story titled: "Governor's convoy latest: Female companion indicts priest". The report claimed that the priest, when he was accosted by the security men of the governor was in the company of a young lady who was indecently dressed. A picture of the young lady and the priest was published on the front page. The story claimed that the security men seeing the priest in the company of an indecently dressed lady could not believe that he was a real Catholic priest.

This publication of the photo (which many believed was digitally manipulated) enraged the Catholics the more. The Catholic Women Organisation (made up of all married women in the Catholic Church), organized a demonstration in the State Capital and picketed the government house. Lay Catholic organizations, like the Laity Council, the Knights of Mulumba and St. John International, took up full-page advertorials in both local and national newspapers denouncing the Governor and demanding for a

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accompanied by siren-blaring escort cars, the observance is more in the breach. Officially, the list of those entitled to the use of siren include the President and his Vice, President of the Senate, Speaker of the House of Representatives, Chief Justice of Nigeria, Deputy President of the Senate, Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives, governors and deputy governors. Also cleared by the House to use siren are the Air Force, Police, Para-military, Federal Road Safety Commission, Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps, Fire Service as well as ambulances and those on special duties and in time of emergency. (See, Mojeed and Akinbajo, 2009),

public apology.

After three weeks of tensed face-off, the Governor ate the humble pie, and on the morning of 4th of September 2010, went on air in the state radio and television and tendered unreserved apology to the priest in question, the Catholic Archbishop and the entire Catholic faithful in the State and the country as a whole.

The incident in Imo State of Nigeria could have happened in any other part of the country and the world at large. The main elements of this provincial drama are the same as in any form of contestation between political and religious leaders: religious leaders adopting moral high ground, while political leaders use the coercive arms of the state or blackmail to attempt to subjugate the religious leaders. This was evident the contest between President Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe and the Roman Catholic Archbishop Pius Ncube.

The cleric and his fellow Catholic bishops were very critical of the President and the way he was ruling the country. Their incessant criticism made Mugabe to say in the government-owned newspaper Herald: "once [the bishops] turn political, we regard them as no longer spiritual and our relations with them would be conducted as if we are dealing with political entities and this is quite a dangerous path they have chosen for themselves." (Suite101, 2007) Part of that dangerous path was the celebrated sex scandal which led to the resignation of Archbishop Ncube, a scandal which many felt the government was implicated.[3]

At the heart of the contests between religious and political leaders is the struggle for the projection of power: political leaders have raw power – the Italian concept of *autorita* (the power to command and order people to do things), while religious leaders have moral power - *autorevelezza* (the power to influence people, to be looked upon by others as worthy of respect). Whichever of the two parties is able to sustain his/her power in the contest carries the day. This is because the contestation plays out in the public arena and public opinion is crucial in the determination of the victor. Mediation is thus a crucial aspect in this struggle.

In Africa, the contestation between political and religious leaders has become accentuated since the nineties with the liberalization of the airwaves and the rise of charismatic religious movements in the continent. This is grounded on the fact noted by Rosalind Hackett (1998): "They have reinvented the categories of power and status, which cease to be primarily tied to material wealth or political connection, but rather to spiritual authority and revelation" (p. 262; See also Meyer, 1995a&b) This struggle could be seen from the perspective of the politics of recognition, especially the strand that deals with identity and status.

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3   Reuters, news agency reported the outbreak of the scandal thus: "State-run media has published what it said were photos of Roman Catholic Archbishop Pius Ncube in bed with a woman, a day after the outspoken critic of President Robert Mugabe was sued for adultery. The scandal has dominated radio and television news on Zimbabwe's state-owned stations, beginning on Monday when a state TV crew filmed Ncube being served with the lawsuit. On Tuesday, the government-owned Herald and Chronicle newspapers ran the photos under the headlines "Pius Ncube Shamed" and "Pius in Sex Scandal." Several photos showed a man identified by newspapers as Ncube removing his clothes and lying in bed with a woman. The two dailies said the photos were from a security camera hidden in Ncube's bedroom in Bulawayo by a private investigator hired by Onesimus Sibanda, who is suing Ncube for allegedly having a two-year sexual affair with his wife, Rosemary Sibanda. Adultery is illegal in Zimbabwe. (Chinaka, 2007; See also: McMaster, 2007)

The identity/status model of the politics of recognition

The politics of recognition has been adopted by scholars to explain the efforts of groups within a multi-cultural/ethnic society, especially minority groups, who try to assert their presence in the society. The demand for recognition comes to the fore in situations of contestation between different groups, especially when one of the groups feels unfairly subordinated by the other. (Taylor, 1994; Kiss, 1999; Englund & Nyamonjoh, 2004)

In situations of social contestation, the actors basically try to assert their worth, their importance, and their identity. The idea is that the lack of recognition or misrecognition inflicts harm that threatens the very existence of the affected groups. Thus, the politics of recognition revolves around identity, understood as the self-image that individuals and groups have.

According to Charles Taylor, one of the leading proponents of the theory, the discourse of recognition operates at two levels: "First in the intimate sphere where we understand the formation of identity and the self as taking place in a continuing dialogue and struggle with significant others. And then, in the public sphere, where a politics of equal recognition has come to play a bigger role" (1994, p. 105) Thus, "the projection of an inferior or demeaning image on another can actually distort and oppress to the extent that the image is internalized" (p. 104)

The 'identity model'—starts from the Hegelian idea that identity is constructed dialogically, through a process of mutual recognition. In his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel noted the difference between the mind and its activity in itself, without relation to an object (the subject of psychology) and the mind as essentially related to an object, external or internal – consciousness. (cf. Copleston, 1985, p. 180) The phenomenology of consciousness as developed by Hegel posits existence of another self as the condition of self-consciousness. The first spontaneous reaction of a self confronted with another is to assert its own existence as a self in face of the other. The one self desires to cancel out or annihilate the other self as a means to the triumphant assertion of its own selfhood.

Hegel posited that recognition designates an ideal reciprocal relation between subjects, in which each sees the other both as its equal and also as separate from it. This relation is constitutive for subjectivity: one becomes an individual subject only by virtue of recognizing, and being recognized by, another subject. Recognition from others is thus essential to the development of a sense of self. To be denied recognition—or to be 'misrecognized'—is to suffer both a distortion of one's relation to one's self and an injury to one's identity.

As Fraser rightly noted, proponents of the identity model transpose the Hegelian recognition schema onto the cultural and political terrain. They contend that to belong to a group that is devalued by the dominant culture is to be misrecognized, to suffer a distortion in one's relation to one's self. As a result of repeated encounters with the stigmatizing gaze of a culturally dominant other, the members of disesteemed groups internalize negative self-images and are prevented from developing a healthy cultural identity of their own. (Fraser, 2000)

In this perspective, the politics of recognition aims to repair internal self-dislocation by contesting the dominant culture's demeaning picture of the group. It proposes that

members of misrecognized groups reject such images in favour of new self-representations of their own making, jettisoning internalized, negative identities and joining collectively to produce a self-affirming culture of their own—which, publicly asserted, will gain the respect and esteem of society at large. The result, when successful, is 'recognition': an undistorted relation to oneself.

Going a step further, Fraser sees recognition as a question of social status. From this perspective, what requires recognition is not group-specific identity but the status of individual group members as full partners in social interaction. Misrecognition, accordingly, does not mean the depreciation and deformation of group identity, but social subordination—in the sense of being prevented from participating as a peer in social life. To redress this injustice still requires a politics of recognition, but in the 'status model' this is no longer reduced to a question of identity: rather, it means a politics aimed at overcoming subordination by establishing the misrecognized party as a full member of society, capable of participating on a par with the rest.

Recognition as a matter of status means examining institutionalized patterns of cultural value for their effects on the relative standing of social actors. If and when such patterns constitute actors as peers, capable of participating on a par with one another in social life, then we can speak of reciprocal recognition and status equality. When, in contrast, they constitute some actors as inferior, excluded, wholly other, or simply invisible—in other words, as less than full partners in social interaction—then we can speak of misrecognition and status subordination.

From this perspective, misrecognition is neither a psychic deformation nor a free-standing cultural harm but an institutionalized relation of social subordination. To be misrecognized, accordingly, is not simply to be thought ill of, looked down upon or devalued in others' attitudes, beliefs or representations. It is rather to be denied the status of a full partner in social interaction, as a consequence of institutionalized patterns of cultural value that constitute one as comparatively unworthy of respect or esteem.

What emerges from the foregoing discussion is that an institutionalized pattern of cultural value constitutes some social actors to relate to others in a certain way. If this relationship is seen to demean the status of the other, it provokes contestations. This is what happens when political leaders relate to religious leaders in such a way as to demean their social status, and in like manner, if religious leaders act in such a way as to usurp the position and authority of political leaders in the public arena. Contestation bordering on religious and political issues is one of the areas which the politics of recognition is played out in the African public sphere. (Bereketeab, 2004)

Social actors in a social drama

The politics of recognition involves social actors – in our case – religious and political leaders. These leaders in their social relationship are consciously and unconsciously acting out ingrained scripts of a social drama on the public stage.

Victor Turner drawing on the work of van Genep, sees social drama as aharmonic or disharmonic social process, arising in conflict situations; an eruption from the level surface of ongoing social life, with its interactions, transactions, reciprocities, its customs making for regular, orderly sequences of behavior. (1974, p. 37; 1985, p. 180, 196)

In social dramas, the actors perform according to a script socially ingrained in their consciousness.

David Boje identified four phases of public action in Turner's social drama theory:

1.   Breech of norm-governed social relations that have liminal characteristics, a liminal between more or less stable social processes;

2.   Crisis, during which there is a tendency for the breach to widen and in public forums, representatives of order are dared to grapple with it;

3.   Redressive action, ranging from personal advice and informal mediation or arbitration to formal juridical and legal machinery, and to resolve certain kinds of crisis or legitimate other modes of resolution, to the performance of public ritual.

4.   Reintegration of the disturbed social group, or of the social recognition and legitimation of *irreparable schism* between the contesting parties. (Boje, , 2003)

Victor Turner used the well known contest between Thomas Beckett – the Catholic Archbishop of Canterbury and King Henry of England to illustrate the actuation of a social drama. According to him, the Beckett-Henry confrontation, evince the presence and activity of certain consciously recognized (though not consciously) grasped cultural models in the heads of the main actors which he called root paradigms. These paradigms have reference not only to the current state of social relationships existing or developing between actors but also to the cultural goals, means, ideas, outlooks, current of thought patterns, patterns of belief, and incline them to alliance or divisiveness.

Based on this, Turner concluded:

I believe that Thomas Beckett came more and more fully under the sway of a linked set of such root paradigms as his relationship with Henry moved from the private to the public sphere, from amity to conflict, and in his attitude shifted from self-interest to self-sacrifice on the belief of a system of religious beliefs and practices which itself concealed, even from Becket intuition of the central good of human *communitas*.

(1985, p. 185)

Thus, the culturally engrained root paradigms determine the posturing of both religious and political leaders in situations of contestation. Political leaders seeing themselves as the repositories of social power expect to be recognized as such and treated with utmost respect from all other members of the society. They are the 'commanders' of social affairs, the 'big men and women' of the society. Religious leaders on the other hand see themselves as the custodians of what Peter Berger has called the 'sacred canopy' and as such demand even greater respect than the political leaders. Some detailed presentation of Berger's concept of sacred canopy and the concept of 'big man' in Africa will be important in arriving at the conclusions of this paper.

Autorevolezza – Custodians of the Sacred Canopy

Religious belief systems, according to Peter Berger, are essentially the body of transcendental knowledge which helps to provide individuals the necessary guide for a meaningful life in a society. Without this guide, the individuals within a society will

find it difficult to make sense of their individual and social lives, because the most important element for individuals living in society is meaning.

In formulating his theory, Berger drew insight from the sociology of knowledge which he had elaborated earlier with Thomas Luckmann. He shows the importance of meaning in a society by establishing the dialectical relationship between the individual and society: society as a human product and the individual as a product of society. Society is the product of man's externalising activity, but once formed, it becomes an objective reality which in turns acts upon its creator and is re-appropriated through the process of internalisation.[4]

The end result of man's world-building activity is to impose order and meaningfulness in his world. Through the socially constructed world, a meaningful order, or *nomos* is imposed upon the discrete experiences and meanings of individuals. *Anomy*, or the opposite of *nomos* poses a serious threat to both the individual and society as a whole, and must be kept at bay. According to Berger, the anthropological presupposition for this rejection of *anomy* is a human craving for meaning that appears to have the force of instinct.[5]

Men are congenitally compelled to impose a meaningful order upon reality. Meaninglessness is therefore a nightmare to human beings. "To be in society is to be 'sane' precisely in the sense of being shielded from the ultimate 'insanity' of *anomic* terror. Anomy is unbearable to the point where the individual may seek death in preference to it. Conversely, existence within a *nomic* world may be sought at the cost of life itself, if the individual believes that this ultimate sacrifice has *nomic* significance." (Berger, 1967, p. 22)

Society shelters the individual from the anomic terror, especially in what Berger calls the marginal situations of life. The marginal situation *par excellence* is death. Society does this by integrating the marginal situations into the socially established reality, and encouraging the individual to accept this reality as normal, i.e. to be taken for granted. When this happens, there occurs a merging of the meaning of the socially constructed reality with what are considered to be the fundamental meanings inher-

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4   Berger depicts the dialectic process of society as consisting of three moments: externalization, objectivation and internalization. Externalisation is the ongoing construction of meaning projected into the world, both in the physical and the mental activity of men. Objectivation is the attainment by the products of this activity (again both physical and mental) of a reality that confronts its original producers as a facticity external to and other than themselves. Internalization is the reappropriation by men of this same reality, transforming it once again from structures of the objective world into structures of the subjective consciousness. (Berger, 1967, pp. 4, 19). In this postulation, Berger shows his indebtedness to Karl Marx and Emile Durkheim. He borrows from Marx his idea of dialectics and, the idea of religion as alienating to the individual. Durkheim's idea of religion as a collective representation of the society is also evident in Berger's presentation..

5   Berger's presentation of the need and process of meaning construction, is one aspect of his theory that has been criticised. Hamilton criticises the way Berger presents man's need of meaning, noting that it does not tell us much about why a religious outlook occurs in some situations and in some individuals but not in others. (Hamilton, 1995, p.163). Robert Wuthnow and his companions criticise Berger's theory for its emphasis on subjectivity, concluding that the framework has received more use for appreciating religion than for studying it. (Wuthnow et al, 1984, pp. 30-32, See also Wutnow, 1992 & 1994). John Bowker criticises Berger for putting much stress on the subject in the process of meaning construction, noting that such an over-stress underestimates the fact that external stimuli may actually cause man to react in one way or another. For Bowker, there are important external sources of influence which are not of social or human origin. (Cf. Bowkwer. 1973; 1978; 1981) However, Berger's postulation could be understood from the sociological and phenomenological standpoint from which it was formulated. In these traditions, the subject occupies a central position.

ent in the universe. *Nomos* and cosmos appear to be co-extensive.

In this view then, individuals cannot tolerate a meaningless world. Every society makes an effort to help individuals come to terms with the crisis of meaning which arises when they are faced with baffling and unusual situations and experiences. In Nigeria for instance, when individuals are faced with unusual sickness, unexplainable deaths, perennial poverty – they need answers. According to Berger, religious belief-systems play a central role in providing such answers because religion is required for the conjunction of the *nomos* with the cosmos. Berger sees religion as the human enterprise by which a sacred cosmos is established, or as he puts it, "cosmization in a sacred mode". (p. 25) It is thus that Berger arrives at his definition of religion as, "the human enterprise by which a sacred cosmos is established. …the audacious attempt to conceive the entire universe as humanly significant" (Berger, 1973, pp. 34, 37).[6]

He identified two important functions of religion in the social process of world-building and meaning construction:

(1)   supporting the process of legitimation (that is socially objectivated 'knowledge' that serves to explain and justify the social order); and

(2) offering solutions to the problem of theodicy (that is, the explanation of the anomic phenomena in terms of the *nomos* established in the society in question).[7]

          Religion legitimates social institutions by bestowing upon them an ultimately valid ontological status, that is, by locating them within a sacred and cosmic frame of reference. The historical constructions of human activity are viewed from a vantage point that, in its own self-definition, transcends both history and man. Religion thus legitimates the social order (*nomos*) and relates the disorder that is the antithesis of all socially constructed *nomoi* to that yawning abyss of chaos that is the oldest antagonist of the sacred. To go against the order of society is always to risk plunging into *anomy*. To go against the order of society as religiously legitimated, however is to make a compact with the primeval forces of darkness.

The legitimising efforts of religion occur in the moments of confrontation with the *anomic* situations in society: death, suffering, injustice, etc. Religion explains and

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6   Berger and Luckman differed on their definitions of religion. While Berger views religious phenomenon as similar but not identical to the general human activity of meaning construction, Luckmann argued that religion is but one aspect of the ordinary human enterprise of transcending biological nature through cultural systems. Berger uses the sacred as different from other systems of meaning – the sacred is according to him, "a quality of mysterious and awesome power other than man and yet related to him, which is believed to reside in certain objects or experience." (1973, p. 34). In an earlier book, Berger presented further explanation of his conception of religion. The core of the argument is that in the observable human propensity to order reality, there is an intrinsic impulse to give cosmic scope to this order, an impulse which implies not only that human order in some way corresponds to an order that transcends it, but that this order is of such a character that man can trust himself and his destiny to it. (cf. Berger, 1971, p. 75)

7   This word theodicy was first used by Max Weber. Hamilton summarised this view thus: "… in Weber's view, religion is fundamentally a response to the difficulties and injustices of life which attempts to make sense of them and thereby enables people to cope with them and feel more confident when faced by them. Religious conceptions arise as a result of the fact that life is fundamentally precarious and uncertain. Uncertainty implies that human beings desire certain things but find their desires are not always fulfilled. There is always a discrepancy between what we think ought to be and what actually is. It is the tension generated by this discrepancy which is the source of the religious outlook. … Religion is an attempt to cope with such (discrepancies), and by its mediation with the supernatural world it is believed that material desires can be satisfied. Through its doctrine the apparent injustices of the world can be made to seem only apparent." (Hamilton, 1995, p. 138).

resolves these anomic situations through theodicy.[8] Theodicy directly affects the individual in his concrete life in society. A plausible theodicy permits the individual to integrate the *anomic* experiences of his biography into the socially established *nomos* and its subjective correlate in his own consciousness. It is not happiness that theodicy primarily provides, but meaning which is important both for the individual and the society as a whole. Through theodicy, entire collectives are permitted to integrate anomic events into the *nomos* established in their society.

The sacred canopy created by religion over society functions as a meaningful reference or 'a plausibility structure'[9] for both the individual and the society.[10] Religion therefore suffers when this canopy is perforated or collapses and the human beings in the given society can no longer find in it a meaningful reference point for their lives.

This was the practical inference arrived at by Berger. According to him, the process of secularisation which is spreading through the western world of Christendom, hinges on the disintegration of the Christian theodicy in the consciousness of Western man. "The social theodicy of Christianity (that is, its legitimation of the inequities of society) has been collapsing along with the over-all plausibility of the Christian theodicy …." (1967, p. 79). Explaining further, Berger notes: "Probably for the first time in history, the religious legitimations of the world have lost their plausibility not only for a few intellectuals and other marginal individuals but for broad masses of entire societies. This opened up an acute crisis not only for the nomization of the large social institutions but for that of individual biographies. In other words, there has arisen a problem of 'meaningfulness' not only for such institutions as the state or the economy but for the ordinary routines of everyday life". (1967, pp. 124-125).[11]

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8   For Berger theodicy does not need to entail a complex theoretical system, but rather ranges from an illiterate peasant who ascribes the death of his son to the will of God, to a theologian who writes a treatise on death and suffering. (1967, p. 50). There are however some fundamental attitudes underlying theodicy, deriving essentially from the surrender of the self to the ordering power of society (the same attitude that led to the establishment of the nomoi). In his use of the well-established theological notion of theodicy, Berger is careful to say that his specific meaning varies from that adopted and customary in theology. For him, theodicy focuses upon the human task of legitimation rather than any questioning of the purpose of an almighty and beneficent deity in the light of evil occurrences. (cf. Douglas, 1984, p. 29).

9   Berger and Luckmann see a plausibility structure as the social base for the particular suspension of doubt without which the definition of reality in question cannot be maintained in consciousness. (Luckman & Berger, 1967, p. 175. James Douglas identifies religious plausibility structures with the promise of salvation. He defines salvation as "a state of cognitive and effective well-being within the currently available system of world-interpretation". Continuing, he notes that "salvation is that state of sufficiency of durable plausibility existing for an individual or group, under given ideological and social structural conditions such that no alternative is sought". (1984, pp. 32-33).

10   Robert Wuthnow and his companions (1984) see the presentation of religion as a plausibility structure as one of the weak points of Berger's theory. Describing it as a 'weak' form of sociology-of-knowledge reasoning, he notes that it specifies only the most general connections between social conditions and beliefs and flies in the face of a long tradition of sociological research that has shown relationships between specific types of belief and variations in social class, region, family structure, and political systems. Maintaining only plausibility structure, according to them, diminishes other factors. (pp. 30-32). While taking due note of the criticism, I hold the same view as James Douglas, that the plausibility theory, when applied to religious phenomenon, does not only concern itself with doctrinal schemes or philosophical systems of abstract forms, but also pays due regard to the emotional elements entering into religious conceptions and to the manner in which people hold to and maintain their beliefs. (Douglas, 1984, p. 29).

11   Thomas Luckmann criticises the conception of secularisation as the shrinking reach of the churches. He notes that this conception derives from the sociological view which identifies religion with institutional religion. He described such

If a religious belief system succeeds in serving as a reference point of meaning for individuals and collectives, that is, if it succeeds in erecting a meaningful sacred canopy, it not only maintains adherents, but also the religious leaders become influential in the society and are treated with utmost respect. Thus, the power of religious leaders which we have termed *autorevolezza* hinges on their role as the custodians of the sacred canopy. The extent to which this canopy is perceived to be plausible by majority of people living in the given society determines the level of authority and influence of these leaders.

Autorita – The African 'big men'

As we noted earlier, at the heart of the contestation between religious and political leaders is the public manifestation of power. In other words, which one of these two groups of leaders commands more influence over the people. Within the African context, this point could be rephrased thus: 'Between the two groups, who is the big man?'

The notion of big man or the big man syndrome, or bigmanism, within the context of political science, refers to corrupt, autocratic and often totalitarian rule of countries by a single person. It is generally associated with 'neopatrimonial' states, where there is a framework of formal law and administration but the state is informally captured by patronage networks. The distribution of the spoils of office takes precedence over the formal functions of the state, severely limiting the ability of public officials to make policies in the general interest.

In current usage, the African big man is synonymous with ruthless eccentric leaders who have insatiable passion for self-gratification and with an orgy of self-enrichment. They amass wealth and become sometimes richer than the state. Their wealth affords them the opportunity to engage in patronage politics or the politics of clientelism – whereby their subjects become their clients who have to be bought over with material and financial favours.

This is contrary to the notion of 'big man' in traditional African societies. Ogbu Kalu citing examples from his native Igbo people of southeastern Nigeria notes that the concept represented an achieved person who had, by the support of his 'ikenga', performed all the traditional rituals and taken all the titles, fulfilling the dream of old age lived with dignity. He notes that the title was loaded with moral implications demanding that the persons tongue be as sharp as that of the tiger; that is, he was to always tell the truth according to his conscience. The big man is thus a person endowed with wealth and moral integrity who would carry his carved stool to sit among the elders to judge the community. Similarly, among the Teso people of Uganda, the big man is a person who assiduously climbs through the status ladder by being elected to hold civic offices; while for the people of Malawi, the big man is a 'kuhwima', that is, a 'ripened' or 'empowered' person, a person of immense status and power. (Kalu, 2008, p. 113; See also Jones, 2005; van Djik, 1992)

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identification as regrettable, because it fails to continue the traditions of the classical sociology of religion, and in consequence acquires the character of a rather narrowly conceived sociography of the churches. (Luckmann. 1967, pp. 17-27). Berger, in subsequent books, tried to offset some of the short-comings of his view regarding secularisation. See especially, Berger, 1971, 1973).

According to Karin Barber, the attributes of big men among the Yoruba of western Nigeria include wealth, toughness, educational achievement, position in local government, new professions, leadership in political parties, towns or city affairs. Big men are excepted to sponsor their clients by using their networks of influence to secure them jobs, send their children to school, get them out of trouble or sponsor their various ceremonies like naming, marriage or funeral. In return they owe him their adulation and allegiance. (1991, 183,247)

With political independence and the advent of nation state in Africa, the notion of big man became bastardized. The Sixties were a heady time for Africans. All over the continent colonial flags were being lowered and Africans looked forward to freedom and a glittering future. But for most of the continent the last forty years have been a shattering experience. Since independence, most of the political leaders, the African big men, turned the state into personal fiefdoms; the national coffers become their personal accounts which were used arbitrarily to buy over loyalties. They lived in oasis of extravagant luxury in the middle of a desert of poverty and underdevelopment. (See, Russell, 2000; Beck 2008; Guled, 2009; CSM, 2006).

The Enjoyment of the trappings of political power made most of them not to want to leave it again. This is the genesis of the sit-tight leaders of Africa. The BBC's Peter Lewenstein has compiled a list - in reverse order, by length of continuous time in office - of the 10 African heads of state who have remained in office for more than 25 years. On the number one spot is President Muammar Gaddafi of Libya. Others include, Ben Ali of Tunisia, Blaise Campore of Burkina Faso (21 years each); King Mswati III of Swaziland and Yoweri Museveni of Uganda (23 years each); Paul Biya of Cameroon (26 years), Hosni Mubarak of Egypt (27 years); Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe, (29 years), Eduardo Dos Santos of Angola and Teodoro Obiang Nguema of Equatorial Guinea (30 years).

The big man syndrome has impacted negatively on the economic life of the continent. Abdi Guled's (2009) view aptly captured this scenario: Intimidating monolithic bureaucracy and red tape frustrates entrepreneurship and growth of small businesses in all over Africa. Pervasive corruption and nepotism in all levels of governmental structures undermines public confidence on those at the helm of affairs. Statism and cult of personality thrives supreme, breeding cronyism which supersedes meritocracy. As the rule of law gradually faded in many African countries, draconian rules are being implemented in kangaroo Courts. Dissent remains virtually stifled; political prisoners terrorized in gulags and fear and dismay seizes the dismayed general population. Inevitably, a police state scenario abounds.

Roger Tangari (2000) conducted a general survey of the political factors (especially patronage) on economic performance throughout sub-Saharan Africa. With case studies drawn from Ghana, Zambia and Uganda, the survey noted the difficulties in developing a private enterprise economy. The book explained the problems of African business, involving antagonistic stances of politicians, the state, international financial institutions and foreign investment.

The African big men, the politics of patronage, clientelistic democracy; by whatever name it is called, the concept remains the same: political leaders who bestride the continent like mighty colossus, and expect every other person in the society is be under them and approach them with fear and trembling. The powerful big men of Africa seek total hegemonic control of the state structure as well as the citizenry.

It is the status of these 'powerful big men' of Africa which is being challenged by the 'powerful big men of God'.

Mediated religion in the African public sphere

Three major social phenomena have marked the history of the African continent from the 1990s to the present. These are the second wave of democratization which saw the dethronement of many sit-tight leaders; the liberalization of the broadcast media which ended the State monopoly of the broadcast media in many countries of the continent; and the upsurge of charismatic movements within Christianity and their massive appropriation of the mass media. The Pentecostal use of the media also motivated the in-road of the other religious groups into the world of the new media, especially the broadcast media and the internet. With the growth of the new media, the world of religion and the media has become more closely intertwined.

The dismantling of state monopolies of the broadcast media and the commercialising of airtime and ownership have radically altered the media landscape, with significant consequences for religious communication and practice (See, Nyamnjoh, 2004; Fardon & Furniss, 2000; Meyer, 2006).

Both radio and television stations increased dramatically in the 90s. Hackett citing Panos (the Institute which actively encourages radio pluralism, as well as development-focused broadcasting in Africa and other "developing" regions), noted that between 1993 and 2001 the number of radio stations had grown from 40 to the 426 stations. They also became more diversified and commercialised in that period, moving from the region's capital cities to local neighbourhoods where they broadcast their programs predominantly in FM. Most of these stations are community radios.

Rosalind Hackett provided instances in specific countries on the growth of the broadcast media in the continent: South Africa had over sixty community radio stations and Uganda had 117 private FM stations by 2002. Mali too has over a hundred. Two hundred new local community rural FM solar stations have been installed in the last few years in Niger. Before 2002, Sierra Leone had no community radio stations; by 2006 it had 24, of which 7 were religious. Most countries have at least twenty. This is why Africa is known as the "radio continent". It is often said that there are more homes with radios than access to running water in Africa. (Hackett, 2010, see also, Mytton, 2000).

The liberalisation of the airwaves has afforded religious leaders more access to the media. A number of scholarly works have explored the appropriation of the media by various religious groups in the continent (Arnsten & Lundby, 1993; Asamoah-Gyadu, 2004, 2005: De Witte, 2005; Hackett, 1998, 2006, 2010; Haron, 2002; Hirschkind, 2006; Ihejirika, 2005,2006,a,b, 2008, 2009a&b; Lundy, 1998, 2002; Lyons & Lyons, 1991; Marshall-Fratani, 1998, 2001; Meyer, 2003a,b,c, 2005, 2006a,b, 2008a,b; Tomaselli, 1995; Ukah, 2005, 2006, 2008a,b) The appropriation of the various means of communication for religious purposes is not limited to the new Pentecostal movements, but historical religions like the Catholic church and Islam are now actively engaged in this practice.

The increased access to the media has given religious leaders the possibility of affirming more forcefully the necessity of religious belief and praxis in the lives of individuals and the society. As Myer and Moors (2006) rightly noted; "with the diminishing

capacity of the nation-state for constructing communities of belonging, sub-publics and transnational publics that are grounded in religious convictions, imaginaries, and networks have become increasingly important. Essential for the emergence of these new publics has been the proliferation of new technologies of communication and representation". (p. 11)

The religious visibility and relevance in the public sphere is accentuated in the era of the new media, especially the increased availability of satellite television in Africa and access to the internet. Among the defining characteristics of the concept of new media is the provision of the possibility to forge new relationships between subjects (users and consumers) and media technologies. This implies changes in the use and reception of image and communication media in everyday life and in the meaning that are invested in media technologies. The new media technologies have made it impossible for political leaders to have absolute control over access and use of the mass media. Internet chat rooms, social network websites and radio broadcasts make it possible to overcome geographic boundaries and reach wider publics. The same possibility is gained through the reception of television stations outside the confines of a specific country through satellite broadcasting.

With the increased access to the media, brought about by liberalization and the new media, religious leaders in Africa are able to portray themselves as distinct from political leaders and show themselves as leaders who can assure the welfare of the people through the interventions of an Almighty Being. The African public space is more and more inundated with religious symbols, thanks to this increased access to the media.

Mediated religion thus presents a challenge to the political leaders, the big men; because it presents completely new repertoires of images and narratives about 'modernity', and 'modernisation' which are quite different from those hitherto monopolised by the state. By so doing, they challenge the hegemonic[12] control which the political class hitherto had over the people

Today, in the African public sphere, the distinction between religious leaders and political leaders has become clearer. This difference is central to the development of new publics. Particular identities and interests are at play in the contestation between various groups in their attempts to take up a position as the public. Myer and Moors notes: "The presence of mediated religion in the public sphere is both constitutive of and constituted by political activism, specially identity politics or the politics of difference." (2004, p. 11)

The importance of the new media to religion is not limited to the technological possibilities it offers for the production and dissemination of ideas, images, and narra-

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12 Following the Gramscian (1975) understanding of the concept, hegemony, is defined as the organisation of the structures of social power in which a fraction of dominant class procures the voluntary and conscious subordination of other sectors to its own programmes of action and policies with the intention of increasing and consolidating its own power. As Stuart Hall noted, hegemony entails the struggle to gain ascendancy over a whole social formation, to achieve positions of leadership in a number of different sites of social life at once, to achieve the commanding position on a broad strategic front. (Hall, 1977, 332) It entails the critical passage of a system of domination into the authority of a leading bloc, which is capable not only of organizing its own base through the construction of alliances between different sectors and social forces, but which as a central feature of that process, the construction of winning of popular consent to that authority among key sectors of the dominated classes themselves.

tives, but that, "such images, ideas and narratives provide a series of elements… out of which scripts can be formed of imagined lives, scripts which while interpreted in terms of local, everyday experience, are taken from global repertoires, and as such, provide means for imagining communities outside or in defiance of the nation-state's bid to monopolise the resources of community formation." (Marshall-Fratani, 1998, p. 280)

Through the new media, religious sensibilities and identities have continued to grow in the continent. Religious leaders have made a very solid in-road into the national public sphere[13], that is, the notional space between the leaders and the led; and re-conceptualised the structure and normative basis of the nation. Nation-states worldwide are faced with this significant problem in attempting to control religion and its inclusion in state-driven imaginations of the nation. In colonial and post-colonial Africa, the state had to a large extent subordinated the 'religious' in the public sphere. But with the rise of the new media, this subordination has become 'fiercely contested', and religious leaders are gaining not only more visibility but also social ascendancy.

Conclusions

The African public sphere today is ferment with religious and political activities. Part of these activities is the contestations between the various leaders. These contests, as already noted, may not manifest openly in physical struggles or persecutions, but may be more subtle, operating at the level of identity formation, that is, the determination of the basis of peoples' vision and behaviour. At this level, politico-religious contestation has to do with some basic values and attitudes toward the society. The issue at stake is: between political and religious leaders, who commands more respect before the people, who is seen to be more relevant, more influential, and ultimately who has more followership among the general public.

The new media have afforded religious leaders the opportunity to permeate the public sphere more and more with religious symbols. These symbols resonate with the traditional African world view and life style. In traditional African societies, religion was considered an important component. Andrew Moemeka sees religion as one of the defining characteristics of African communalistic societies. Religion pervades life and gives force to the bases of social life. Religion is used for safeguarding social order and protecting social norms. (Moemeka, 1998, p. 182) Wherever the African is, there is his religion; he carries it to the fields where he is sowing seeds or harvesting new crops; he takes it with him to the beer party or to attend a funeral ceremony" (Mbiti, 1969, p. 2)

In Africa, the sense of the sacred is still very strong. The new media have given religious leaders the opportunity to continue to affirm the relevance of the sacred can-

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13   The notion of public sphere is ascribed to the German philosopher, Jurgen Habermas and his investigation of the new public which emerged in eighteenth century Europe with the rise of generalized commodity exchange, education and the mass media. According to him, "the public sphere may be conceived as the sphere of private people come together as a public; they soon claimed the public sphere regulated from above against the public authorities themselves, to engage them in a debate over the general rules governing relations in the basically privatized but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labour. The medium of this political confrontation was peculiar and without historical precedent: people's political use of their reason…" (Habermas, 1989, p. 27) In the Information Age, the modern mass media play a central role in the formation of the public sphere.

opy over the individuals and the society as a whole. This is contrary to what Stewart Hoover sees as one of the consequences of mediated religion in the western world. According to him, due to the intervention of the media, the central cultural momentum is towards the relativizing, not the entrenchment of religious authority and religious claims:

> Shared, mediated experiences come to define the terms and outlines of social and political discourse. Through such trends, culture increasingly functions with a kind of autonomy that is in many ways unprecedented. At the same time, practices of religion are changing, with individuals assuming more responsibility for the direction of their own spiritual quests. Through their 'seeking,' the influence and legitimacy of formal religions of all kinds has increasingly come into question.
> (Hoover, 2006, p. 2)

This claim does not reflect the African context where religious sensibilities and praxis are still, to large extent, communitarian and public. In Africa, majority of people still find meaning and shelter under the sacred canopy in its various manifestations. Rather than de-legitimizing religion, the increased availability and access to the media in Africa have accentuated the power and authority of religion and its leaders. This explains the respect and honour that is still accorded to them. As custodians of the sacred canopy, they are treated with respect. Because religious leaders still retain the moral authority in the society, they determine to a large extent people's way of life. This explains why, political leaders either endeavour to align themselves with them, or attempt to 'buy' them over with material gifts; and when these fail, to call their moral authority into question through exposing their short comings.

The contestation between religious and political leaders is a healthy development as it keeps the African public sphere vibrant and dynamic. It creates checks and balances which is very important for socio-cultural and political development.

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Валтер Ихеђирика

ФИЗИЧКА СНАГА И МОРАЛНА СНАГА: ОБЈАШЊАВАЊЕ СПОРОВА ПОЛИТИЧКИХ И ВЕР-СКИХ ВОЂА У ЕРИ НОВИХ МЕДИЈА

Резиме

У многим афричким земљама, од деведесетих година, траје суптилан спор између верских и политичких вођа. У срцу овог спора је оно што Розалинд Ха-кет описује као редефинисање категорија моћи и статуса, које престају да буду превасходно везане за материјално богатство и политичке везе, а у корист ду-ховног ауторитета и објаве. То је борба за хегемонистичку контролу друштва у Грамшијевском смислу речи. Док политичке вође, у циљу наметања свог ауторите-та, могу да користе државни апарат принуде – војну силу, као и сопствену кон-тролу финансијских ресурса државе, верске вође се, с друге стране, постављају као моралне иконе, те личности обдарене супериорним знањем заснованим на божанском у откровењу. Будући да се ови спорови одигравају у јавној сфери, на-чин на који су вође у стању да се представе својој јавности определиће њихове следбенике. То објашњава значај помирења у процесу политичко-религијских трвења. У очима јавности, политички лидери имају физичку или сирову силу, што одговара италијанском концепту *autorita*; док верске вође располажу морал-ном силом – *autorevolezza*. Овај рад користи се тим концептима као метафорама како би дао опште објашњење тога како се спорења верских и политичких вођа одвијају у јавној сфери нових медија.

Кључне речи: религијска моћ, политичка моћ, политика признања, јавна сфе-ра, нови медији, посредована религија, хегемонија, свети балдахин.