"FETISHISM" IN THE GOLD COAST

Wadé Harris and the Anti-Witchcraft Movements

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The aim of this paper is to discuss the notion of fetishism and to evaluate how deeply this notion has influenced the perception of religious change and practices in the Gold Coast. To this purpose I analyze the case of the prophet Wadé Harris's passage through the Gold Coast in 1914 and the spread of anti-witchcraft movements throughout the country in the first thirty years of the last century. To different extents, the two religious events influenced the history of Christianity and the destiny of traditional religion in the country. Both movements provided a stimulus towards religious and social change but, notwithstanding their many points of similarity, they aroused deeply different reactions

My point is to discuss the reasons for such a different response to similar phenomenon. One of the crucial gaps between the two movements was the attitude toward fetishism. Wadé Harris urged his followers to destroy all sort of fetishes and ritual objects while the leaders of the anti-witchcraft movements spread throughout the Colony what appeared to witnesses to be new fetishes.

Harris's movement was generally ignored by colonial officials and accepted by African elite because it could be fitted into the "fetishism has to be abandoned from the bottom up" logic of an African modernization. Christian missionaries, and to some extent traditional chiefs, welcomed Wadé Harris. Anti-witchcraft movements, by contrast, did not receive general elite support because, while they presented themselves as "anti-fetish," they did not fit into the progressive narrative of colonial modernity, which involved a movement away from African indigenous religions towards Christianity and which still imagined indigenous religions as unchanging.[2]

Chiefs accused the new fetishes of being a form of witchcraft; Christian churches were suspicious that new religious movements might simply

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be hidden forms of "fetish revival" and colonial administrators wondered what position they should take on this problematic issue. As movements that were adapting to dynamic conditions and which did not lead into Christianity or Islam, anti-witchcraft campaigns were deeply threatening to the colonial order and, by the first years of the twentieth century, anti-witchcraft movements became a matter regulated by the Colony.

Despite the fact that the motives of those who followed Harris and anti-witchcraft movements were very similar, the reactions at the higher levels of the society were quite different. For an understanding of the contrasting reactions that the two movements aroused, and of religious change in the Gold Coast, I suggest to deal with the ambiguous notion of fetishism and of religious materiality.

Theoretical Works on African Indigenous Religions

For a long time, social scientists understood religious change in terms of increasing rationalization, a logical passage from indigenous religions to world religions. Since primitive religions were regarded as an amalgam of superstition, magical fears and fetishist incoherence, the decision of a community or of an individual to convert to world religions was assumed to be the direct consequence of the intellectual and technical evolution of the society, eventually free from superstition.[3] The crucial point was the comparison between world religions and the other great family of religions, referred as primitive or indigenous religions. David Chidester (1996) argued with respect to the first (seventeenth- to eighteenth-century) European observers in South Africa that the act of comparison was constitutive of the very first identification and classification of indigenous religions. Marc Augé, in his "Génie du paganisme" (1982), shared the same perspective. He claimed that missionaries denied the so-called "pagan" cults the status of reputable religions whenever comparison or translation failed in its "struggle of the meanings." As a consequence, African religions were explained in terms of magical practices or transformed into a sort of primitive philosophy.

In contrast to the world religions, each with its own history, African religions were supposed to be timeless and incapable of historical transformation. This line of thought found its prototype in the introduction to Hegel's *Philosophy of History,* where he stated: "What we properly understand by Africa, is the Unhistorical, Undeveloped Spirit, still involved in the conditions of mere nature, and which had to be presented here only as the threshold of the World's History" (1837/1956, p. 99).

The two opposed categories of indigenous and world religions were of course simplistic and reinforced prejudices; the implicit assumption was that religious change and conversion could follow just one direction: from indigenous religions to world ones (Masuzawa, 2005). The two categories were the result of the invention and "objectification" of religions that, as Tambiah (1990, p. 5) argued, "were regarded as phenomena with their distinctive histories, and scholars sought to compare them, and some even to grade them into higher and lower."

The first comprehensive descriptions we have of African religions were the result of missionary interests in cultural translation and were deeply influenced by the Judeo-Christian structure. It was a translation from above, through which notions, religious entities and practices were selected, promoted or excluded. Two further varieties of cultural translation developed during the 1950s and 1960s, in the days of anti-colonial nationalism and independence. African countries saw the development of independent African churches that articulated a translation of Christianity from below, challenging the established mission churches. It was also a period that saw an increase in studies aimed at promoting a positive image of African religions, excluding terms with pejorative connotations, such as "primitive" and "tribal," or categories such as "fetishism" or "animism."[4] In his popular critique, Okot p'Bitek (1970) argued that Western scholars, as missionaries, anthropologists and colonialists before them, were not interested in African religions for the sake of these religions. For their part, African scholars reacted to European cultural hegemony and begun publishing on African indigenous religions by the early 1960s. They conducted research into aspects of African culture and they refused strongly all pejorative labels that denigrated African traditional religions.

In reality, however, this was once again a translation from above, for scholars and African elite persisted in defining notions pertaining to African religions in terms of hegemonic discourses consistent with Judeo-Christian norms (Mudimbe, 1988); for instance they rarely paid attention to practices and rituals in favor of focusing exclusively of the discursive dimension of religion (Brenner, 1989; Asad, 1993). Shaw (1990) suggested that, in that period, a authorized version of an "African traditional religion" came to being when intellectuals wishing to change perspectives inadvertently reinforced the Western Christian representations of African culture and religion. They promoted the idea of "African traditional religion" as an almost uniform category, to add to the "butterfly collection" of religions (Shaw, 1990). Furthermore the term "traditional" suggested that African religion was worthy of respect but at the same time contributed to reproducing a uniform and static notion. However, it made possible a distancing from racial prejudices often related to the notion of "fetishism," which constituted "an embarrassment to disciplines in the human sciences" (Pietz, 1985, p. 5), and, as Chirevo Kwenda argued, such “inventions” are not in themselves negative but a process by which people negotiate “their way through history” (1997, p. 2).

Genealogy of the Idea of Fetish

The origin of the idea of the fetish has usually been found in the transformation of the medieval Portuguese word *feitiço,* “charm,” that was used to describe the African religious objects in the course of the first explorations of the West African coasts. By the end of eighteenth century, the fetishism of African peoples was a well-established category within travel and anthropological writings.[5] During the first half of the twentieth it disappeared from most anthropological theorizing, because it was recognized as a misleading and derogatory translation of African thought.

In a series of articles on the origin of the idea of fetish, William Pietz (1985, 1987, 1988) theorized that the fetish, as a notion and a problem, originated in the cross-cultural spaces of the coast of West Africa during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries from the encounter between Catholic Portuguese-speaking men living in the Guinea, African people and Dutch Calvinist merchants. This construction was a novel object without precedent any prior society (1985, p. 5). The pidgin word *fetisso* derived from the Latin word *factitus* “artificially created” and its root was the same of the verb *facere,* “to make.” The etymology of *fetisso* clearly raised “the problem of the social and personal value of material objects” (Pietz, 1987, p. 35). The materiality of the *fetisso* (the opposite of the transcendent spirituality of the idol) was developed by the Catholic Portuguese-speaking men and then adopted by Dutch Calvinist merchants. Between them, Pieter de Marees (1602/1987) and Willem Bosman (1705) introduced the term into Northern Europe languages. During this process, the fetish was transformed into an object able to create and explain economic relationships. Bosman, however, also laid the basis of the Enlightenment conception of fetish religion as “the worship of haphazardly chosen material objects believed to be endowed with purpose, intention, and a direct power over the material life of both human beings and the natural world” (Pietz, 1988, p. 106).

Charles de Brosses coined the term “*fétichisme*” and developed theoretically the concept in his “Culte des dieux fétiches. Ou Paralléle de l’ancienne religion de L’Egypte avec la religion actuelle de Nigritie” (1760). De Brosses concluded his book by asserting that fetishism and the religions of antiquity were the same in essence. Therefore, fetishism could be considered as the oldest and the original form of all religions. After de Brosses, fetishism was redefined in nonreligious, psychological and aesthetic terms. The problem was no longer one of identifying the varieties of theists' belief, but "deriving types of belief from people's manner of thinking about casual powers in material nature" (Pietz, 1988, p. 106).

The idea of the fetish was originally coined to describe what were considered to be naïve and quite scandalous customs: a false religion for primitive people. Indeed, it became a synonym for illusion and irrationality and it conveyed the idea of a deviant perception of reality; fetishism was transformed into a definition of the essence of African society. It was understood as a principle of social order based on irrational fear, the foundation of the arbitrary despotic violence that governed all unenlightened societies (Pietz, 1988).

In the last step of his genealogy of "the fetish," Pietz pointed out the 1840s' identification of African fetishism with human sacrifice and slavery. The idea of fetishism came to stand as the opposite of civilization and supported the British conquest of African societies (1999, p. 55). During colonial period, fetish worshippers were seen as the "visible, living evidence of evolutionary degeneration" (McClintock, 1995, p. 182), allowing the imperial discourse on fetishism to become a justification for conquest and control.[6] Anne McClintock suggested that discourses on fetishism had been an accomplice to imperial policies and contributed to building an image of Africa's social marginality and degeneration.

Even in the later appropriation of the term "fetish" by social thinkers, such as Karl Marx's notion of commodity fetishism and Sigmund Freud's psychopathological notion of sexual fetishism, fetish remained a synonym of erroneous attribution of value and primitive regression.[7] The idea of the fetish was indeed invented to express a negative attitude towards the union between the spirit and the material. Actually, the ideal/material dichotomy has been a powerful mode of thought in the modern Western discourse and the material has always been expressed negatively. Analogously, the primitive of the primitive/civilized dichotomy represented the material/negative side of the same polarity. In terms of practice, however, the spiritual and material realms had not been so clearly separated until the modern period.[8]

The privileging of belief over practice continues to mark much scholarly discourses, notwithstanding a number of radical critiques (Asad, 1993, Keane, 2008, Morgan, 2010). Scholars of religion have only recently started to realize that religion is always concretely mediated by things in order to be present and tangible in the world (Chidester, 2000; Houtman & Meyer, 2012). The turn to matter and materiality has raised crucial questions because religion has so long been imagined as oriented just toward transcendence. As the editors of "Material Religion" stated: "a materialized study of religion begins with the assumption that things, their use, their valuation, and their appeal are not something added to a religion, but rather inextricable from it" (Meyer, Morgan, Paine, & Plate, 2010, p. 209).

Although scholars of African religions have overcome the idea of fetish on an epistemological level and banned it from academic language, the word "fetishism" is used locally and it is still an ambiguous notion able to convey the idea of degeneration and to create marginality. The problem of materiality still remains the unresolved question in the study of religious dynamics. As stated by Sonia Hazard, an emergent approach, designated "new materialism," could open up better problems to scholarly investigation. New materialism rejects the priori oppositions between subjects and objects and aims to focus on the agency of things:

> In a new materialist paradigm, things are not reducible to symbolic representation, nor are they merely passive data for phenomenological perception. They have a wide range of powers (. . .) material things themselves are constitutive and generative of religious reality, and are not derivative forms of evidence which the scholar must interpret in order to tell us something about more primary human meanings (Hazard, 2013, p. 69).

This approach could reconcile scholarly and popular discourses on African religions with the problem of materiality, leading to a reconsideration of matter in religious discourses and at the same time eliminating all the derogatory meanings that lie at the very basis of the fetish invention.

Fetishism and the Colony

Fetishism was an important issue for the British administration. In 1858, Governor Benjamin C.C. Pine, signed a proclamation that forbade the practice of "putting people into Fetish," a practice that caused "a great deal of wrong and misery to be inflicted upon the people."[9] In 1853, Brodie Cruickshank, in his book *Eighteen Years on the Gold Coast of Africa,* discussed in depth the notion of fetishism, contributing important insights. He defined it as a superstition "which exercises such an illimitable influence over the minds of the masses of the population" (Cruickshank, 1966, p. 24). This was a common point of view, but his analysis, based on a deep knowledge of the society, was able to take in the political and social dimensions of traditional religion. He hoped for a general adoption of the Christian faith but at the same time expressed his concern about the consequences of too hasty a transition from fetishism to Christianity. According to Cruickshank, neither the local British government nor the native authorities were prepared for such an event, which would "loosen the bonds of social order." The destruction of fetishes would leave men exposed to their own passions, "the consequence of which will be the introduction of crimes almost unknown in the present simple and primitive state of society" (Cruickshank, 1966, p. 158). Fetishism was a pervasive institution: "the character of the Gold Coast African, the nature of his government, his idea of justice and its administration, his domestic and social relations, his crimes and his virtues, are all more or less influenced by, and even formed upon, their peculiar superstition" (Cruickshank, 1966, p. 153).

For Cruickshank the free interchange of ideas with Europeans, as well as the effect of missionary teaching, had given a new impulse to "native minds," which tacitly admitted the unsatisfactory nature of their worship. Notwithstanding this, the time "for speaking out" had not yet come. But he noted a grumbling discontent among the upper classes and a partial disregard of their masters on the part of slaves: "the powerful chief and the wealthy slave owner alike hold the reins of authority with less confident gasp; and even the cunning Fetishman feels that he must lower his pretentions and moderate his extortions if he would not see his victim drag him into a court of justice" (Cruickshank, 1966, p. 159).

He perceived the fetish as a sort of "police agent", guarantor of the social order. "Without this powerful ally it would have been impossible to maintain the order" (Cruickshank, 1966, p. 160), to cope with social relations, to ensure the security of property, to safely transmit packages of gold and to recover lost or stolen property. The passage from fetishism to Christianity would be a "moral and social revolution," and the government had the duty and the wisdom to help the population in this transition, because the danger was that "the first taste of emancipation, however circumscribed, may be so sweet, that an ignorant impatience may hurry men into excess, destructive of all order" (Cruickshank 1966, p. 159).

Cruickshank's exaggerated concerns give insights into the social and political dimensions of local religions and help us to understand the disquiets and the diplomacy with which the British administration had to deal with religious matters. Things changed with the Proclamation of the Gold Coast Colony (1874). In 1907, when F.C. Fuller, Chief Commissioner of the Ashanti, first encountered the anti-witchcraft movement called Aberewa,[10] he was impressed by its injunctions against criminality and bad behavior. After an enquiry in 1907, he concluded that Aberewa worship was working for law and order. According to Fuller, the missionaries had raised the issue precisely because they feared Aberewa's proselytizing success would show up their own lack of success (Allman & Parker, 2005, p. 130). However, the following year Fuller announced in Kumasi the prohibition of the movement as a consequence of the unease expressed by some local Asante chiefs and by part of the Colony. Aberewa's diffusion was too rapid and the number of complaints and petitions was increasing. Now, the concern was not fetishism in itself but the rise of new religious movements.

During a meeting with the local chief in Kumasi, Fuller informed them of the Government's decision to ban Aberewa. Here he directly addressed the issue. Aberewa represented a new illegitimate religious form that could subvert traditional authority. Fuller asked the chiefs: "The Ashantis have always had Gods of their own; they have always worshipped their ancestors. What have their ancestors done that you should stop worshipping them? Is not what was good for your fathers, good enough for you? Or is the success of Abirewa due to the fact that you wish to insult your Ancestors?"[11]

The new religious movements generally operated outside the established structures of belief and did not fit the system of indirect rule. They mobilized followers who had always been excluded from the centers of political or ethnic power and they moved all over the colony out of control. Fuller neatly expressed this issue during his speech: "I will give you another result of this new Religion. However much tenets of it say that you must obey your chiefs, the result of it is to undermine the power of the chiefs, and the so-called Ashantis who are Abirewa Priests, are gradually arrogating unto themselves the powers of Chiefs."[12] The problem was the passage from old to new religious ideas. Even if Fuller at first recognized that they were on the side of order, progress and modernity, Aberewa seemed to have a dangerous revolutionary flavor.

Comparing the Two Movements

Anti-witchcraft movements and the "harrism" of William Wadé Harris were at the same time the effect and the cause of important social and historical changes. In different but similar ways Harris and the anti-witchcraft movements demonstrated that the traditional religious orientation was no longer effective and the people needed to seek a new one. From the perspective of their followers, these movements had many underlying similarities, while people themselves moved from one religious order to another for many different reasons. Thomas McCaskie pointed out one important similarity between anti-witchcraft movements and their principal competitors, the Christian churches and the prophetic movements. In the colonial period, he stated, "countless people drifted in and out of a succession of religio-cultic allegiances. By their own testimonies, their peregrinations of belief and adherence were prompted by the search for a calming certainty" (1981, p. 137). People joined these congregations because they were systems for controlling spiritual forces in order to secure material benefits and to cope with changes in their lifestyle and also in their mode of production and exchange.

Anti-witchcraft movements and "harrism" were both healing movements with anti-witchcraft dimensions and, to varying degrees, their practices drew inspiration from the Christian liturgy. Although Harris did not present himself as a healer, his psychological influence was so strong that in spite of himself many of the sick that joined him during his preaching claimed to be healed.[13] Later on, healing would become the central focus for Water Carriers (one of Harris's legacies). They made use of no medicinal herbs, just water, and patients had to stare at the sun during the healing ritual as a way of assuring continuity with the past, because the use of water was a reinterpretation of Harris's lifting a cup of water to the sky before baptizing people. Analogously, for the anti-witchcraft movements water was the focus of all ceremonies and was used as a medicine to defeat witchcraft. Of course, we should also remember that water was the most prominent substance in all the therapeutic and cleansing traditional rituals.

The anti-witchcraft dimension was not explicit in Harris's preaching, but was rather a consequence of the fight against fetishism.[14] In any case, both movements were convinced that people who would not follow them or, worse, who would abandon them after having been healed and break the laws they established, would go crazy and eventually die.[15] On the other hand, the act of healing established a strong bond between the leader and his followers, and usually a strong community grew up around the priest.

Of equal importance was the fact that by joining anti-witchcraft movements and by converting to Christianity, people were also trying to escape the traditional forms of dependency, or at least to change the social network of their dependency.[16] Fuller's speech against Aberewa underlined the implicit change in the social structure of power:

> By the constant remittances to Jaman Country, Ashanti is being considerably impoverished, and gradually drained to the enrichment of people who sometime ago used to be your Slaves. I have here, now behind me, one of the leading men in the Religion. He happens to be, or used to be, an Ashanti slave. Now he is becoming a very big man. He has got a lot of money out of it, and hopes to get more. What does a slave like better than to turn on his former master? There are among you, I dare say, some Chiefs who are in Favour of it?[17]

Fuller's statement should not be underestimated; most of the anti-witchcraft movements originated in the North, among the non-centralized people that were regarded by the Ashanti as the "uncivilized barbarians who were fit only to be exploited as slaves" (Allman & Parker, 2005, p. 31).

In a similar way, the destruction of every kind of fetish, as proposed by Wadé Harris, was more than just the desertion of a religious system of belief. As Cruickshank stated, it was rather an attempt to change the social order and disrupt traditional forms of control. The so-called fetishes were almost invariably the basis for creating something new: worship congregations, gender relations, new social relations, new communities. Fetishes were indeed called on as witnesses for any type of private and public contract, such as marriage, master/servant relationships, etc. They were appealed to in oath-taking during judicial proceedings and they were the seal of a ruler's authority and the material and visible sign of the mystical power of a priest.

Harris's message was simple. In order to be converted, people should burn their fetishes or cast them into the sea. They were to stop worshipping many gods in favor of the Supreme God and to do so they must be baptized, read the Bible, organize Christian congregations held by elders called Apostles, and, where present, join one of the mission churches, regardless of their denomination. In many respects, anti-witchcraft movements tended to copy Christian practices, too. They celebrated Mass on Sunday, practiced confession, used water as an initiation rite for entry into the community and wrote Decalogues along the lines of the Biblical one. According to the District Commissioner of Mpraeso, Rutherford:

> this new religion pretends to be a spiritual worship like the Christian religion; it seems to satisfy the young pagans better that the worship of old idols. They imitate the Christian observance of Sunday, ring small bell, gather in their shrines, pray together and insist on the observance of some precepts of the Decalogue.[18]

Finally, they both came to the Gold Coast from faraway places; the anti-witchcraft movements came from the Savannah region, while Harris was a Kru-man from Liberia. We should take into consideration that this last aspect was of primary importance in their success. Even today the followers of Harris's movement emphasize his foreign origin, to the point of imagining him as a black man who had arrived from Europe.[19] Accordingly, the present-day offspring of the anti-witchcraft movements tend to overemphasize the remote origins of the divinities they worship (Rosenthal, 1998; Brivio, 2012).

William Wadé Harris

William Wadé Harris was welcomed to the Gold Coast as a black prophet capable of shaking the African people out of their primitive beliefs. Much has been written on Wadé Harris. Missionaries, intellectuals and historians have documented the upheaval that occurred in the Ivory Coast and Gold Coast as a result of the activism of "Prophet Harris." In the Ivory Coast, whether it was his intention or not, he became involved in politics and was suspected of being an agitator against French colonial policy (Casely-Hayford, 1915; Benoit, 1926; Ching, 1947; Haliburton, 1971; Shank, 1983, 1991, 1993; Walker, 1983; Dozon, 1995; Bureau, 1996). In the Gold Coast he had no problems with the British colonial administration, even if his rapid passage deeply influenced the future history of Christian churches in Ghana and to some extent local political and social dynamics. His favorite interlocutors were the Christian churches, whose ministers all tried to establish a dialogue with him.

Dressed in a white gown and carrying a cross, a Bible and a bowl of baptismal water, he toured the Western part of Ghana, preaching and converting "pagans" to Christianity.[20] Harris was a modest and almost illiterate man who refused to get rich or to found a new Church, declaring he was but the mat on whom Christ wipes his feet.[21] I will not explore here the details of Harris's biography and mission, but will limit myself to some key events.[22] During March of 1914, Harris crossed over the Tano Lagoon and entered the Gold Coast near Half-Assini. His first stop was probably Beyin, the capital of Western Appolonia. On April 20 he left Attuabo, the capital of Eastern Appolonia, for Axim.[23] In fact, Harris chose Axim as his headquarters, remaining there for at least one month. He never travelled further east and in July decided to go back temporarily to the Ivory Coast, but his departure turned out to be definitive. In four months he baptized almost eight thousand people, and fifty two villages burned their fetishes.[24]

A.Q. Kyiamah, a Division clerk in Sekondi, twenty five years later described Wadé Harris's arrival in Beyin:

> Every enlightened Nzema now living, who saw, as I did, this man during the days of his great prophetic achievement, can recall what actually happened and state emphatically that Harris was not out to establish a new Church of his own, apart from his injunctions to his convert to join any of the Churches then existing in that area. He possesses extraordinary power of exorcism, preaching the Gospel and baptizing anyone who came to him for the purpose. He carried in his hand a staff the top of which was in the shape of a cross covered with white cloth. He merely preached to the Nzemas and convinced them of the uselessness of fetishism, jujus and evil practices.[25]

As all the sources reported, Harris's fight was against fetishism. In *The Gold Coast Nation* of March 26, the correspondent wrote:

> He met with a large congregation and asked them to give up all their fetishes and charms, threatening those who refused with a punishment from God. Plenty of people have given up all their fetishes and charms. In fact we are surprised so many of such things are in town. It is only three days to-day (March 2) since he commenced, but the fetishes and charms given up will truly fill up a boat.[26]

A widespread desire to change power and gender relationships pushed Nzema people to burn their "fetishes" and to follow Harris. Marriages, slavery and other forms of dependency were often sanctioned by swearing oath on a fetish. For instance, the Sefwi District Commissioner, Howard Ross, denounced husbands' loss of the authority which ensured their wives' marital fidelity by having them take an oath on a fetish.[27] One can also cite Harris's successful destruction of the menstruation huts where women were customarily confined.[28] Harris's passage had indeed a long-term effect on gender relations. In the 1960s the anthropologist Ernesta Cerulli (1972) noted how menstrual blood was in no way sanctioned in the Twelve Apostles Church. Indeed, during their menstrual period the prophetesses were allowed to participate and officiate in the ceremonies. Although the priestesses were a common institution in the entire region, after Harrism women like Grace Tane I[29] and Marie Lalou became active reformers and founders of new churches.

Howard Ross had also to deal with the anger of the traditional chiefs, who were sorely upset by the evangelization work carried on by John Swatson (Harris's first disciple) and by his injunction to destroy all fetishes (Haliburton, 1971; Jenkins, 1974). The Ivory Coast was certainly the country where Harris's preaching produced the most disruptive effects. Paul Marty (1922, p. 15) noted that, thanks to Harris, in Jacqueville, young people had begun to return to their village, where the elders could no longer exploit them and steal their money through fetish blackmail.[30]

It was not unusual for traditional chiefs to display negative reactions against the conversion work carried on by Christian missionaries and this was one of the reasons why colonial policy was quite cautious on religious matters.[31] The refusal to worship the local divinities was a way to cut the bonds on physical life imposed by ritual prohibitions (Jenkins, 1974). Again, it could give rise to the abandonment of the old forms of devotion for the purpose of either conversion to Christianity or adoption of new forms of religious expression (such as the anti-witchcraft movements). However, not all the traditional chiefs opposed the teachings of Christian missionaries or the preaching of Harris or the introduction of the anti-witchcraft movements. It depended on the social and political context.[32] For instance, in the Western Region the chief of Beyin and Axim converted and accepted making a bonfire of the village's "fetishes"[33] and at Attuabo the Omanhene of Eastern Nzema was baptized by Harris (van Brake, 1994, p. 282). Several traditional priests freely abandoned their divinities, between them Grace Tane and John Nackabah, two of Harris's principal acolytes.

What needs to be considered in assessing Harris's success is also the Roman Catholic and the Methodist churches' presence in the Western Region. Missionaries were working here before Harris's arrival, and, despite their shortcomings in the conversion process, they had already prepared the terrain. The Methodist presence among the influential Nzema people in the Ivory Coast was crucial to Harris's success, since he arrived in the Ivory Coast as a Christian preacher trained in the Methodist Church.[34]

The intellectuals' reactions to Harris's passage were impressive. At Axim, J.E. Casely Hayford was shocked by Harris's work. Casely Hayford was one of the most outstanding intellectuals in the country and an important political leader, an activist in the Aborigines Rights Protection Society and a follower of the Methodist Church. He welcomed Harris as "a dynamic force of a rare order," that would "move this age in a way few have done" (Casely Hayford, 1915, p. 6–8). For him, Harris was a black man sent by God to help Africans on their path to independence and emancipation from the white powers.[35] He recognized in Harris an African political leader capable of awakening Africans and encouraging a political consciousness against the colonial order.[36] In fact, in the Gold Coast Harris did not assume the role of political leader and neither did his followers.[37]

The Anglican, Methodist and Roman Catholic missionaries all reacted to his itinerant preaching. The Reverend Ernest Bruce, stationed in Axim, was in charge of the Methodist societies in the region. He witnessed the general religious awakening: "everywhere, bamboo chapels and churches were built. Their thirst for the Word of God and for the songs of Zion is insatiable" (Bruce, 1957, p. 5). The Methodists recognized Wadé Harris as an unforeseen solution to their problems in converting the population and in eradicating fetishism. But they did not have the personnel to handle the thousands of people that embraced Christianity under the impact of Harris (Bartels, 1965, p. 174–183).

Reverend Georg Stauffer, one of the missionaries of the Roman Catholic Church in Axim, was definitely hostile. In July, 1914, a delegation of "educated Fantis and mulattos," led by Casely Hayford, went to the Catholic Mission in Axim, where Casely Hayford asked Rev. Stauffer what he thought of the prophet. Stauffer replied that Harris had done a lot of good and had brought many people to the church but also did wrong things and preached polygamy.[38] But when Casely Hayford told Stauffer that Harris was coming to preach in the Catholic Church, Stauffer exclaimed, "How dare you! A lawyer, educated in Europe, the brother of a Reverend, tells me that a Krooman is going to preach in the Catholic church whilst you know perfectly well that nobody who is not a Bishop or a priest, not even the Governor, is allowed to preach in the Catholic church."[39] At the Sunday Mass in Axim, Harris went to the Catholic Church with almost a thousand followers.[40] Harris entered the chapel, but Stauffer didn't invite him to preach, so he left the building and stood outside, surrounded by all his new adepts. That day, he left Axim and the Gold Coast permanently.

John Swatson attracted the attention of the Anglican Church. After Harris's departure, he left the Methodist church and travelled through the Western Region of Ghana as an evangelist of a new church, which he called the "Church of England." The Anglican missionaries were shocked by his achievements in penetrating the inner villages in the Western Province and in making so many disciples. They decided to take advantage of his work; he was ordained by the Anglican Church and licensed to preach throughout the Nzema area. He returned to his hometown of Beyin and established his headquarters there. In 1943, Swatson was described on the page of Anglican Church bulletin as follows:

> he was undoubtedly used by the Holy Ghost . . . and by the very irregularity of his methods achieved in a short time remarkable changes in primitive "fetish" country. John Swatson had been through the Denkyira district carrying a crude cross staff, denouncing "fetishism" and proclaiming the true God. In village after village the people, moved mainly by fear, burned their fetishes and submitted to Swatson's Christianising ceremony. (Candler, 1943)

Swatson's days with the Anglican Church finished as he was approaching old age (Bishop Anglioby, the Anglican Bishop, refused to recognize him as a bishop, claiming he was a self-constituted missionary), and he died a mentally deranged old man (Pobee, 2009).

In the last years of his life, Harris seemed to have chosen the Methodist Church as the only one able to host his followers. During his encounter with father Benoit, he signed three letters in which he ordered his converts in the Gold Coast and in the Ivory Coast to join the Methodist missionaries.[41] It has been suggested that these letters did not express Harris's real thoughts but that he was merely induced by Benoit's enthusiasm. However, here the interesting point is the attention that Harris drew and the efforts that missionaries and intellectuals made to appropriate both his message and his converts.

For his whole life Harris remained a fervent Christian, in spite of the fact that he proposed a reading of Christianity from below, did not renounce polygamy, comprehended polytheism and in the past had probably practiced spirit possession.[42] All this notwithstanding, his preaching accepted no compromise. He simply asked people to leave and forget all their past customs and beliefs, challenging them to disobey their fetishes in order to prove to them that nothing bad would happen.

Harris, along with Swatson and Sampson Oppong, has been considered one of the pioneer prophets of the African Independent Churches, the precursors of modern Pentecostalism. As C.G. Baëta stated, the protagonists of the movement were usually rejected by their mother church. They were born inside the Christian churches and were forced to leave them (for example Joseph Egyanka Appiah, the founder of the Musama Disco Christo Church and John Swatson). During the imposition of colonial rule, white control began to be seen as indispensable for effective church management, even though the process of Christianization had begun long before, and Africans had already taken a leading role in religious proselytizing. It was a step backwards; missionary confidence in the ability of Africans was overridden by racist considerations (Sanneh, 1983). This was Casely Hayford's point in his *Ethiopia Unbound* (1911) and one of the reasons why he enthusiastically welcomed Harris's passage through the Gold Coast.

The effects of Harris's rapid passage in the Gold Coast were long-lasting. A few months after Harris had withdrawn, the Provincial Commissioner of the Western Province, John Maxwell, was happy to verify the demise of the fetishes and the general progress of the villages (Haliburton, 1971, p. 90). But a few years later, Christian missionaries wondered if the fetishes were making a comeback. A never-ending debate began over the nature of Harris's legacy. Were fetishes just disguising themselves under new forms? Were Harris's converts and the new Churches, such as the Twelve Apostles Church, betraying his words? Harris did not have the time to establish a Church and perhaps was not interested in doing so, and missionaries wondered about the depth and sincerity of the massive conversion, fearing that because of this lack of a hierarchy the "old" fetishism might be replaced by a new form. Accusations of fetish worship were ready to emerge, expressing their ability to marginalize and mark the border between classes and races.

The Anti-Witchcraft Movements

While Wadé Harris was preaching in the western part of the Western region, and later, in the 1930s and 1940s, when disciples of his, such as John Swatson, Grace Tane I, Kwesi John Nackabah[43] and Michael Kojo George[44] (the founders and promoters of the "Twelve Apostles Church," also known as the "Harrist Church" or the "Water Carriers" movement) were converting people, healing patients and building churches, the Gold Coast was also affected by the massive phenomenon of the anti-witchcraft movements, such as Aberewa, Hwemesu, Kunde, Nana Tango, Tigari and others. Since it is beyond the scope of this essay to enter into the details and context of every single movement, I simplify by referring to all of them as anti-witchcraft movements.

Witchcraft was only one of the dangers these movements promised to protect their adherents against. However, it was their witch-finding dimension that created their public following and attracted the negative attention of the colonial state. Basically, they had two main features. They were oracles able to banish witchcraft and heal its consequences.[45] The guilty or sick person was compelled to drink a special "medicine," a mixture of water and herbs, or sometimes just water, to extinguish the power of witchcraft.[46] Through this medicinal-type ritual, patients would be bound forever to the priest; if he or she refused to take the medicine or to respect its rules, the outcome could be death.[47] Anti-witchcraft movements constructed dynamic networks connecting distant places, such as the savannah and forest regions or the west and east of the Guinean coast, and they promised the renewal of old values of social solidarity. They borrowed practices and ritual objects from both Islam and Christian Churches, and claimed to worship the Supreme God.

Colonial officials perceived anti-witchcraft movements as a threat to colonial order. New fetish-priests were actually building networks of power that did not overlap with the presumed traditional centers of religious and political power. Christian priests and colonial administrators accused the movements of being foreign gods, merely money-making, exploitative, and a new and more dangerous form of fetishism. Traditional chiefs often opposed the new divinities, but some adopted them if they perceived that the old gods had begun to lose their significance and power. They used them to gain popular support, and common people also used the movements to oppose unpopular chiefs.

Colonial authorities did all they could to suppress accusations of witchcraft, but these attempts were rarely successful (Gray, 2001). Indeed, the colonial control was very strong and on some occasions led to the destruction of the anti-witchcraft shrines and to the detention of their priests. Copious documentation indicates resistance to anti-witchcraft movements came from traditional rulers, traditional priests, Christian missionaries, Christian converts and also from Colonial administrators. The Gold Coast colonial documents clearly reveal the shifting position of the different political subjects forced to cope with the new phenomenon. From a local point of view the problem seemed to be the conflicts between the chiefs and the fetish priests. The District Commissioner of Akuse stated that the fetish was "harmful," but he added, a "number of adherents educated and otherwise" considered it beneficial to the community. Nevertheless he predicted its prohibition because: "particularly in small villages, the popularity of the fetish tends to increase the power and importance of the fetish priest to the detriment of the Chief of the village. Followers of the fetish take their troubles and complaints to the fetish priest instead of the Chief".[48]

In general terms, according to missionaries and colonial administrators, the issues were, on the one hand, the danger for the new Christians of backsliding into fetishism, and, on the other, of being influenced detrimentally by Christian teachings, which tended to further the loss of confidence in ancestral systems of belief.[49] The third position was the one expressed by local converts who experienced the fear of being accused of witchcraft or the need to take a stand against the political implications of these increasingly powerful instruments.

Despite the fact that anti-witchcraft leaders never assumed any kind of political stance, they were often suspected to have anti-colonial purposes and were perceived as a threat to colonial stability. The anti-witchcraft movements were polymorphous and unstable. It was difficult to follow their trajectories which were often fragmented by the variety of names and manifestations adopted in order to avoid persecution by authorities or to compete with other similar religious cults. Colonial officials often assumed the priests had just changed the name of their movements in order to carry on celebrating the banned cults.

The Harris movement faced resistance too, but it was not comparable to the reaction engendered by anti-witchcraft cults. The first charge against Nackabah came in 1918, and was based on colonial restrictions against "fetish worship," which authorities had linked to anti-witchcraft activities (Breindenbach, 1979). Presumably, in the 1930s the Twelve Apostles Church faced the resistance of chiefs and elders of the villages where Harris's followers had attempted to establish churches. By the 1940s a dispute was recorded by the Magistrate's Court, the traditional Council of Kromantze having received complaints that a woman had been seduced by a leader of the Church and that other people had been accused of witchcraft.[50] The colonial clerk Kyamah wrote a detailed report on it. He had no doubt about the fake nature of the Church: "it is patent that the professors are false prophets who have the 'devil' (ulterior motives—motives to chest) as their god and helper. Hallucinations have played a great part."[51] And he went on: "from a moral point of view, water carrying centres are but a menace to

Nzemaland. Some, if not all, of the water professors who cannot read 'A' carry about copies of the Holy Bible."

But the anti-Harrist reports were nothing compared to the number of documents against anti-witchcraft cults. The Harrist church was just a "minor irritation but not really a threat to colonial tranquility" (Breindenbach, 1974, p. 598). Indeed, the Twelve Apostles Church had an impressive success and spread far and wide through the Country, becoming one of the most important African Independent Churches in Ghana.

Conclusion

The Provincial Commissioner, Maxwell, equated the end of fetishism with general progress and improvement in the sanitary conditions of the villages he had visited.[52] Fetishism was indeed for him synonymous with a confused state of mind but also of disorder and filth. In Victorian culture, the iconography of filth became deeply integrated in the policing of boundaries between ruling elite and lower classes, both in imperial metropoles and in the colonies (McClintock, 1995, 45). From Cruickshank's years, the proclamation of the British Colony (1874) had dramatically changed the political and social context. The respect of social and racial borders became crucial and, accordingly, the destruction of local religious emblems went in the direction of cleanliness and therefore of a more widespread social order. The materiality of fetishes posed a chronic threat to "the riches, health and power of the imperial race" (McClintock, 1995, p. 48). The ambiguous notion of fetish conveyed double and conflicting meanings: the threat of new political institutions and the repugnance and contempt for marginal and degenerated social and religious expressions.

Wadé Harris, like John Swatson, was an iconoclast who attacked the fetish aspects of the traditional society.[53] The materiality of the African shrines had always seemed outrageous to the European mind, and in general both missionaries and colonial officials welcomed Harris's iconoclasm, even if in some instances they expressed preoccupation or displeasure. In the Ashanti region, Fuller, in ordering all the emblems of the new religious movement, Aberewa, to be collected and burnt,[54] did the very same thing that Harris had done in the Nzema region to defeat "fetishism." The bonfire of the ritual objects was the solution to mark the end of fetishism, since the essence of a fetish resided in its "status as a material embodiment" (Pietz, 1985). The promiscuity of the African fetish, which could be animals, plants, bones, stones, feathers, or shards of pottery or the mix of all these elements had since ever impressed the European minds, unable to attribute to them a true religious nature. Fuller stated that fetishism provoked unreasoning reactions both among the local people and the Colonial officers: "My experience is that there is no phase of native life that lends itself to such unreasoning criticism as these spasmodic fetishes. Facts become so distorted, rumours so exaggerated, that Political Officers may well be excused for taking an unduly serious view of a new fetish."[55]

Although always described as a symbol of backwardness and the product of primitive minds, the new religious movements were the expression of a dangerous social creativity, and the "fetishes" seemed to conceal an inner and invisible power able to act on reality, to influence human behavior, and to create social communities (Graeber 2005). Anti-witchcraft movements built strong congregations with important political implications throughout the country and did not respect the borders imposed by the new colonial states (the new cults moved from north to south and from west to east). The priests established shrines with impressive and peculiar aesthetical features, founded on what appeared to be a new and dangerous form of fetishism. And these "new fetishes" were able to challenge the structure of both traditional powers, as constructed by colonial order, and the colonial order itself. Embodying repetition, contradiction, multiple times and multiple agencies (McClintock, 1995, p. 188; Pietz, 1985), anti-witchcraft movements refused the idea of linear time and the spirit of progress implicit in the colonial project. By contrast, Harris's actions were clean and clear. He destroyed the fetishes and did not immediately propose new forms of community, merely suggesting that his adherents joined already existing missions. The only colonial opposition Harris had to cope with was about his recommendation to respect the Sunday as a no-work day.

Over the years, Harris's followers established small churches that gathered people in a family-type association. In reality, they did create new communities and new social relationships, and it is not surprising that these gave rise to accusations of fetish activities. But, aside from the cross and water, they seemed to own no ritual objects. Although his followers, such as Grace Tane I, had been suspected of fetish activity, there was no evidence of it. On the other hand, anti-witchcraft shrines still displayed an aggressive and bewildering materiality.

Today, the Twelve Apostles Church is becoming marginal, having lost over the past decades many of its adepts, who have become increasingly fascinated by the modernity and opulence of the new Pentecostal churches spreading all over the country. Once again, the Twelve Apostles Church is being accused of fetishism, of working with bad spirits, and of practicing witchcraft.[56]

In the June 2012 issue of the *Daily Guide,* in the wake of the murder of the daughter of a Twelve Apostles Church pastor at Anwia in the Nzema

East District of the Western Region, discussion of the true nature of that Church still proved to be a timely topic.[57] The journalist, Rev. Apostle Kwamena Ahinfu, wrote about widespread rumors asserting that the Twelve Apostles Church pastors, before placing their big cross in their "garden," dig a hole "into which they place a goat and some juju whilst reciting some incantations. The hole is refilled—all in one midnight."[58] It was a clear insinuation that the cross was a fetish.

The words of pastor Kwamena Ahinfu deserve attention because too he compared the Twelve Apostles Church to Tigare, one of the anti-witchcraft movements of the colonial period:

> The Tigare fetish priest looked into water to prophesy, a thing which I saw myself in the mid-1940s and 1950s when I was young. So if Awoyo or Twelve Apostles' priests look into water for prophecies, aren't they reminiscing over Nackabah's former Tigare fetish practices? Sometimes ago, it was rumoured the Twelve Apostles' Church was going to be headed by a graduate pastor. Yes, an enlightened person must head that church to give the Biblical light of salvation that conforms with true Christianity. But where is the graduate? If the Nackabah or Awoyo Church doesn't change its ways, it should stop calling itself the "twelve apostle" church. It will be called a reformed Tigare sect![59]

The fetish remerges as a problem and the accusation of fetish activities is still today a way to marginalize people and denigrate their primitive practices. The jealousy between churches arouses this type of accusations and, today as in the colonial period, is able to mark the border between classes.

On the one hand, local religions (the fetishes) frightened the institutions that had always sought to contain their disruptive social implications. Cruickshank was aware of fetishes' value as a source of social control and feared any sudden changes within the political system. He imagined them as static institutions put outside history. Some decades after, the "new fetishes" troubled both the colonial administrators and chiefs who, glimpsing their revolutionary nature, were equally concerned with preserving the status quo. They feared their inner bias to infringe geographical and metaphysical boundaries and the attitude to reproduction and fragmentation. Harris worked for the destruction of all fetishes because he desired to radically improve the spiritual sphere of African people, to change their social condition and lead them to the Supreme God. The only religious change compatible with the modernization project was, for those who supported him, in the direction of monotheism and simplification.

On the other hand, fetishism was used as a label to marginalize people and organizations, from the definition of fetish religions as the primitive stages of evolutionary progress to the imperial discourse on fetish-worshippers and to the present-day rivalry between the many expressions of African religious life. The long genealogy of this notion had been able to project people onto "the invented zone of degeneration" (McClintock, 1995, p. 143), evoking the prehistory of the human race and the pathology of their souls. Fetish accusations historically emerge whenever strategies of containment are required.

The different reactions engendered by Harris's preaching, by the anti-witchcraft cults and later Harrist churches, are all evidence of the epistemological problem represented by materiality in religious discourses. The fetish, invented to express a negative attitude towards the material dimension of religion, in relation to the historical, political and social context, had the power to frighten because of its deep political force and to marginalize because of its derogatory meaning.

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Endnotes

1. This article was completed thanks to funding from MEBAO (Missione etnologica in Bénin e Africa Occidentale), PRIN 2010–11: "Stato, pluralità e cambiamento in Africa" and the European Research Council as part of the ERC project 313737: Shadows of Slavery in West Africa and Beyond: a historical anthropology.

2. There were important exceptions to this general trend. In 1931, J.B. Danquah prepared a petition in defence on the anti-witchcraft movement Nana Tongo, while the Cape Coast barrister Kwabena Sekyi was hired by the Omahene of Akuem Kotoku, Afa Fua, in defence of the anti-witchcraft movement Hwemeso. For more details overview of the particular situation see: Allman & Parker (2005, p. 170–180).

3. Max Weber's work on religion and on the world religions' rationality was influential. This perspective was, for instance, the one of J.G. Frazer (1922); E.B. Tylor (1871); and Malinowski, (1948). For the discussion of these issues see: M. Douglas (1966) and S.J. Tambiah, (1990).

4. In his book *Primitive Culture* (1871), Edward Tylor defined animism as "the general doctrine of souls and other spiritual beings." Tylor believed that animism was the beginning of early religion. For a discussion of the notion of animism, see Emile Durkheim (1912).

5. J. F. McLennan defined it as a subcategory of totemism and, according to Edward B. Tylor (1871), fetish religions were the earliest, primitive stages of the evolutionary progress, marking the Africans' inferior evolutionary development.

6. Anne McClintock explored fetishism as a hinge linkage between race, class, gender, sexuality, and imperialism in nineteenth-century Britain and twentieth-century South Africa. She stated that "'Fetish-worshippers' in the colonies and sexual fetishists in the imperial metropolis were seen as the visible, living evidence of evolutionary degeneration . . . In this way, the imperial discourse on fetishism became a discipline of containment" and fetishism justified conquest and control. According to McClintock, fetishes are expressions of social contradictions and repressions: "The contradiction is displaced onto and embodied in the fetish object, which is thus destined to recur with compulsive repetition" (McClintock, 1995, pp. 182, 184).

7. Scholars have also used the notion of fetishism to discuss the European intellectual and social history. William Pietz (1985, 1987, 1988), traced the history of the term and its emergence in the intercultural area of West Africa from the sixteenth through nineteenth centuries, drawing almost exclusively on Western sources. Bruno Latour (2010) used the notion of fetishism to transcend the predominant Cartesian paradigm that distinguishes the domain of material objects from that of social relations of exchange. He adopted a 'symmetric anthropology,' to show how modernity is founded on the rejection of animism and the objectification of nature. For a critique of Latour, see Hornborg (2013).

8. In *We Have Never Been Modern,* Latour tried to get past the modern distinction between persons and objects, and between culture and nature. His argument is that the distinction itself is "cultural," and it shows the extent to which moderns do not separate the spiritual from the material. According to Latour this is evidence of the fact that moderns were never modern (1993).

9. PRO (Public Record Office, London), CO 96/43.

10. Aberewa ("The old lady") was established in the Asante heartland in 1906 and from there it spread south. It was the transformation or probably the integration of an older cult called Sakrabundi. Aberewa was forbidden in 1908, but according to many observers it never actually disappeared. After Aberewa, there appeared Hwemeso ("Watch over me"), which suffered the same fate but had a shorter life; it appeared in 1920s and was suppressed in 1922. After Hwemeso a relevant number of anti-witchcraft cults flourished, increasing the general disorientation of the colonial administration. The most prominent were Kunde, Senyakupo, Nana Tongo and Tigare.

11. NAK (National Archive Kumasi, Ghana), ARG 1/20/1/21, "Meeting held on the August 6, 1908 outside the fort at Coomasie."

12. *Ibid.*

13. The *Gold Coast Leader* reporter wrote: "Harris was invited to cure a woman who was suffering from heart disease when baptizing her he informed her people that he did not come to cure outwardly but inwardly and there is hope of the woman being recovered and she was seen the following morning full of life" *The Gold Coast Leader,* 4 July 1914.

14. Casely Hayford described a healing session. Despite the violence of the event, there was not even the suspicion of witnessing an exorcism:

> There has been noticed in the crowd a woman who has attempted several times to touch the cross and held back, as if she would rather not (. . .) The woman is torn as if by a violent force. Her body is convulsed. She tears at her breasts. Her eyes literally dart from their sockets. They roll completely up and then completely down. Her hair stands on end. At last she falls prone and rolls about in great agony. Harris calm goes on baptising as if nothing is happening. After a while he goes near and utters a strange prayer. Gradually she grows somewhat calm. She is now on her feet. This strange man again approaches the agonised soul, opens the tattered Bible and holds it before her face, the while uttering a prayer—She seems to be growing calmer now. But again she is seized by—I know not what. She roars like a beast. Her attitude is distinctly defiant. She is, indeed, menacing. . . . He now approaches her for the second time, and once more holds the Bible to her face. She gradually calms down and then comes to herself. She is now as helpless as a babe. She takes her seat with others of like nature and awaits baptism. (Casely Hayford, 1915, p. 11)

15. As far as Harris is concerned, the newspaper correspondent from Axim wrote: “Those who would not hearken to him but keep their fetishes from being burnt run mad on the spot, some dying under his prayers” (*Gold Coast Leader,* July 4, 1914). After Harris left, his converts remained obedient to his teaching, under punishment of death. On September, the newspaper correspondent wrote: “A certain woman who committed immorality after holding Professor Harris’ Cross died last week and confessed on her dying bed the cause of her death. This will be a check to our female sex in Apollonia and other places” (*Gold Coast Leader,* September 12, 1914).

16. On this matter, see for instance Morton Williams (1956) on Atinga (Tigari)

17. NAK, ARG 1/20/1/21, “Tano fetish, Fuller, 6th August 1908.”

18. NAG National Archive Accra, Ghana, CSO 21/10/4. D.C. Rutherford, February 13, 1932.

19. Between 2012 and 2013, I carried on research on the Twelve Apostles Church in the Western region and in the outskirts of Accra.

20. The following was his typical portrait: “He was advanced in years and a nice imposing appearance. He had a white beard, was dressed in a white garment like a cassock or a hausa cloak. He wore a white turban on his head, a strip of black clothing falling from his shoulders to the knees like a stole. In his hand he held a bamboo cross, the cross piece tied with a white ribbon. In the left hand he carried a small Bible, a bowl of water and a calabash” (Archivi SMA [Società Missioni Africane], Roma, 34A Fond Heesewjik- Histoire d’Axim et Half Assinie 1902–1961, 3A4-A, p. 15).

21. Casely Hayford wrote of Harris: “William Waddy Harris wants nothing. He has nothing. He has everything. He is neither a mendicant friar nor an aggressive toll collector. So urgent is the King’s command that he has no time to think of silver and gold. . . . According to him money can degrade. It can cause nausea to those spiritually minded” (1915, p. 8).

22. William Wadé Harris was born in Liberia, between 1860 and 1865. He was of the Grebo ethnic group of southern Liberia and related to the Kru group. Of Methodist background (he entered the Methodist Episcopal School of Rev. J. Lawry at the age of twelve [Benoit, 1926, p. 3]), in Liberia he was a teacher-catechist in the American Episcopal mission. In 1910, he was imprisoned for anti-government activity. He had hoisted the English flag on the beach at Cape Palmas. His action was one of the last protests of the Grebo people against the Government. The Grebo had never accepted Liberian domination. They fought five wars "to shake off the yoke of the American negroes" (Benoit, 1926, p. 33). While imprisoned, he became convinced of his calling by the archangel Gabriel. He declared that he was a prophet in 1911 or 1912 when he was around his forty-seven (Haliburton, 1971, p. 4). During his interview with Benoit he declared: "Jesus Christ said to me: Go and teach all the nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost and teach them to observe all that I have commanded to you. So I go and baptise. I shall be like Elijah who burnt all the priest of Baal" (Benoit, 1926, p. 3). Accompanied by women singers and charged to bring in "the reign of peace," he began his itinerant preaching. In 1913 he crossed the Cavalla River in the Ivory Coast and travelled along the coast to the eastern areas including the Cercles de Lahou, the Lagunes, Bassam and Assinie. He entered the Gold Coast where he stayed for some months and then went back to the Ivory Coast. In 1915 he was expelled from the Ivory Coast and went back to Liberia where he died in 1929.

23. *The Gold Coast Nation,* May 7, 1914.

24. Father Ernest Bruce, during the Wesleyan Methodist Synod of 1915, gave the account of the "awakening of the Axim District" and described the results (*The Gold Coast Nation,* February 25, 1915).

25. NACC, ADM 23/1/1025, "Kyiamah to District Commissioner's Office, Sekondi, 6th February, 1940."

26. *The Gold Coast Nation,* March 26, 1914.

27. "Sefwi women were eager to embrace a religion that absolved them from swearing fetish to their husbands as to marital faithfulness. In many cases brought to me it was obvious that their conversion to Christianity was used as an excuse to indulge in casual ampuris without that fear of consequences which, in their fetish faith, constituted the sum total of their morals" (H. Ross 1915, quoted in Haliburton, 1971, p. 219).

28. After his passage women, during menstruation, were no longer segregated in the huts. They began sleeping at home and they went on working in the bush. Furthermore, bereaved spouses no longer had to stay on the beach for eight days (Haliburton, 1971, p. 75)

29. Grace Tane was a fetish priestess converted by Harris. She married him and remained at his side until his departure for the Ivory Coast. She had a great reputation as healer in Nzima. One hundred healing compounds called "gardens" belonged to her Church.

30. Referring to Harris, Paul Marty wrote: "[Il] a bouleversé toutes les idées qu'on se faisait sur les sociétés noires, si primitives, si rustiques, de la Côte, et qui

sera avec notre occupation, et comme conséquences d'ailleurs de cette occupation, l'événement politique et social le plus considérable de dix siècles d'histoire, Passée, présente ou future de la Côte d'Ivoire maritime" (Marty, 1922, p. 13).

31. In 1915, the D.C. of Dwawso, in discussing a case of recently converted drummers of the Omanhene of Kumawu who refused to play for their chief, noted: "it was done only to get out of serving the chief." He explained to the drummers that playing would not harm them and to the missionaries "that we could not allow this kind of thing as it would lead to any man who does not want to serve their masters running away and saying they are Christians" (NAK, ARG1/1/69, "Certain Kumawu candidates for baptism forced to beat drum. Letter from D.C, of Kwawso to Fuller, 27/9/1915").

32. For instance, conversion responded to the increasing need for education. Before Harris's passage through the Western Region, the changing economic scene and the increasing importance of the timber economy led people to feel the need for schools and teachers, often linked to the missionaries' presence. The periods in which missions made the greatest numbers of converts often coincided with increased local demand for education (Jenkins 1974).

33. Caseley Hayford wrote: "Yesterday the Chief of Axim made a bonfire of his fetish. It would certainly have been a ground for war in the past if Ashanti had demanded this. And so did the Chief of Beyin the day before" (Casely Hayford, 1915, p. 12).

34. In Aboisso (Ivory Coast), he met John Swatson, a Methodist agent from Beyin. Swatson was born from a royal mother and a European father attached to the royal court of the chief of Beyin. From Aboisso he followed Harris and worked alongside him in the Gold Coast and then again in the Ivory Coast, when in September 1914 they were called back to Assinie. On John Swantson see: Haliburton (1971, p. 217–227) and Jenkins (1974).

35. Casely Hayford (1915, p. 8) wrote: "he is revealing unto West Africa to-day the things of God in a way they have never been before."

36. He wrote: "rebellion. It is a word that is constantly on his lips. He says I came to preach rebellion. He means I came to preach against rebellion. He denounces authorities and powers without fear. . . . He is strong against Sabbath breaking, and he makes men realise what it means" (Casely Hayford, 1915, p. 6).

37. Actually, Harris had only one confrontation with the D.C. of Axim, caused by his opposition to all work on Sunday. He stopped all Kru-boys from doing their jobs when their boats were anchored at Axim (Archivi SMA [Società Missioni Africane], Roma, 34A Fond Heesewjik- Histoire d'Axim et Half Assinie 1902–1961, 3A4-A, p. 16). In the area, in particular in Tarkwa and Sekondi, there was a settlement of Kru labourers, and, as a young boy, Harris himself had been a Kru-boy.

38. For instance, in August, after Harris left the Gold Coast, the Catholic priest in Axim baptised sixty two people: "on these two days took place the first baptisms of those adults brought in by prophet Harris; 62 of them were baptised and on August 15 and 16 they received their 1st Holy Communion. Whole families of father, mother and childrenwere amongst them" (Archivi SMA (Società Missioni

Africane), Roma, 34A Fond Heesewjik-Histoire d'Axim et Half Assinie 1902–1961, 3A4-A, p. 19.

39. Archivi SMA (Società Missioni Africane), Roma, 34A Fond Heesewjik-Histoire d'Axim et Half Assinie 1902–1961, 3A4-A, p. 17.

40. According to A.Q. Kyiamah, the great majority of his converts "apparently elected to join the Roman Catholic Church, because in those days Roman Catholics were the only Christians in that area known to be found of the Crucifix which they wore on their necks and placed on their church buildings, etc" (NACC, National Archive Cape Coast, ADM 23/1/1025, "Kyiamah to District Commissioner's Office, Sekondi, 6th February, 1940").

41. Pierre Benoit visited Harris in Cape Palmas, in 1926. In the letter Harris claimed:

> I, William Wadé Harris, who have called you to the true Gospel and baptism I have given this message to the Rev. P. Benoit so that he may bring it to you and that you may obey it. All the men, women and children who have been called and baptised by me must enter Wesleyan Methodist Church. I myself am also a Methodist. No one must enter the Roman Catholic Church if he wishes to be faithful to me. Mr. Platt, the Director of our Methodist Church, is appointed by me as my successor to the head of the churches which I have funded. All the fetishes, the Koubos and the ju-jus must be destroyed. Burn them all in the fire. Evil befall him who secretly keeps them in his house! May the fire from heaven devour him! (Benoit 1926).

42. On the possible past possession experiences of Harris, see Shank (1993, p. 121). The argument arose from Harris's assertion, written down by Benoit (1926, p. 3) that "the Angel Gabriel is my master: when he speaks to me I am in a trance" and by direct testimony of Father Hartz who saw him going in trance. However, according to Bureau (1971, p. 38), it needed to be received with caution.

43. John Nackabah was a fetish priest converted by Harris. He was the founder with Grace Tane of the "Twelve Apostles Church."

44. Michael Kojo George was a disciples of Grace Tane. He was sent up the coast, to work with the Fanti.

45. Usually the priest stabbed a fowl and threw it down; if it died breast down the person was lying, if it died breast upward he was innocent.

46. For this reason the priests were soon accused of being imposters. In this regard, Fuller's words are of extreme interest: "we do not call vaccination a religion because it cures small pox. Take it from me, Ashantis, Religion does not come to you in the shape of a medicine. A religion deals with a man's soul, and a man's spirit, and it is only by cultivating the virtues that a religion will benefit you. I have only mentioned these points not because they concern the Government, and because these considerations are making you ridiculous and the laughing stock of others" (NAK, ARG1/20/1/21, "Tano fetish, Fuller, 6th August 1908.")

47. Since their diffusion, anti-witchcraft movements attracted the interest of European observers, colonial administrators and scholars. Hence, there is a considerable

literature dealing with the phenomenon of anti-witchcraft movements. It can be divided into at least three perspectives. The first studies interpreted such cults as a new response to the mounting anxieties engendered by colonial conquest. They suggested a psychological approach able to explain an apparently irrational phenomenon such as the widespread practice of both accusations and admissions of witchcraft (*Inter alia,* Debrunner [1959]; Field [1950]; Tooth [1950], and Ward [1956]). For a review see Willis (1970). The second introduced a time perspective. Among them, Jack Goody (1957), who was the first scholar to argue that these movements were the historical continuation of an older and pre-colonial tradition and not just the consequence of colonial change. The problems connected with all these approaches and studies were a common tendency to generalise. McCaskie (1981) and Terray (1979) definitely changed the perspective, studying the cults as historical phenomena rooted in particular social contexts. McCaskie (1981) analysed the anti-witchcraft movements in Asante. He stated that in Asante such movements do not seem to have flourished in periods of anomie or of extreme social turbulence, being instead "the product of a social order under interrogation by its members." The last studies on this subject have been carried out by Allman and Parker (2005); again they considered anti-witchcraft cults as historical processes rather than structural beliefs and practices, emphasizing the spatial dimension in the formation of such movements.

48. NAG (National Archive Ghana, Accra), ADM 11/1/1679.

49. One of the main opponents of the anti-witchcraft movements was Monseigneur Jean-Marie Cessou, the Vicar Apostolic of Lomé, in Togo. He was concerned with Kunde which, following the local custom, he called Goro. On this subject he wrote an article (1936) in which he reproduced an article by Monseigneur Auguste Hermann (n.d.) and one by Father Folikwe-Kpodar.

50. McAuley wrote to the Cape Coast district commissioner, noting that if someone seduced another's wife there were other remedies to consider and he seemed to completely ignore witchcraft accusations.

51. NAG, ADM 23/1/1025.

52. He wrote: "Apollonia before Harris visit was steeped in fetishism and the towns and villages were in a most unsanitary condition. All this has now been changed, places of worship and schools are to be found in every village, and the villages and towns are being remodelled on sanitary lines" (Haliburton, 1971, p. 90).

53. The Omahene of Wiawso Quamina Tano advised the D.C. that he did not like Swatson, and that he and the elders would never leave the faith of their ancestors (Haliburton, 1971, p. 221).

54. The Provincial and Acting Commissioner of the Southern Province (Ashanti), on this matter wrote to Fuller: "the order was obeyed and everything connected with the Fetish was brought in and handed over to the Government. On the 18th I returned to Obuassi with 21 loads of Aberewa-Manguri Fetish" (NAK, ARG 1/20/1/21, The Provincial and Acting Commissioner Southern Province to Chief Commissioner of Ashanti, Aug 28, 1908).

55. NAG, ADM11/1/63, Chief Commissioner Ashanti Fuller to Colonial Secretary, Oct 30, 1915.

56. Apostle Kwamena Ahinfu, "Can Healing Camps Admits Mad Men? Murder of Nackabah Pastor's Daughter," *Daily guide,* June 23, 2012.

57. The journalist went on to write: "Did the Twelve Apostles of Christ do such a thing? All these suggest fetishism, and they reflect the status of John Nackabah who was a fetish priest before he was converted in Christianity by Williams Wadé Harris, a powerful Kru man of God from Liberia. It appears that John Kojoe Baidoo, who was Nackabah's secretary, and who founded the Twelve Apostles' Church in the 1920s, with headquarters near the Ankobra near Tarkwa, was taught some fetish methodology which he injected into his church's system of worship and healing and prophecy." Apostle Kwamena Ahinfu, *Daily guide,* June 23, 2012.

58. *Ibid.*

59. *Ibid.*

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