



Counter-Hegemonic Mobilities: Burgerisation and the Transnationalisation of Ghanaian Indigenous Religions

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Abstract

This paper examines the activities of Indigenous Religious Traditions' (IRTs) priests and priestesses who cross borders from their localities to international destinations. This is grounded in an ongoing, unacknowledged religious competition within Ghana's religious market, which pits Christianity against others, including IRTs. Over the years, the leading Christian group in Ghana has called IRTs the devil's stronghold that keeps followers in servitude and has often celebrated their victory, hibernating it. In contemporary times, a new breed of indigenous priests engages in positive, rebellious activities, employing counter-hegemonic strategies, discourses, and claims to authenticity through the media to advance their advocacy. The counter-hegemonic approach openly posits that IRTs are authentic and possess potent spiritual powers, which Christian pastors seek to tap into and utilise for their miracle services. It argues that the internationalising agenda by IRTs priests is part of a new strategy meant to stage an IRTs comeback not only on the religious scene in Ghana but also to announce their presence to the world. Data were gathered through an ethnographic method. The religious market and the concept of burgerisation were used to analyse the data. The findings indicate that the transnationalisation of IRTs is not incidental; instead, it is strategically constructed and rooted in earlier cultural revival movements of the 1960s and 1980s, driven by diasporic demand and supported by institutional efforts such as the Ghana Psychic and Traditional Healers Association (1962) and the Afrikania Movement (1982), which were targeted at modernising IRTs.

Keywords: Indigenous religious traditions, burgerisation, cultural revival, religious tourism, reverse mission, religious marketplace

1. Introduction

Contemporary religious practices increasingly emerge within transnational contexts shaped by globalisation, migrations, and media flows. Although scholarship has thoroughly investigated the global proliferation of Christianity and Islam, the external dissemination of Indigenous Religious Traditions (IRTs), especially from Africa, is still inadequately examined. Understanding how IRTs adapt to and propagate within new transnational settings is essential for rethinking global religious dynamics and challenging established hierarchies. The preference for the term "indigenous" over "African traditional religions" reflects recent academic shifts toward recognising the agency and significance of IRTs (Haar, 1999; Cox, 2007; Harvey, 2000).

The Ghanaian religious landscape is notably diverse, including Western missionary churches, Pentecostal Charismatic churches (PCC), new indigenous religious institutions, independent ritual specialists, spiritual churches (Sunsum sore), Islamic groups, the Baha'i Faith, Neo-Hindu, Buddhist,

and local Jewish offshoots. Intense competition for resources and visibility characterises this environment, prompting religious actors to adopt entrepreneurial strategies. This pluralism and contestation provide context for the central argument: The IRTs, once marginalised, are now actively innovative and competitive in both local and transnational markets, reclaiming agency through adaptation and international outreach. (Wuaku, 2013; Asamoah-Gyadu, 2009).

In this competitive environment, IRTs have traditionally been portrayed as primitive or demonic because of colonialism and Christianisation. However, IRTs are currently transforming and gaining renewed visibility, particularly through the emergence of neo-Indigenous priests and priestesses who modernise practices while maintaining connections to tradition. Nrenzah categorises IRTs into two groups: the old, or conventionally revitalised, and the neo-indigenous priest and priestess. The groups are organised based on their call to the priesthood and their mode of operation (see Nrenzah, 2015, 6 and 170). The revived or traditional priesthood has culturally recognised signs indicating a person's calling, either via inheritance or abduction by mystical beings called 'mmoatia' (dwarves). A claim must be validated by the *ɔkɔmfɔpayin*, an elder priest/priestess knowledgeable about deity traits, who receives training in the deity's dos and don'ts and priestly skills (*Kɔmfɔ Kyei*, interview by Genevieve Nrenzah, April 3, 2012; Ekem, 2009, p. 48). The neo-priests do not rely on community validation or training; neo-priests often claim spiritual authority through charisma and direct possession experiences (Nrenzah, 2015, p. 126).

The neo-priest employs counter-hegemonic activities, strategies, discourse, and claims to the authenticity of spiritual power over others through rituals and miracles. They engage with Christian pastors in public spaces over who wields potent spiritual power and claims to supply Christians with their powers, which they use in their miracle services (Alabi, 2019); they exhibit power and control in public spaces, their *agoro* or *akɔ afahye* performances (Nrenzah, 2015, p. 238). Modernising formats such as media culture, both traditional and social, are modes they use to disseminate their ideas, dotting their locality and other parts of Ghana, as well as international destinations, to express their expansionist and transnational agenda, which includes promoting cultural exchange and influencing global perceptions of Ghanaian identity. Social media and other digital platforms play a crucial role in shaping how IRTs are perceived and recognised beyond Ghana's borders. Their influence enhances visibility and builds legitimacy, making them more accessible to a global audience. The activities mentioned are spaces that press home their discourse — a discourse on modernity and authenticity from the perspective of Africans.

Their adaptation, often influenced by Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity, signifies a major shift in how IRTs assert legitimacy and expand. Neo-indigenous agents establish authority through charisma and media outreach, extending practices beyond Ghana to Europe and North America (Nrenzah, 2015). This phenomenon is likened to the concept of "burgerisation" (a term derived from Ghanaian migrant experiences), which reflects the transnational spread of IRTs. "Burgerisation" is introduced as a framework for analysing the international spread of IRTs, representing a departure from their previous marginality. Through burgerisation, Ghanaian IRTs now reach global audiences. Its significance lies in the display of how previously delegitimised religious traditions claim space in the global religious marketplace. The theoretical framework underpinning this concept will be elaborated later in the work.

This study examines the intentional transnationalisation of Ghanaian IRTs, with a focus on new indigenous priests and priestesses expanding into Europe and North America. These developments directly challenge the dominance of Christian narratives that have historically depicted IRTs as backward. By reclaiming legitimacy and asserting the contemporary relevance of indigenous religions, these agents disrupt established hierarchies and reshape religious markets both locally and globally. The study addresses the following questions: Why and how do Ghanaian indigenous religious agents engage in transnational activities? Which socio-historical and global forces facilitate this change? How do these activities contest religious hierarchies and narratives? Drawing on

ethnographic data, particularly Nana Kwaku Bonsam's, the study establishes that the expansion of IRTs represents a fundamental shift in African religious agency within globalisation debates.

2. Literature Review / Conceptual Model

This research draws upon scholarship on transnationalism, Christianity in Ghana, Pentecostalism, indigenous religious traditions, migration, global flows, reverse missions and burgerisation, religious markets and competition, and multiple modernities. Each of these fields contributes to our understanding of globalisation and the competitive dynamics of IRTs.

2.1 *The PCC on Indigenous Religious Traditions in the literature*

Change, be it social or religious, is always met with apprehension (Assimeng, 2010; Goody, 2018). Uncertainty always raises suspicion and resistance. This was the case with encounters between Christianity and IRTs in Ghana, which created permanent damage to the latter. Christian missionaries have historically blacklisted IRTs as evil, and, in contemporary times, Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity in Ghana has framed indigenous religions as backward and demonic (Meyer 1999, xvii; De Witte 2005, p. 313). Debrunner recounts the first meeting at Elmina, when Diego d'Azambuja arrived on January 20, 1482:

The mass was heard by our men with many tears of devotion, and thanks to God for allowing them to praise and glorify Him in the midst of those idolaters, asking Him that as He was pleased that they were the first to erect an altar at so great a sacrifice, He would give them wisdom and grace to draw those idolatrous people to the faith so that the Church, which they would found there, might endure until the end of the world (Debrunner, 1967, p. 17).

Words like 'idolaters' and 'heathens' directly insult the host country's values. Modern Ghanaian Christian discourse still shows this animosity that started with the first encounter. Missionary reports from the 1850s called indigenous priests agents of the devil and obstacles to the gospel. Smith describes an Akropong incident. Missionary J.A. Mader flogged a fetish priest for opposing the gospel. In Asaafa and Kwaaman, missionaries destroyed a sacred grove for a chapel (Ekem, 2009, p. 163). Mader had students collect black soil from the grove for his garden to show that it had no power. He told a chief he would go to hell for his immoral life (Smith, 1966, p. 91). In Akwapim, the chief tried to marry female catechumens. Inspector Josenhans called polygamy unchristian and warned that forced marriage was unjust (Odamtten, 159–160). In 1850, a missionary in Aburi cut down a sacred tree for a mission house. This represents the decline of the old order. Local priests protested and demanded that Christians offer sacrifices to avoid a smallpox epidemic (Smith, 1966, p. 91).

This missionary hostility to indigenous religions continued across Ghana, but this discussion focuses on the Akan land. Kumasi, capital of the Ashanti, was called the "stronghold of the devil" by Maclean, the British governor, in a letter to Freeman (Smith, 1966, p. 88). Missionaries branded Asante rituals—*odwira*, *odae*, prayers, drumming, dancing, and puberty rites—as 'pagan' and 'superstitious' (Obeng, 1996, p. 121). The then Ashanti king, Mensah Bonsu, responded to missionaries by seeking to educate them on the relevance of indigenous religions. He told Picot in 1876, during negotiations to work in Kumasi:

The Bible is not a book for us. God, at the beginning, gave the Bible to the white people, another book to the Cramo, and the fetish to us... We know God ourselves... As to the commandments of God, we know and keep them all. But we will never embrace your religion.... The God of the white man and the Fantis is different from the God of the Ashantis, and we cannot do without our fetish" (Ekem, 2009, p. 96).

The king saw Christianity and IRTs as equal, each fitting different cultural spheres and sharing a similar purpose. This view tacitly rejects the new religion, indicating that indigenous custodians resisted the loss of their authority. After colonialism, one might expect Ghanaian Christians to act differently from foreigners, yet they continued the missionaries' work. Today, the dominant PCCs lead the opposition to IRTs, even though they thrive on that belief.

The PCC has enjoyed substantive scholarship on all facets of life. Meyer, De Witte, Ukah, Hackett, Asamoah-Gyadu, and Hock connected the PCC's success to the media (Meyer, 2004; De Witte, 2005; Hackett, 1998; Asamoah-Gyadu, 2011; Ukah; Hock, 1995, p. 58). Heuser (2016) hints at the African type of Pentecostalism; Gifford (2004) focuses on the various strands of charismatic Christianity; and Bergrunder (2008) points to the alternative Pentecostal movement experience in South India. Kgate opines that South African pastors act like cults and cause subsequent religious abuse (Kgate, 2021). Kaunda addresses sexuality and gender in African Pentecostalism (Kaunda, 2020, p. 2). Chitando et al. touch on topics that lie at the nexus of Pentecostal, charismatic, and other renewal movements, as well as associated phenomena, including tradition, beliefs, interpretations of sacred texts, scholarship, and the transforming and renewing work of the Holy Spirit in Christian cultures, traditions, and creation. Chitando, Togarasei, and Maseno-Ouma, (2024). Idumwonyi examines gender, religion, and culture in Nigerian Pentecostalism (Idumwonyi, 2023). Kaunda and Sokfa (2022) address sexuality and gender in Africa, highlighting contemporary concerns, such as morality, stemming from the presence and influence of Pentecostalism. Kölle's (2022) account indicates sexual abuses in the earlier missionary work in Ghana. Homewood closes in when he investigates and explains why sexual encounters with demons are so fundamental to the Pentecostal belief in this world and beyond in deliverance-dominant Pentecostalism, stressing the seductive spirits that operate spiritually (Homewood, 2024).

Buertey argues that African Traditional Religions (ATR) or IRTs "can hardly be separated from the ordinary African" (Buertey, 2025, p. 82). Debrunner (1967, p. 2) and Opoku (1978, p. 11) have previously highlighted the relationship among social activities, religion, politics, tradition, and culture. Opoku and Debrunner make these points forcefully when they note that in Ghanaian indigenous religions in general, the religion of the indigenous people of Ghana permeates all aspects of their lives. Religion was therefore not separable from other aspects of life, and "religious life is not an individual but a communal affair." (Gyekye, 1996, p. 4). Among the Akan people, one is born and into a religion. In such an indigenous setting, religion is not separate from other aspects of living. Indigenous Akan religions, however, demonstrate features that foreshadow their ability to withstand the pressures from newly emerging forces, whether local or external. Fluid and flexible, their beliefs and practices are always dynamic, adopting and adapting to newly emerging situations.

The PCCs, however, use the same old formula as their predecessors, the missionaries, in their proselytising activities. They realise, as Africans themselves, that they cannot do away with IRTs; they therefore transmogrify ideas to suit their course. Grants' notes that Pentecostalism, rather than removing traditional ways of thinking, routinely incorporates, reshapes, and presents them through a Christian lens. "Pentecostalism does not completely reject these ideas; instead, it gives them new life" (Grant, 2025, p. 26). As IRTs learn to tell their stories, they also learn the dominant Christian methods of evangelism, with the intention of debunking the negatives and relaunching them locally and intentionally.

2.2 Religious Transnationalism and Reverse Mission

The many faces of faith encompass the different "world religions" (Losch, 2002) and other religious traditions worldwide. The rapid global spread of religious transnationalism includes migration, globalisation, and "religious switching" (Pew Research Centre, 2022, 7). Religious transnationalism is the process by which immigrants and religious groups create and maintain spiritual practices, identities, and institutional links across national borders. It operates in a "transborder" space, in which

faith links people in their new host country to their home country and to networks worldwide. This is different from localised religious life (Katigbak-Montoya, 2025; Mensah & Aryee, 2013). Spickard and Adogame were right in their assessment that the world is now a transnational field in which religion operates alongside other social institutions and forces. Religion's "locality" thus crosses borders in new and complex ways (Spickard & Adogame, 2010, p. 1).

The complex yet crucial feature of religious transnationalism is the dual loyalties migrants experience. Religious transnationalists are linked to both their religious community and their national state and sometimes prioritise religious affiliation over national identity. (Waldinger & Fitzgerald, 2004). There are the material and immaterial flows of both "hard" resources (such as money for building churches or humanitarian relief) and "soft" resources (such as religious ideas, norms, and values) (Sheringham & Villares-Varela, 2024; Garbin, 2019). Then, there is a reconstitution of space as the church transforms physical and spiritual landscapes, creating "translocal" connections in which a specific parish in a host city may be directly linked to a specific village church in the homeland, in the case of the Zimbabwean Catholic congregation in Birmingham (Pasura, 2012, p. 1; Mutambasere, 2022).

People understand transnationalism and the transfer of churches, for example, from Africa to the West, as serving the satiating tastes of Africans while also filling the gaps in community, family, and nationhood. There is, however, an expanded agenda among religious leaders who establish churches beyond their nations. The extension of African Christianity to the newly emerging Diasporas in Europe and North America (Adogame, 2013, 2010, 2009; Tetteh, 2007; Olupona, 2007). Adogame and Spickard alert us to the "reverse flow" (Kalu, 2008, p. 271) or "reverse mission" trend, in which Africans, formerly referred to as "heathens", are returning to re-Christianise the American and European continents (Olupona, 2007, p. 8). In 'God's continent' (Bronk, 2010; Jenkins, 2007), which introduced Christianity to Africa and other places, churches are now converted into pubs, restaurants, nightclubs, offices, flats, museums, and industrial warehouses due to a shortage of priests and members (Goslin, 1984; Jenkins, 1997; Burgess, 2011).

Africans are now among those preaching the Gospel in Europe, which Adogame and Spickard (2010) and Olupona and Gemignani (2007) have termed a "reverse mission". They draw attention to the "reverse flow" or "reverse mission" trends whereby Africans, formerly referred to as "pagans", are returning to re-Christianise the American and European continents. It is a yearning to evangelise from previously peripheral societies to the earliest centres of mission, that is, to re-evangelise their host society, which is otherwise called reverse evangelisation (Pasura, 2012, p. 27). Lychou sees the move as the construction of national unity through faith (Lychou, 2025). Reverse missions include churches established in Africa and have a significant impact on the emerging civic participation of African religious communities (Adogame & Spickard, 2010, p. 14; Olupona and Gemignani, 2007: 8; Nrenzah, 2015: 27) but for Olupona, "reverse missionaries" include not only African-established churches but also have a significant impact on the developing civic participation of African religious communities. In Olupona's view, the new indigenous priest's transnational agenda falls within this concept. The idea that the West is, or has become, spiritually arid and the challenges African transmigrants face in adjusting to their new homes in Europe and North America have also increased demand for African Christianity as a spiritual resource and triggered the influx of African indigenous spiritual forms in these regions.

This paper expands this idea beyond Christianity to IRTs. It drew on the reverse mission to launch IRTs across other parts of Africa, just as Christianity was brought to Africa. Here, the new indigenous religious agents on this mission have a goal to "evangelise" and/or convert people of African descent in the diaspora, as well as non-Africans, to IRTs. In doing so, they build a sense of "reverse mission", to borrow the term used by scholars such as Adogame to describe the growing practice of African churches extending branches to Europe and North America. The activities of the new indigenous priests/priestesses are a response to the historical missionary showdown and current

PCC attitude towards the IRTs. This is a counter-hegemonic approach to the so-called Christian “order”.

In the discussion on modernity, Meyer highlights that Christian popular culture has greatly influenced public space in southern Ghana, where it dominates and portrays indigenous religions as outdated and evil (Meyer, 2008, pp. 85–96). This perspective corresponds to a wider narrative that reinterprets local deities as demonic forces. Smith points out that European missionaries viewed West Africa as needing not just the Gospel but also the advancements of Christian civilisation (Smith, 1966, p. 87; Omenyo, 2002, p. 45), strengthening a narrative of superiority and order by present-day PCCs.

In response to what constitutes modernity, scholars such as the Comaroffs argue for plural modernities, in which different religious systems articulate their forms of modernity (Comaroff & Comaroff, 1993). Concentrating on the multiple popular religious expressions in the Global South under various conditions, Parker elaborates on multiple modernities, opining that diversity is not a matter of the proliferation of churches, denominations, sects, or movements, religious leaders, or new prophets. In other words, religious diversity is not “religious pluralism”; the focus is on the real diversity of religious expressions, not on religious institutions exclusively. The fact “that popular religions in the Global South are being reinvigorated and are not declining” (Parker, 2019, 2) means their forms of modernity are also relevant. Scholars say IRTs can modernise their religion on their terms, not the PCC’s.

The subsequent discussion will elucidate how this empowerment forms a critical foundation for IRT agents as they challenge Christian religious hegemony in Ghana. Furthermore, it will examine how the global outreach campaign, designed to demonstrate the mobility and global relevance of indigenous religions, may also entail potential economic motivations.

2.3 Religious Marketplace and Pluralism in Africa: A Conceptual Model

This section analyses the literature and data concerning competition within the religious marketplace and the concept of burgerisation in Ghana’s context, where numerous religious traditions coexist and increasingly influence the operational strategies of their representatives. Many religious groups now adopt business-like behaviours, utilising marketing strategies to attract clientele or “consumers” to their goods and services, thereby ensuring organisational visibility and viability. Peter Berger, seeking to explain the dynamics among religious groups in a secularising, rapidly changing, and religiously pluralistic American society of the 1960s, proposed the religious economy theory. He argued that in societies where the state has limited authority to regulate religious adherence, new religions and worship cultures continually emerge, each presenting its most appealing image to attract worshippers’ loyalty.

Berger argued that the development described above engenders a free-market situation in which religious groups and their agents compete for adherents and public patronage, with Iannaccone adding a new twist by stating that “if individual denominations function as religious firms, then they collectively constitute a religious market.” (Berger, 1963, p. 79; Iannaccone, 1998, p. 1485). Muller points to the competitive advantages among religious organizations (Muller, 2002, p. 436), with Stark and Finke viewing the religious economy as a commercial venture (1988, 42) but shifting position recently, describing a religious economy as a subsystem within religious activity... a set of one or more organizations seeking to attract or maintain adherents and the religious culture offered by the organization(s) (Stark & Finke, 2000, p. 193).

Contemporary religious leaders employ business strategies and forms of religious capital like those of producers and entrepreneurs, responding strategically to the constraints and opportunities present in the religious marketplace (Iannaccone, 1999, p. 77). The relative freedom of choice available to religious consumers compels religious agents to develop diverse religio-cultural commodities and services, particularly in countries with numerous competing churches rather than a single dominant

church (Iannaccone, 1486). These agents supply attractive commodities and services, advertise and market their offerings, compete to retain market share, and strive to maintain consistent demand (Nrenzah, 2015, p. 58; Iannaccone, 1995, p. 77).

This theory has faced criticism from scholars who contend that it inappropriately equates religious behaviour in pluralistic societies with commodity markets, citing issues such as lack of selectivity (Willis & Bruce, 1984; Bruce, 1993; Robertson, 1994, p. 51). Nevertheless, the religious market model remains pertinent for analysing the strategies employed by Christian and indigenous religious agents to establish their presence in Ghana's contemporary religious economy. The model demonstrates how representatives of Ghana's IRTs attract followers, provide services, and generate demand in a largely unregulated environment, competing with Christian groups. This situation contrasts with the restrictive military rule of the 1970s and 1980s, as the 1992 constitution now guarantees religious freedom, fostering significant religious pluralism and a dynamic, sometimes volatile, religious market. In this context, power struggles among various groups are common, setting the stage for the emergence of concepts relevant to neo-priests and priestesses.

2.3.1 *Burgerisation*

The study reveals the impact of internationalisation on Ghana's indigenous religious landscape. To establish a presence in local and global religious markets, they have adopted internationalisation, or 'globalisation' strategies, to connect with the world, much like their competitors, the PCCs, and other religious groups in Ghana. I appropriate the notion of internationalising a local religious tradition to the concept of burgerisation. The origin of the term "burger" is unclear, but according to some Ghanaians, it seems to have a geographic root: most Ghanaian expatriates travelled to Hamburg, Germany. The word originated from Ghanaian immigrants returning from Hamburg, Germany" (Nrenzah, 2015, p. 252). Burgers could be defined as transcontinental migrants who have achieved middle-class status in Ghana by doing working-class jobs in Western Europe or North America" (Nieswand, 2014, p. 403).

In Germany, people are sometimes identified by the cities they live in; those who live in Berlin are Berliners, those who live in Rostock are Rostockers, those who live in Regensburg are Regensburgers, and those who live in Hamburg are Hamburgers. It is therefore believed to have originated from Ghanaian immigrants returning from Hamburg, Germany, who shortened it to 'burger'. Nieswand suggests that the term "burger" began circulating in the 1980s among the protagonists of a new wave of migration to Europe, especially in Germany (Nieswand, 2014, p. 403). Generally, "burger" is a colloquial term that refers to something international. Currently, the word "burger" in Ghana refers to people who travel abroad to Europe, North America, Australia, and so on.

Within this context, "burgerisation" denotes the transformation of religious forms into globally mobile, market-oriented, and consumer-facing systems, reflecting broader neoliberal and transnational dynamics. To facilitate internationalisation and transnationalisation, figures such as Kwaku Bonsam have developed narratives that challenge perceptions of IRTs as primitive or parochial, instead presenting them as modern religious expressions with contemporary significance that extends beyond local contexts. Empowered by this perspective, agents like Bonsam engage both local and global communities, utilising modern media to broaden their outreach.

As argued earlier, internationalisation, or what is often referred to as the "burgerisation" of religious organisations, has become the status quo for religious traditions seeking to be taken seriously. Kwaku Bonsam's move is interpreted as a counter-hegemonic approach, a resistance that could be gleaned from the anti-witchcraft shrines during the latter part of the nineteenth century and the early part of the twentieth century (Dovlo, 1998, p. 53). These anti-witchcraft shrines, such as Aberewa (literally meaning "old woman"), in 1906, Hwemeso (1920–1923), Kunde, Senyakupo, Nana Tongo and Tigare (Parker, 393), are said to have spread across West Africa in the 1950s. Aberewa literally means "watch over me," presumably a reference to its role in providing supernatural cover

for its clients (Parker, 2004, p. 393). Goody (1981, I) was widely found in Ghana at the time and attracted considerable scholarly attention because it was a form of resistance against Christianity and/or colonialism. What is happening now is a buildup on that.

3. Methodology, Ethics, and Positionality

This study is based on ten months of ethnographic fieldwork conducted principally through a multi-sited engagement in the Ashanti region of Ghana, with transnational extensions in Amsterdam, Europe, and the Bronx, USA. The Akan indigenous religion was selected for two reasons. “The Ashanti region, home to the Ashanti Akans, serves as the research site for this project.” Secondly, the Akans are the largest ethnic group in Ghana. They constitute 49.1% of the entire population and inhabit about two-thirds of Ghana’s land space (Nrenzah, 2015, p. 77; Nykansa, 2010, p. 8). Finally, the Ashanti region has stronger, more undeniable indigenous practices throughout time. The ethnographic approach allows for an in-depth understanding of lived religious practices and their transnational adaptations. Data were generated from in-depth interviews with priests, assistants (bosomfo), members, and clients; observation and participant observation at shrines and rituals; and digital ethnography (social media and websites).

The first fieldwork began with a month-long preliminary study to map the field. Access was facilitated through local gatekeepers and mapped priests, priestesses, and shrines linked to Indigenous religions across the country. Two key agents and shrines were selected as case studies using random sampling. Sampling was used in two ways: to select cases and to conduct interviews. Given the impracticality of interviewing all priests in Ghana, Gold’s “sociological sampling” was used (Gold, 2001, p. 291), focusing on two exemplifying cases—the neo-indigenous priests and revitalised old priests and shrines—based on the project’s objectives and the respondents’ willingness to participate. This choice was influenced by Gold’s idea that human communities are like other natural phenomena (Gold, 2001, p. 290).

The first three months of fieldwork began on 17 December 2011 and ended on 17 March 2012 in Akomadan Afrancho, Ashanti Region. Fieldwork in the Bronx, New York, USA was conducted from 14 November 2012 to 21 November 2012. The study in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, was conducted from 1st December 2012 to 8th December 2012. The second major fieldwork was conducted at Obuasi-Dadwen from the 17th of December 2012 to the 17th of April 2013. From the 1st of February to the 15th of March 2025, when I decided to publish the earlier research, I conducted a follow-up visit to the earlier cases’ shrines, Kwaku Bonsam’s and Komfo Oforiwaa’s, and interviewed old and new members and clients to cross-verify and strengthen the data. In all, the research took ten months.

The goal of the interviews was to explore recent responses from IRT agents in the Ghanaian religious landscape. I focused on their biographies, the strategies they use to establish their presence, and the motivations of members and clients for openly associating with these shrines. Their past religious affiliations and the reasons these shrines are now more important to them were studied. Most interviews were conducted in Twi and then translated into English. The primary data for analysis included the transcribed interviews, photographs, videoed observations, handouts, and descriptions of the research settings.

The research uses semi-structured interviews, observations, and document analyses of the research sites. ritual protocols, including participation in shrine-based practices. These included the indigenous agents (priests/priestesses), their shrines, clients, helpers, subscribers/adherents, non-worshippers (casual and permanent), fans, and natives of the study locations. In all, forty people were interviewed individually and in focus groups.

The ethnographic method was particularly vital, as the research called for comprehensive descriptions and explanations of the diversity of signs that marked the experiences I was investigating. These included the indigenous agents (priests/priestesses), their shrines, clients, helpers,

subscribers/adherents, non-worshippers, fans, consumers, and natives of the study locations. Gold cites Weber as saying, “One could best understand society for what it is—not for what one thinks it might, should, or must be—by studying it from the points of view of its members.” (Gold, 2001, p. 290). So, as an ethnographer, you had to live with them, observe, probe, participate, ask questions, and record.

A comparative examination was a key tool for theming and accentuating the differences and similarities between the two case studies, which serve as examples of aspects of Ghana’s indigenous religious landscape. Finally, the analytical tool was critical, helping make sense of the raw data collected and going beyond what had been collected in the field. This tool cannot be ignored.

3.1 Ethics and Positionality

The study sought both verbal and written consent from priests, priestesses, members, clients, and residents of the communities. First, after the gatekeeper introduces the researcher to the respondent, verbal consent is obtained. When they agreed to be interviewed, the respondents were given written consent to read and sign. The respondent’s rights are set out in the consent they voluntarily agree to provide. They can withdraw consent at any time and skip questions they do not want to answer.

Oral and written consent were used to inform illiterate respondents of the paper’s contents. Then comes the task of making sure they understand their rights and can withdraw consent at any time. Participants were informed that they could change their minds within a year if they wished and could contact me using the contact details on my business card.

Pseudonyms are used in place of their original names. In the case of Nana Kwaku Bonsam and ɔkomfoɔ Oforiwaa, they insisted on using their names. They say they have been hiding for so long that they don’t want to hide their identity anymore, so they’re the only ones with real names here (Nana Kwaku Bonsam, November 16, 2012; ɔkomfoɔ Oforiwaa, March 3, 2013).

3.1.1 Positionality

In this study, I see myself as having a dual role. I consider myself an outsider because I am not a practitioner, a subscriber, or an Ashanti. I could refer to myself as an “insider” because I am a Ghanaian scholar researching in Ghana on a religious tradition that has family resemblance to my Nzema ethnic group. My outsider status called on me to empathetically insert myself into their world to uncover what they do. This method helped me earn the trust of the communities involved, making it easier to collect information about them and their followers.

4. Findings and Discussions

The findings in this study demonstrate that transnationalisation of IRTs is not incidental but strategically constructed and rooted in earlier cultural revival movements of the 1960s–1980s, identified by diasporic demand, Black consciousness, and Sankofa ideology, along with institutional efforts like the Ghana Psychic and Traditional Healers Association (1962) and the Afrikania movement (1982), targeted at modernising indigenous religion and media and technological innovation. The findings are demonstrated in the ensuing discussion sections.

4.1 Historical Foundations: Cultural Revival and Indigenous Institutionalisation

The 1960s and 1970s witnessed a cultural awakening, particularly in Black pride, power, and self-awareness regarding the spirituality of Black people, which Konadu refers to as the “Black cultural thing” in the United States of America (Konadu, 2010, pp. 217–218). The influence of this movement was so widespread that it prompted a reconsideration of narratives about African consciousness across communities worldwide. In Ghana, it inspired the concept that came to be known as Sankofa. Unlike the 1950’s struggles, which were political, this new concept emphasised religion. Individuals led the

revival or the restructuring of indigenous religions in various African countries and the diaspora. In Ghana, local figures such as Afrikadzata Deku, Seth Dartey Kumordzi, and Segbawu articulated nationalistic religious ideas, capitalising on the growing popularity of print and electronic media (Dovlo, 1998, p. 54). Indigenous priests and nuns also tried to institutionalise themselves.

The establishment of the Ghana Psychic and Traditional Healers Association (GPTHA) in 1962 was the first attempt to institutionalise indigenous religions. Although it did not function as planned due to power struggles among the priests/priestesses, it remains relevant. It serves to differentiate between trained and untrained indigenous agents. The Ghanaian government recognises it as an official body. The IRTs agent must first be a member of the IRTs before the Ghanaian Ministry of Health licenses them to use herbs for healing. Nana Akua Oparabea, the priestess of Akonnedi shrine, was the central pillar behind this move. The organization also received support from Ghana's first president, Osagyefo, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah. The influence of Sankofa extended into the early 1980s and fertilised the grounds for the genesis of Afrikania, which could then be described as the most significant new indigenous religious movement.

Afrikania's origins triggered a new revolution that shook Ghana's religious landscape. Founded by a Catholic priest, Vincent Damuah, later known as Osofo komfo Damuah, Afrikania's objective was to revitalise indigenous religions and transform them into a "modern and morally good" religion comparable to any world religion (De Witte, 2010, p. 89). The founder's dramatic conversion from Catholicism stirred debate in Ghanaian Christian circles. Ghana's Christians viewed this as an anomaly. As Wuaku has noted, when Damuah died in 1992, many Christians welcomed the news, celebrating the death as a sign of Jesus's defeat over Satan, who rules the indigenous spiritual environment according to contemporary Christian discourse.

Despite his premature death, Damuah's initiative to revitalise African religions ushered in an era of indigenous cultural innovation and revivalism in Ghana. Damuah subsequently inspired many Ghanaian religious and political actors to initiate cultural projects. In his work on Ghana's Hindus, Wuaku identifies some of these cultural awakening programmes, such as the Centre for the Awareness of African Spirituality; new festivals, such as the Gbidukor Zaa celebrated in Peki, and invented traditions, such as Panafest and Emancipation Day (Wuaku, 2013, p. 70). The Pan African festival, or Panafest for short, was created in the mid-1980s by the late Efua Sutherland. The initiative intended to establish a national platform for Africans on the continent and in the diaspora to discuss issues related to their history and to strengthen African consciousness among people of African descent. Supported by the then government, this festival has existed since 1992.

Emancipation Day was added in 1998 to remember the horrors of the slave trade and to venerate people who fought for its eradication. In addition to these new festivals, there was a rekindling of interest in existing festivals, such as the Akwasidae, Fetu Afahye, Kundum, Odwira, Hogbetsotso, and Aboakyere, which are both cultural and religious (Nrenzah, 2015, p. 140; Wuaku, , 2013, p. 70). For the diaspora portion of the African world, the cultural awakenings on the African continent, especially in Ghana, held an enormous appeal. People of African descent from the diaspora in the Caribbean, South America, and the USA have flooded Ghana every year to access authentic African spirituality or to obtain firsthand experience of an indigenous African spiritual tradition, which many consider more potent than those they were exposed to in their home nations, as they seek a richer connection to their roots and cultural heritage. The 2019 "Year of Return..." was organised by the Government of Ghana as a symbolic commemoration of four hundred years since the first enslaved Africans arrived in Hampton, in the English colony of Virginia, in America. Many African families worldwide, especially celebrities, return to Ghana, but it is important to note that this is described as a "major landmark spiritual and birthright journey" (Visit Ghana, 2019). These developments led to a surge in religious and cultural tourism in Ghana, beginning in the 1980s and continuing to this day.

Individuals from the African diaspora seek recognition as powerful spiritualists, drawing their potency from authentic African, or "home", sources, which is apparently a strong motivating force

behind these visits. An African American born Augustus Edwards, who later became Nana Yao Opare Dinizulu, is a classic example of such an individual (Konadu, 2010, p. 202). In 1965, Augustus visited the Akonnedi shrine in Ghana's eastern region. During this visit, he became an apprentice and was initiated as a priest by Nana Akua Oparebea, ɔkɔmfɔɔ. Hema of the Akonnedi Abena shrine of Larteh-Kubease in 1969 (Konadu, 2010, p. 214). Divination at the shrine revealed that Dinizulu was a relative of the shrine's owners and prompted this initiation. Dinizulu returned to the USA and founded the religious institution Bosum in New York in 1971. He established additional branches in Philadelphia, where he trained priests/priestesses and instructed laypeople in indigenous Akan spirituality. Beginning in the 1970s, Dinizulu would lead delegations of Americans, primarily people of African descent, to Ghana (Konadu, 2010, p. 219). Some of these individuals were trained and initiated in New York, but they still sought spiritual fortification in the "homeland", which they meant as Africa, specifically Ghana. Although they had accepted their African religion, many others still wanted to visit Ghana to identify with their African roots. One of Dinizulu's products was Nana Akua Kyerewaa Opokuwaa, another African American. She was trained by Dinizulu in Bosum Dzimawodzi, NY, and was initiated in 1971; she visited Ghana and was enstooled as a queen mother in Elmina. In 1997, she established Asomdwee Fie, Shrine of the Abosom and Nsamanfo International (AFSANI) in Washington, DC, United States (Dorvlo, 2013). These are but a few examples of people of African descent from the diaspora who came to Ghana after independently studying the spirituality of their enslaved ancestors.

These cases are not peculiar to Ghana. For example, Mama Zogbe, an African American with roots in Togo, established the Mami Wata West Africa Vodoun shrine in Martinez, Georgia. Also noteworthy is Walter Eugene King, later known as Oba Efuntola Oseijeman Adelabu Adefunmi, the king of Oyotunji village. Scholars such as Olupona and Rey have noted that he has contributed considerably to Orisha's devotion in the United States, drawing primarily on his links to the Yoruba religions of Nigeria (Olupona & Rey, 2008, p. 17). I also wish to point out that non-Africans made parallel developments in other African countries. A classic example is an Austrian-born artist, Suzanne Wenger, who sought to revive the Yoruba religion. She married Ulli Beier, a German linguist, and the couple moved to Nigeria when Beier accepted a position as a phonetician in Ibadan. Beier later became the director of Iwalewa-Haus in Bayreuth. Wenger's interest in art and art collections led her to the Yoruba religion. She later trained as a priestess and adopted Oshogbo as her home. She was so engulfed in the Yoruba religion that she "made enormous efforts to protect the sacred grove of Osun, a forest along the banks of the Oshun River just outside Oshogbo, which she turned into a sculpture garden filled with art made by her and others" (Keith, 2009; Ijisakin, 2021). UNESCO rewarded her efforts to protect the grove in 2005 by listing it as a World Heritage site (Andrew Walker, BBC News).

Scholars and practitioners have pushed for the recognition of some IRTs as world religions as they spread globally. Although the concept of "world religion" is problematic, Olupona and Rey have supported the classification of Yoruba religions, just as Christianity "should now be considered a world religion" (Olupona and Rey, 3). Activities in the USA and those initiated by individuals such as Efuntola Oseijeman Adelabu Adefunmi, the king of Oyotunji, and Susanne Wegner in Oshogbo, Nigeria, are based on these movements. All these efforts paid off, as Stephen R. Prothero recently listed Yoruba as a world religion in his book *Die Neun Weltreligionen* (Prothero, 2011, p. 239). These examples exhibit the far-reaching influence of local African and Ghanaian indigenous religious revivalisms and identify earlier developments that established the foundation for Ghana's contemporary global outreach campaign by indigenous priests. The optimistic perspective of Africans in the diaspora toward indigenous religions and their keenness to participate in such practices in Ghana, at a time when these traditions were widely disparaged as occult and evil in local circles, helped to improve the local image of these traditions and bolster the morale of their agents. It also enabled Ghanaians to trust and value locally produced items, commonly referred to as "made

in Ghana” products, including those associated with indigenous religions. These developments established the foundation for reframing indigenous religions as modern, legitimate, and exportable.

4.2 Diasporic Engagement and Religious Tourism

African diasporic communities have played a key role by pursuing spiritual reconnection with African roots, participating in rituals and initiations in Ghana, and establishing transnational religious institutions. Events such as Panafest, Emancipation Day, and the Year of Return intensified religious and cultural tourism, reinforcing Ghana as a spiritual homeland.

A greater positive awareness of indigenous heritage emerged across all facets of Ghanaian life, leading to increased purchases of Ghanaian-made products in both local and foreign markets. For instance, Ghanaian agricultural products and handicrafts were exported to foreign markets and received well. The patronage of Ghanaian products has expanded the market for tie-dye and batik, creating jobs for local designers/dressmakers and tailors. Notably, the interest spurred a national agenda, and the government developed a national trade platform, the “Trade Fair,” for local and cross-country trade, which has been organised annually since its inception and biennially in recent years. The trade fair is a stage for showcasing African products during a month-long trade bazaar. African Americans patronised these local fabrics abroad, especially in black-dominated cities like Chicago. For example, the researcher observed that Pastor Emeritus Rev. Jeremiah A. Wright, Jr., Pastor Emeritus of Trinity United Church of Christ (TUCC), always wore African dress and encouraged his African American congregation to express their pride as Africans by wearing African dress to church. The American movie “Black Panther” had African costumes, and viewers mostly wore African clothes to watch in the theatre. In Eddie Murphy’s “Coming to America 2”, actors wore African costumes sewn by a Ghanaian fashion designer. Drawing on the intentional use of African attire in films and famous churches, I propose that Ghana’s global outreach campaign by indigenous priests builds on Ghana’s orientation toward exporting local products and on the African diaspora’s acceptance of African cultural products. The suggestion is connected to the development known as the “reverse mission”. Adogame describes the reverse mission in the following words:

... the concept holds that, in earlier periods, churches in America and Europe sought to reach the world, especially Africa, hoping to rescue the heathen and turn them to Christ. Still, those “heathens” are returning to re-Christianise them, often referring to Europe as a “dark or prodigal continent” (Spickard and Adogame, 14).

The idea that the West is, or has become, spiritually arid and the challenges African transmigrants face in adjusting to their new homes in Europe and North America have also increased demand for African Christianity as a spiritual resource and triggered the influx of African indigenous spiritual forms in these regions.

This diasporic demand helped revalorise indigenous religions locally, even though they remained stigmatised within the dominant Christian discourse. All the developments discussed above have created fertile ground for a new breed of Ghana’s indigenous religious agents [priests/priestesses] to build on earlier efforts to restage indigenous religions as an alternative form of religion in the Ghanaian religious field and to endeavour to operate on the global stage. In the following discussion, I focus on Kwaku Bonsam as a significant player and a protagonist in the indigenous religious reconstruction agenda, whose activities exemplify the ambitions of these new IRTs priests. His activity, in retrospect, is counter-hegemonic in that it undermines the dominant Christian assumptions in Ghana. I examine how he uses modernising formats, media culture, and the internet to pursue his international agenda, expanding his influence abroad to fulfil the “call of the deity Kofi”.

4.3 Case Study: Nana Kwaku Bonsam and Transnational Expansion

Bonsam exemplifies the new generation of neo-indigenous religious agents. His key activities include establishing multiple shrines across Ghana and abroad, expanding into Europe (Amsterdam, Paris, and London) and the USA (Bronx), and framing his mission as divinely mandated by his deity.

Nana Kwaku Bonsam is an IRT priest from Akomadan-Afrancho in the Offinso-North District of Ghana's Ashanti Region. He has organised outreach programs to spread the message and sell religious products across various towns and villages in Ghana. In his first public appearance on a Kumasi radio station, he delivered a message from his chief deity, Kofi oo Kofi, promising to redeem Ghana and the world. As a key figure in neo-indigenous religions, Bonsam confidently discusses his calling and plans, driven by the belief that the gods have chosen him. Supported by spiritual promises from his chief gods, Kofi Oo Kofi and Chacha, he aims to popularise indigenous religions both in Ghana and beyond.

Kwaku Bonsam is the only neo-indigenous religious priest in Ghana with thirteen shrines across various cities and towns. Most other neo-priests have only two or three shrines. While some aim to internationalise their services, as evidenced by the different contact information they provide for local and foreign clients, Bonsam is the most ambitious. In addition to his shrines in Ghana, he has established ones in Amsterdam, France, London, Conakry (Guinea), and the Bronx, New York (Kwaku Bonsam, March 3, 2013). These shrines symbolise the "presence" of spiritual existence and reflect his strategic efforts to promote indigenous religions internationally.

Religious organisations' internationalisation, referred to as "Burgerisation," has become pervasive, with Kwaku Bonsam's actions seen as a response to this trend. There is an increasing interest among Africans in both the historical and modern diasporas of indigenous religions, leading to the spread of these traditions beyond their origins. Recent research highlights anti-witchcraft Akan shrines in New York, where priests assist clients in eliminating perceived witchcraft barriers to wealth and celebrity (Parish, 2013, p. 281). However, there is a lack of information regarding the backgrounds of these priests—whether they are economically motivated migrants, genuine spiritual leaders, or trained African American priests. The following section will analyse Bonsam's international objectives and their execution.

4.4 Internationalisation of Indigenous Religion

I first encountered Nana Kwaku Bonsam on January 22, 2012, during the first Akwasidae of the Ashanti religious calendar, and quite recently in 2025. That morning, he appeared in traditional priestly regalia, dancing to the drummers' rhythms as his followers welcomed him. We processed through the city to his shrine, where we offered a libation of thanksgiving before heading to the chief's palace to "feed the gods." Bonsam, a native of Akomadan-Afrancho, participated in the festival as a priest. Meeting Bonsam for the first time was before an encounter with Kojo Poku, his Bosomfo, who had informed me of his visit to Europe. Poku started explaining,

Our chief god, Kofi Oo Kofi, promised to take Nana K.B. to places... Last year, Nana came to the aid of a man in Holland after the necessary rites, and the deities solved his puzzle. The man invited him over to Amsterdam. While in Amsterdam, Nana opened a shrine with the gods' assistance and appointed the man as the Bosomfo. Now, the demand for his remedies is so high that he must go there to support the Bosomfo. Wait, when he comes, he will provide you with more significant details, that is, if he and the deities accept you to do this research." (Bosomfo Kojo Poku, January 10, 2012).

The afternoon of the Akwasidae festival is reserved for priests and priestesses to demonstrate their magico-religious power. During this time, they may enter a trance, communicating clients' requests through the bosomfo, who translates their responses from the language of the gods. This was my opportunity to request the gods' consideration for my research. My offerings were accepted only after the gods agreed to proceed with them when the Bosomfo Kojo Poku discussed my research.

That evening, during our conversation at his home, Bonsam elaborated on his reasons for pursuing overseas expansion.

My god, Kofi oo Kofi, has never failed me. He promised to take me to places to expand the religions of our ancestors... and he is doing it. I went to Amsterdam, the Netherlands, and Paris to help alleviate people's physical and spiritual problems. My next visit will be to the USA (Kwaku Bonsam, January 3, 2012).

When I asked him about which "people", he replied, "Everyone—Ghanaians, Jamaicans, Indians, and some white people. I want to help people globally and show them that my ancestors' religion is modern and beneficial " (Kwaku Bonsam, January 3, 2012). Bonsam aims to internationalise and modernise indigenous traditions by expanding his services to Europe and New York, where he promotes IRTs as pathways to contemporary spirituality. His success represents a significant shift in Ghana, where traditional priests typically serve rural areas. Operating shrines in Amsterdam, Paris, and New York, Bonsam caters mainly to a European clientele and has gained popularity among 10 African and Caribbean migrants in New York, who turn to his magico-religious practices for socioeconomic breakthroughs and protection from supernatural harm.

Bonsam is a prominent African priest admired by African Americans and Caribbean migrants for his connection to African spirituality. His popularity may stem from his boldness in challenging Christian pastors who sought his "potent African powers". His actions were sensationalised in the media, quickly elevating his fame. Reports from Ghanaian migrant families, who sought his help and shared their experiences, likely contributed to his reputation abroad (Lipinski, 2013; Alabi, 2019).

Bonsam views his travels abroad as a purposeful endeavour to establish himself as a representative of African Indigenous religions, which have now gained recognition as respected participants in Ghana's religious landscape after previously remaining largely in the background. He aims to show that, like other religious institutions, IRTs can contribute to humanity's betterment and should be embraced as an alternative spirituality. He emphasises that for a religion to be relevant, it must be accessible to its followers, which drives his transnational efforts. The ethnographic encounters in Ghana, Europe, and the USA reveal that his international work is understood as both a spiritual duty and a strategic expansion, as evidenced by his clientele, which includes Africans, diasporans, and non-Africans. His presence abroad symbolically asserts the global relevance of IRTs.

4.5 Media, Technology, and the Construction of Transnational Religious Space

Bonsam's success relies heavily on modern communication technologies, including social media (Facebook, Skype, WhatsApp), websites, online consultations, and radio broadcasts targeting diaspora communities. Word of mouth spreads rapidly within the African community, especially when migrants form crucial social ties through church services, parties, and rites of passage, such as births, marriages, and funerals. Two types of media, namely cyber and physical spaces, were identified to promote his mission abroad.

4.5.1 Cyberspace Community

In the new global era, it is possible to interact with people who are not physically known but virtually known through the spaces or platforms the internet culture has created. Gado refers to such areas as shared "at national or even continental levels", though these spaces are less stable than national, cultural, or racial ones. They appear to be the "receptacles... of globalising and localising dynamics" (Gado, 2008, pp. 201–214). Taking this opportunity, Kwaku Bonsam created a website—<http://www.kwakubonsam.com>—where he introduced himself and advertised his credentials, services, and activities. He has also informed prospective clients of his ability to travel worldwide by posting his itinerary on his website. Building on this, he has created a cyber-community through which he communicates with clients/fans via video and audio from remote locations, using his

numerous social media platforms (Facebook, Skype, YouTube, WhatsApp, and Twitter). Bonsam's YouTube channel, Nana Kwaku Bonsam TV, is where he shares his activities, with over 16.7k subscribers. His Facebook community, his main platform for reaching people worldwide, provides the data for this discussion. Two of his Facebook accounts are open to the public, with about 2.1K and 442 friends, family, and fans. The two secure accounts for clients/fans are for those who wish to stay privately connected with him. He frequently used Skype in 2011/12; in 2025, he informed me that he used WhatsApp to communicate with clients and friends, allowing them 10 to 15 minutes to explain their situations. In his words, he said, "My sister, now communication is easier and cheaper than before." With WhatsApp, I can provide services to my clients globally, whether through video or audio, and I can quickly prescribe solutions" (Bonsam interview by Genevieve Nrenzah, February 8, 2025). He picks those calls in the inner shrine, which creates a sense of privacy, establishes trust, and shows his clients images of his gods, who are his sources of power. The clients can see that Bonsam is consulting the gods, and I often heard him prescribe specific remedies and actions for them to take.

Bonsam used phone calls, Skype, and recently WhatsApp to serve clients over long distances, which appeals especially to Christians who value privacy. These platforms enable remote ritual consultations, expand clientele beyond geographic limits, and create virtual religious communities. Despite the supposed success of Bonsam and other interested parties, the questions of authenticity and legitimacy, particularly regarding virtual rituals, linger, as scholars have raised concerns about newly ordained priests' acceptance of technology compared to traditional practitioners. In her 2012 presentation at the American Academy of Religion Conference, where I presented part of my research to experts in religious studies, Rosalind Hackett, in conversation, pointed out the authenticity of cyber consultations and rituals in African indigenous religions, arguing that virtual environments fail to convey the magico-religious effects experienced through physical interactions with shrines. Jacob Olupona raised further doubts about the legitimacy of virtual priests, particularly concerning their qualifications and training (AAR, Chicago, Illinois, on November 18, 2012), while the author critiques neo-indigenous priests for their perceived lack of training and oversight, focusing on Bonsam's capability to conduct cyberspace rituals, and the implications of this critique are crucial. The internal resistance from some IRTs practitioners, the resistance of some Ghanaian migrants, and the legal and social constraints in host countries are important issues that must be considered in the future.

4.6 Performance, Adaptation, and Religious Hybridisation in Physical Spaces

In diaspora contexts, Bonsam adapts his practices by hosting events in formats familiar to Christian audiences (e.g., "all-night" services), incorporating music, performance, and spectacle, and engaging multicultural audiences (Bayern, 2012).

4.6.1 Physical Space

Bonsam advances his internationalisation agenda by travelling to countries where his services are sought, using Amsterdam as a key gateway to Europe, including France, the UK, Italy, and Germany. He utilises Ghanaian radio stations, such as Asomdwe FM and Word of Mouth FM, to announce his presence and upcoming events (Bayern, 2012). On December 3, 2010, he hosted an event in Amsterdam titled "Watch Night: Wonders by Nana Kwaku Bonsam" (Bayern, 2012), featuring Ghanaian gospel music performed by him and other artists. This program aimed to connect him with the diaspora community, primarily Christian worshippers. By participating in a Christian gospel event, Bonsam seeks to soften perceptions of his role as an indigenous priest in Ghana, positioning himself as a tolerant religious figure who respects Christian traditions and is approachable to the Christian community.

Bonsam's gods showcased their powers at an event dubbed Kwaku Bonsam All-Night in Amsterdam on the 3rd of December 2010, which was promoted on Asomdwie FM and at Ghana food markets in Amsterdam. The diverse crowd, mainly Ghanaians of various faiths, witnessed rituals starting with prayer and drumming. Bonsam's chief god, Kofi oo Kofi, displayed magical abilities, such as conjuring fabrics and boiling water without fire, and distributed protective rings to the audience, promising to ward off evil and bring luck. He conjured Ghana fabric, ahenema (traditional slippers), and rings said to bring good luck, as videoed by a Ghanaian videographer in Amsterdam, Steven Osei Mensah (Bayern, 2012).

His visit to the U.S. highlights his transitional agenda through personal presence and digital outreach. He promotes himself through his website, pamphlets, and radio interviews. He appears on television stations such as Sahara TV while attending various social and religious events (see Nana Kwaku Bonsam TV, 2013). His activities depend on connections with influential Ghanaians and have drawn attention from media outlets such as The New York Times (Lipinski, 2013).

Kwaku Bonsam's international agenda shifts according to his global exposure. In Amsterdam, he focused on supporting the Ghanaian community and promoting African spirituality. At the same time, in the USA, he aimed to popularise indigenous religion through his works, as commissioned by his chief deity, Kofi Oo Kofi. He often collaborates with cultural and religious event organisers, both publicly and privately, likely due to his B-1 visa restrictions and concerns about deportation. Nonetheless, what needs to be noted is his demonstration of seriousness about accomplishing his mission despite his immigration status.

Bonsam's attendance at social activities with the city's mayor, Ernest D. Davis, at the "Ghana New York Expo 2012" in Mount Vernon, New York, depicts this (Nrenzah, September 14, 2012). Again, Bonsam interacted with Dr Kay Turner, the Director of Folklore at the Brooklyn Arts Council, discussed his heritage, personal experiences, and the connection between tradition and contemporary art. Bonsam's exchange with a cultural powerhouse illuminated innovative strategies for engaging the community and revitalising folklore through creative projects. This and others were the collaborative efforts staged by Bonsam in his abroad agenda to give IRTs an international facelift.

Bonsam demonstrates openness toward individuals who do not share his perspective on indigenous religion, regarding such interactions as opportunities to present alternative viewpoints. This approach is evident in his activities in the United States, where he uses a range of platforms, including non-religious ones, to publicly discuss his faith. Concurrently, he maintains certain practices in private settings, such as his residence and online communities. These strategies increase the accessibility of IRTs, reduce associated stigma, and position indigenous religion within global patterns of religious consumption, exemplifying hybridisation as described by the concept of burgerisation.

4.6.2 Burgerisation as IRTs Missions Abroad

The concept of "burgerisation," as utilised in this study, encapsulates the transformation of religious practices while challenging the prevailing assumption that religious globalisation primarily flows from the West to Africa. Kwaku Bonsam exemplifies and advances the notion of "reverse mission," a term adopted from scholars such as Adogame and Olupona, who have described African Christian activities abroad. This reverse mission now includes emissaries from IRTs, such as Bonsam, who disseminate their beliefs and practices to Europe and North America. This development marks a significant departure from the traditional pattern of Christianity spreading from the West to Africa, typically facilitated by Western missionaries (Nrenzah, 2015, p. 9). This perspective contradicts Pentecostal assertions that indigenous religions are static, uncivilised, or confined to local contexts (Nel, 2019, p. 2). Instead, indigenous religions are portrayed as dynamic, adaptive, and globally mobile systems. This transformation is aptly described as "burgerisation", highlighting the increasing branding and standardisation of spiritual offerings and the expansion of shrine networks in a manner

analogous to the concept of “McDonaldisation”.

4.7 Alternative Explanations and Boundary Conditions

This section seeks to offer alternative explanations, supported by data, to readers who might enquire about the extent to which Nana Kwaku Bonsam is representative of the wider population of IRT agents and if his and his cohorts’ agenda is a “transnational religious expansion” or an act of individual entrepreneurship. Are we seeing a “revival” or simply market adaptation within spiritual services? Is this a response to the PCC and/or other religious denominations, as it were? Critics would say that Bonsam’s and others’ plans are more about individual businesses than a big “transnational religious expansion”.

First and foremost, the neo-priest Nana Kwaku Bonsam is used as a case for this study, even though apart from him, other neo-indigenous priests whose activities are congruent to Bonsam’s pattern, such as Nana Nyamekeh, Father Moses, Nana Saabentoo, Nana Ogyaframa, Mallam Kagyeibi, Nana Obuanipa, Abass, Nana Azagli, Nana Dzakpata, Komfo Yaa Asuo, Togbui Kedinakpo, Mallam Kagyeibi, Sofo Abass, Komfo Yaa Bea, Nana Durga, Nana Obiaba Nye, Nana Brenyan, Mallam Zack, and others, exist. He seems to be the neo-priest of nationwide repute but also a destination of international renown, whereas most of his colleagues work locally. Bonsam seems to be the protagonist, as most of the indigenous priests agree with his straightforward counter-hegemonic approach (Komfo Kyei, interview by Genevieve Nrenzah, February 15, 2025).

Secondly, these questions could be hypothetical, since Bonsam has said from the start that his gods sent him to an international place to make his ancestors’ religion more popular. This assertion of Bonsam’s claim to expansion from his deities cannot be affirmed or denied; he has not said it is done for pecuniary benefit, and we could not say that the sole purpose of his international activity is to expand his business. However, his claims, approach, and actions suggest a greater focus on reviving traditions than on adapting to the market. Bonsam’s answer to such an inquiry was simple: he followed the commands of Kofi oo Kofi and Chacha, his chief deities. For him, pecuniary benefits are blessings from his deity for obeying them (See the interview with Bonsam above).

Lastly, it is important to observe the consistency of Bonsam’s claims regarding his intention to propagate IRTs both in Ghana and internationally; this reflects the lens he uses, which does not adapt to suit the market. There is no evidence to support the claim that neo-indigenous religious internationalisation is a response to the PCCs, which are the dominant Christian strands in Ghana’s religious field. What is evident is that the PCC itself, to revisit the reverse mission concept here for clarification, is internationalising, and the PCC style seems to be in vogue and the status quo for religions seeking global visibility. In other words, other religious tradition could be following their steps to get global recognition. One striking difference with Bonsam’s approach is his diplomatic approach to collaboration and meetings with local authorities, such as the mayor of the city, Ernest D. Davis, and Dr Kay Turner, the Director of Folklore at the Brooklyn Arts Council. This is a well-thought-out and executed approach.

5. Conclusion

This paper offers conceptual clarity by distinguishing between conventional and neo-indigenous priesthoods, building upon existing categories, and, most importantly, demonstrating that Ghanaian IRTs actively participate in global religious flows through intentional transnational strategies. By documenting the activities of neo-indigenous priests such as Nana Kwaku Bonsam, the study indicates that indigenous religions are not relics of the past but agents of modernity, engaging in counter-hegemonic projects to reclaim legitimacy through religious activities both within Ghana and internationally.

The study addresses a gap in scholarship by emphasising the global ambitions and practices of indigenous religious agents, thereby expanding our understanding of religious transnationalism

beyond dominant traditions and highlighting a neglected dimension of global religious dynamics. These neo-priests contribute to reversing the direction of religious globalisation, as IRTs now flow from the global south to the global north.

Finally, by prioritising ethnographic data—particularly the case of Nana Kwaku Bonsam—this study provides empirical insight into how indigenous religious actors navigate and reshape both local and global religious fields.

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