



Culture, Religion & Mental health in the African Context

Lecture 4
Rev. Dr Sahaya G. Selvam
selvamsdb@gmail.com



Institute of Youth Studies
Tangaza University College, Nairobi



Learning Objectives – Lecture 4

By the end of the lesson the learner should be able to:

- evaluate some of the cultural and religious practices in Africa with some sound principles, in an attempt to assess the mental wellbeing of those involved.

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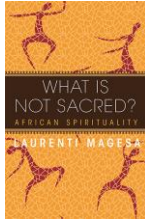
DISCUSS

Mbiti: Africans are
'notoriously' religious!

Implications of this statement:

- That their religiosity is very persistent;
- That their religiosity is enmeshed with psycho-social life;
- That their religiosity is shaded by irrational practices;

What is not sacred...



Argues that despite missionary Christianity's refusal to acknowledge the worth of traditional African religious culture, the incarnational spirituality of those cultures remains vibrant and visible today, and has much to offer and teach other cultures, both Christian and not. When we admit that, in fact, all is sacred, we are challenged to reevaluate our relationships with each other, with other cultures, with God, and with the environment.

African Spirituality is Integrative

- It integrates the different dimensions of human beings: physical, spiritual, intellectual, socio-emotional.
- A wise traditional medicine-man caters to all these dimensions when treating a client:
 - Socio-emotional: Drama-therapy through rituals;
 - Intellectual: a reason for the condition;
 - Spiritual: establishing the relationships with the God and ancestors;
 - Physical: Herbal Medicine.

Psychological Status of African Traditional Medicine Men

Mbiti makes a distinction between:

- Medicine man
- Witch-doctor
- Priest
- Elder
- Diviner
- Medium

Does this distinction really exist?

Mbiti, J. S. (1990). *African religions & philosophy*. Nairobi: Heinemann.

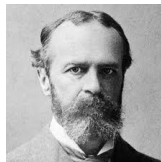
Medicine man = Shaman

- Shaman... “deliberately enters non-ordinary states of consciousness in order to journey to ‘other realities’ and encounter ‘other entities’, both human and animal, to bring about the required healing for an individual or community.
- “Shamans consider the content and nature of these experiences to be an authentic expression of the psyche in direct connection with the cosmos.” (p.225)

Read, T., & Crowley, N. (2009). The transpersonal perspective. In Cook et al. *Spirituality and psychiatry*, 212-232. London: RCPsych Publications.

7

James: Religious Experience as an altered consciousness



William James
1842-1910

“Our normal waking consciousness (as we call it) is but one special kind of consciousness whilst all about it, parted from it by the filmiest of screens, there are potential forms of consciousness entirely different.” This consciousness could be triggered by religious experience.

James, W. (1960). *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. Glasgow: Fountain Books.
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Experience of Trance

“Shamanic states of consciousness can be readily accessed by listening to a drum beat of 200 to 220 beats a minute;
“in the West this technique is increasingly being used as a method of personal growth and exploration” (p.225).

Read, T., & Crowley, N. (2009). The transpersonal perspective. In Cook et al. *Spirituality and psychiatry*, 212-232. London: RCPsych Publications.

9

The case of Daniel, an African atheist

- Daniel was born and brought up in a Presbyterian context in Kenya, but lost his faith in God at the age of 25.
- He is now 34, unmarried, trained as a lawyer (not practicing right now).
- Could this be a serious problem?
- More details to be provided in class.

Discuss this...

10