

Conversion to Christianity in African History before Colonial Modernity: Power, Intermediaries and Texts

Kirsten Rütler*

This article examines different paradigms of conversions to Christianity in regions of Africa prior to the advent of colonial modernity. Religious change, in general, connected converts and various intermediaries to resources and power within specific settings. Even though African cultures were oral, conversions generated the production of texts which became important print media and were at least partly responsible for prompting conversions elsewhere in the world. The first case study explains how mission initiatives along the so-called West African slave coast almost always resulted in failure between 1450 and 1850, but how these failed efforts figure as important halfway options which reveal fundamental mechanisms of conversion. The dynamics of interaction were different in the African Kingdom of Kongo, where conversions became intimately entwined in the consolidation of political power and where, subsequent to the adoption of Christianity, new understandings of power evolved. Last but not least, in South Africa, again, another paradigm of conversion developed within the nexus of conflict and settler violence. Contested narratives of Christianity and conversion emerged as settlers tried to keep Christianity as a religious resource to be shared among whites only.

*Department of History, Leibniz University of Hannover, Hannover. E-mail: kirsten.ruether@hist.uni-hannover.de

The Medieval History Journal, 12, 2 (2009): 249–273

SAGE Publications ♦ Los Angeles/London/New Delhi/Singapore/Washington DC

DOI: 10.1177/097194580901200204

Defining the Problem

While religious conversions to Christianity during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have, for good reasons, triggered off an ongoing debate in African history, encounters with Christianity and options for conversion during the period before the advent of colonial modernity have formed a relatively marginal subject of enquiry.¹ For the period that begins with the fifteenth and extends till the emergence of colonial institutions during the nineteenth century, commerce and diplomatic relations figured more prominently in the study of Africa's encounter with European powers than the Christian religion, which during pre-colonial times nowhere commanded the potential to reconfigure African societies beyond a degree sanctioned by rulers. In response to a recent strand of history writing, however, which attempts to put into trans-regional perspective the subject of religious change and conversion, it has become worthwhile to cast a fresh view on the approach of African societies towards conversion and, more particularly, to religious change. This is all the more important in order to question the conventional wisdom that Africa as an entity constituted a factor of minimal historical significance within the global processes which from early modern times gradually connected different regions of the world.

African encounters with Christianity and the numerically few conversions which occurred before the advent of colonial modernity call for their own paradigm of interpretation, one which differs from the way we tend to understand modern conversions. For a long time after Europe had begun to expand beyond its boundaries, European trading and military influence continued to be significant only along the coastal areas of the African continent. Traders and companies desired, well into the nineteenth century, people and goods, not territory. Even along the southern tip of the continent where European intruders were indeed interested in land, cattle and access to water, they more frequently desired labourers to work their farms or to scout raiding expeditions and hunts. Therefore, the time frame chosen for this article and qualified as 'before colonial modernity', is a term of convenience rather than a reference to a period whose chronological markers could be fixed all too closely. Depending on region and

¹ The important topic of conversion to Islam is beyond the scope of this article. For further reading, as a point of entry, see Robinson, *Muslim Societies*.

society, the advent of colonial modernity, in its guise as a European model and 'a marker of Europe's right to rule, something to which the colonised should aspire but could never quite deserve'², is usually considered to have taken place in the course of the nineteenth, often during the second half of the century, though in some areas not until the early twentieth century. To refer to the period 'before colonial modernity', therefore, means that the chronological units will have to be clarified for the respective regions under review as the sections of this article develop.

A range of questions one would ideally like to ask about conversions before the advent of colonial modernity are actually difficult, even impossible, to pose. The source material, though at times underexplored, ultimately steers our inquiries as it compels us to engage critically with the gaps, ruptures and omissions which historians have become aware of, but usually find hard to narrate. There is a complete lack of narratives of the converts themselves, or of accounts of Africans who as contemporaries would have witnessed conversions of others. We have to rely overwhelmingly on the culturally specific reports of the missionaries and derive from their observations, indirectly, the meanings of conversion. A crucial issue to pursue is the ways in which conversions connected converts and various mediators between religions to issues of power. Missionaries acted as one such group of mediators who offered access and linkages to power resources, at times distant and at times within reach, be they objects, technology, knowledge, letters or words. Such resources, if handled with care and by experts, or local mediators of religion, held out a promise of prosperity to the African societies involved. So, rulers ensured to the utmost possible that intermediary experts who, for instance, commanded the skills to keep a community wealthy, who knew how to call for rain or who fortified warriors and protected against misfortune, would not misuse their skills at the expense of those who expected them to serve a greater interest. Rulers were especially interested in maintaining political power, or in widening their sphere of influence. Hence, it is important to inquire how in particular African rulers controlled the search for power, connection and access to it. A range of intermediaries who undertook the task of working out conditions for conversion and of making them ritually safe will receive particular attention in this text. Intermediaries were not necessarily of 'local' origin but could be drawn

² Cooper, *Colonialism in Question*: 115.

from various places and cultural backgrounds. Moreover, seeing that our knowledge of such intermediaries tends to be fractured and selective, a second focus of study will be on religious texts and translations emerging from the conversion-oriented encounters. For the period under review, translated catechisms and prayers, often imperfect, were less indicative of efforts at othering African interlocutors or of exoticising the conversion setting. More important, they became durable items which travelled independent of the situation in which they had originated. Such texts, converted into print media through third parties who had not been involved in the translation, for instance, but who used the items for their own spiritual endeavours, were at least partly responsible for prompting conversions elsewhere.

While religious encounters, conversions and the introduction of Christianity figure more prominently in the narrative of modern African history, there is less discussion or debate around issues of African conversion before the advent of colonial modernity. Nonetheless, the early history of Christianity has received some attention in academic writing. Adrian Hastings' wide-ranging and magisterial overview of the church in Africa, which lays a strong emphasis on community building, is a mine of information and illuminating with regard to the different interpretations of Christianity to be found on the continent.³ With particular reference to southern Africa, where religious interaction with Christianity commenced immediately against the backdrop of violent European colonial intrusion, David Chidester has engaged conceptually with the various mechanisms which shaped, to this day, the academic structuring of knowledge and our inquiries with regard to religion, conversion and religious change in Africa.⁴ Both works draw our attention to how important and, at the same time, how difficult it is in the case of African conversions to insert specific experiences and local or regional dynamics of the religious encounter into broader, more general narratives of religious change. It is deeply ingrained in our understanding of history that case studies of historical change acquire greater significance if they advance general and coherent narratives of change over time. Therefore, conclusions drawn from individual case studies must ideally be geared towards the reinforcement or critical evaluation of such general and

³ Hastings, *Church in Africa*: chs 1–5.

⁴ Chidester, *Savage Systems*: chs 1–3 especially.

coherent narratives which themselves sketch broader developments based on fractured evidence only. The following account addresses this problem by engaging with some of the main conceptualisations of African conversion to Christianity, even though these conceptualisations are mostly derived from modern religious encounters. Thus, a narrative in which more than one perspective is built will be provided, leaving scope for the consideration of structural changes as well as for the integration of individual agency or local expressions of conversion dynamics. Last but not least, working with different perspectives is also an attempt to do justice to a research context in which history lies scattered rather than clearly delineated before us.

Halfway Options in Favour of Conversion

Whereas cultural and economic encounters between Africa, the Atlantic and Europe became an important feature ever since the fifteenth century, religion had not yet uniformly taken root as a feature of social and political expression.⁵ African gods proved resilient and highly adaptable to change. Certainly, the encounters gave Africans an idea of the powers, good and evil, which Europeans apparently commanded and which they harboured in their places of origin, on or beyond the seas. Christian ritual and religion offered access to, and control of, that foreign power, and yet, mission initiatives along the so-called West African slave coast almost always resulted in failure between 1450 and 1850. Conceptually speaking, it is problematic to delineate a ‘history’ of the numerous failed mission efforts in that region as such a line of consecutive failures suggests a chronological order or causal connections where there are actually none. Mission parties along the coast of West Africa usually appeared in isolation. Individual missionary expeditions were divided by long interruptions, and they hardly impacted on the way African societies conceived of themselves, their immediate surroundings, and of the wider world. To construct a ‘history’ of such erratic and sporadic mission efforts would mean to endorse the perspective of the missions, the papacy and the states which launched them and which definitely did not plan them as part of a grander design. It would amount to a denial of the perspective of the societies

⁵ A first approach to this wide-ranging and elaborately studied field of research may be taken, also by non-specialists, through the engaging account provided by Northrup, *Africa's Discovery*.

who actually received the missionaries as guests and ritual experts and whose rulers looked for ways of organising and sustaining access to the powers promised and demonstrated by the missionaries. And yet, it is important to begin a historical narrative on African conversion with these failed efforts, or else one would risk complicity with an even more debatable paradigm, one which constructs the historical narrative of religious change through conversions purely in terms of its successes.

With reason it can be argued that, at least for the societies and fort populations⁶ along the coast, who were drawn most directly into Atlantic exchange patterns, the label of an 'Atlantic age' suits what the title of this article loosely terms 'before colonial modernity'. This age took off around 1450 and received further impetus between 1640 and 1800 when the Atlantic slave trade peaked.⁷ In this long period, empires and kingdoms emerged and declined, wherein power bases displayed a tendency to shift from the interior towards the coast. Around 1800, with the imminent British abolition of the Atlantic slave trade and the introduction of so-called 'legitimate trade' within the region, the spread of modern colonial economic patterns and the humanitarian idea changed the nature of the religious encounter. It was only after 1850 that a former scientific curiosity about that area was transformed into interpretations more thoroughly couched in racial awareness.⁸ In fact, 1800 could also be adopted as a rough caesura because the early nineteenth century witnessed, in the wake of renewed devotion of Muslims to the highest ideals of their religion, a number of reform movements aimed at restoring the Muslim world to its former greatness.⁹ The vast West African world, however, which was neither entangled with the Muslim encounter nor with the Atlantic matrix, can well be described as a pre-colonial world whose African societies themselves colonised enormous territories. They came under the influence of Christian missions and colonial modernity as late as the 1890s.¹⁰ The slave trade impacted in a disastrous manner

⁶ Europeans erected forts along the African coast from which they traded goods and human cargo. In the forts, the local traders mixed with traders of European origins. Some individuals rose to power and status. See, for instance, Ross, 'The First Chacha of Whydah Francisco Felix de Souza'.

⁷ Ehret, *Civilizations of Africa*: chs 8–9.

⁸ McCaskie, 'Cultural Encounters: Britain and Africa in the Nineteenth Century'.

⁹ Ajayi and Crowder, *History of West Africa*, vol 1; and others who adopt this caesura.

¹⁰ Iliffe, *Africans*: ch. 5.

on all these societies and yet, such Atlantic and trans-Saharan entanglements were experienced less as a European intrusion, but rather as opportunities for ruling groups or, from the perspective of those who suffered other people's rule, as predatory incursions of one's own or neighbouring kin and rulers.

Between the late fifteenth and the early eighteenth centuries, the Portuguese, the French and even the Spanish undertook various efforts to establish a presence of missions in such kingdoms as, for instance, Whydah, Alladah, Warri or Benin.¹¹ After 1670, missionaries of French and Italian origin, who were members of direct papal missions, entered the region with a view to provide a counterweight to the missions patronised by the Iberian monarchs. To a large extent, Christianity served the European trading enterprises. Theologically, the eradication of witchcraft and the struggle against Satan provided a strong incentive for missionary commitment to go abroad. The drive towards missions also owed substantially to the idea that if not in India, and if not in Ethiopia, the mythic kingdom of Prester John was perhaps to be found in these still unexplored surroundings.¹² The Oba of Benin,¹³ thus approached in 1485 and unaware of this myth, was however interested in contact to achieve access to firearms. In 1514 and 1515, he sent to Portugal a group of envoys, who, by asking for firearms and requesting the king beyond the sea to send missionaries, did their best to achieve access to new sources of power overseas. In a parallel action, the Oba gave one of his sons to the local missionaries for instruction with the aim of training him in the knowledge and ritual skills commanded by the missionaries. In Benin, like in Portugal, conversion was understood as a political decision of and between rulers to organise and sustain access to sources of power. When in Benin, as was the case in many other kingdoms, this important relationship between the African ruler and his European counterpart did not yield the resources for prosperity aspired to, the mission parties painfully learnt that they were treated as guests but no longer desired as mediators of a foreign religion. Initial interest on the part of the ruler was, depending on the historical circumstance, impinged upon by various forces. Sometimes it was domestic opposition among the king's councillors, and sometimes it was the dramatic intervention of rival Protestant European powers

¹¹ Law, 'Religion, Trade and Politics on the "Slave Coast"'.
¹² Ryder, 'The Benin Missions'.
¹³ Title of Yoruba rulers.

which stopped the king from converting.¹⁴ Only around the 1840s, some hundred years after previous efforts of Catholic Christianisation had subsided, modern Protestant missions started to evangelise among, for instance, the Yoruba who at least had some acquaintance with the concept of conversion, through their exposure to Islam in the Western Sudan and in connection with trans-Saharan trade. A well-known African bishop, Samuel Ajayi Crowther, therefore referred to the lexicon of Yoruba Muslims rather than to African religion when he prepared his public sermons and started to translate the Christian Bible.¹⁵ Further to the west, African–American and West Indian missionaries, sent by white agencies, arrived in Sierra Leone, Liberia and the Gold Coast.¹⁶

To the kings and rulers interested in the ritual expertise and knowledge of the missionaries, the Christian specialists explained that they could cure the problems of evil on the surface only. Demons, witches and acts of sorcerers would, however, return unless the king converted. Conversion, in turn, they insisted, required that the king become monogamous. Virtually no ruler could have met this precondition for conversion as it would have disconnected him from the networks of domestic and regional power flows, not to mention the damage ensuing from the publicly visible decline in wealth and status.¹⁷ The furthest many kings went was to provide cultural intermediaries and young men to be trained as future ritual experts.¹⁸ All this did not take place in a political and religious void. Situations of contact and exchange engendered readjustments within the realm of African gods and deities. Among the Oyo and Yoruba, for instance, godly beings were reconceptualised in dramatic ways, reflecting, over time, societies' incorporation into the Atlantic matrix, people's criticism of rulers and the gradually changing interpretations of the role of ritual and religious experts. For instance, in the minds of the people, gods who, in tandem with the ruler and his ritual expert, had formerly guaranteed the wealth of the people gradually came to be perceived as

¹⁴ Law, 'Religion, Trade and Politics': 49–54.

¹⁵ Peel, *Religious Encounter*: 195; McKenzie and Rutherford, *Inter-Religious Encounters in West Africa*. This was not an intention to convert Muslims to Christianity. In fact, Christianity, so successful in producing conversions from the late nineteenth century, did nowhere in Africa make inroads where Islam had established itself as the major monotheistic religion.

¹⁶ Killingray, 'The Black Atlantic Missionary Movement and Africa, 1780s–1920'.

¹⁷ Labouret and Rivet, *Le Royaume d'Arda*: 1–30.

¹⁸ Ryder, 'The Benin Missions': 236.

creatures of the sea which devoured humans and bones regardless of the power the ruler on the land wished to exercise. The crucial experience of slavery can be read into this reinterpretation. Other gods came to be associated with money and cowrie shells which they handed over to powerful traders on the market, bypassing women traders who had formerly drawn wealth from the markets. Again, the ascendancy of slave traders who sold humans in the Atlantic slave trade and who monopolised wealth which was no longer available to local traders can be read into this allegory.¹⁹ For those, however, who since 1787—and thus during the long momentum towards the full assertion of modernity—came further west, to Sierra Leone, as escaped or liberated American slaves, or as part of the London poor, the adoption and cultivation of Christianity seemed an option. By the 1820s, freed slaves greatly outnumbered the original settlers, with the arrival of recaptives peaking in the 1830s and 1840s. These recaptives were enslaved people whom the British freed from the slave ships of other European nations and whom they set free along the coast of either Liberia or Sierra Leone, where the recaptives were foreign and without anchorage in existing social and kinship structures. With the help of the Church Missionary Society and the Methodists, a distinct captive Christianity developed among the traumatised and dislocated African people which merged with aspects of Yoruba religious culture.

In such a context, the central role of intermediaries needs to be drawn out. Different individuals, in many possible constellations, sought to enhance the power networks of the kings. One such intermediary actor, around whose trajectory it is possible to reconstruct an exemplary constellation, was Don Felipe Zapata, alias Vans, who figured prominently in the 1657–61 encounter between the Spanish Capuchins and the king of Arda. Vans had come as a royal ambassador, from Arda via Cartagena in Spanish America to the king in Madrid, soliciting commerce and a mission party. A party of Capuchins was recruited in 1659, and an Allada interpreter added to the group who had resided in Spain for 44 years. Vans was invested with crucial responsibilities. He decided where to embark, and he principally guided the missionaries in culturally foreign surroundings.²⁰ The ritual expertise rested with the missionaries

¹⁹ Ogundiran, 'Of Small Things Remembered'.

²⁰ Buenaventura de Carrocera, 'Misión Capuchina al Reino de Arda'.

who, in the presence of the king, demonstrated their powers through the application of consecrated water and through the manipulation of a rosary which they used to communicate with the divine. At the court, this group of spiritual and cultural brokers, again, had to cooperate with another intermediary, one Mateo Lopez, who acted as a royal interpreter and whom the Spanish missionaries deemed to be a Christian of Portuguese background. Once, as described earlier, the idea of conversion had lost its attraction, the king prohibited his intermediaries from further assisting the missionaries.²¹ In other encounters where, as for instance, the king of Warri chose his son to become a mediator of the divine power represented by the missionaries, this son married a Portuguese woman while abroad and so was lost as a mediator, this time by decision of the missionaries.²² Conversions were difficult to achieve not only because as royal decisions they depended on practically insurmountable obstacles, but more so because the skills and responsibilities of various intermediaries did not entangle in a sustained way.

Being hosted by African rulers for more than a year, the missionaries managed, instead of achieving conversions, to turn into text-producing mediators. The texts had little impact on the religious structure of the region, but became important because they laid the foundation for later appropriations of the situation in Arda through textual interpretation. The Capuchin party, probably with the help of Vans, had worked on a bilingual catechism in Catalan and Arda, while still in Spain. Even though the translation is in many ways problematic and reflects rather pervasively that the religious world of Arda remained closed to the missionaries, the *Doctrina Christiana*, published in 1658, has served as an important basis from which, at least academically, to reconstruct local religion.²³ Scholars have in particular concentrated on the terms chosen to translate the idea of 'God' from one cultural context to the other, even though there is no indication that for the translators themselves—Vans and the missionaries—this was the term which mattered most to them.²⁴ From the approach adopted in this article, that is, the focus on mediating constellations, it becomes apparent that discussions of the Supreme Being did not constitute a major aspect of communication and religious

²¹ *Ibid.*: 537.

²² Ryder, 'Missionary Activity in the Kingdom of Warri to the Nineteenth Century'.

²³ Labouret and Rivet, *Le Royaume d'Arda*: 31ff.

²⁴ But see *ibid.*: 32.

interaction at all. Only with the Protestant mission in the 1840s, written translations began to figure again. At that time it was, for instance, Samuel Ajayi Crowther whose use of local idiom reflected how the lexicon of Yoruba Muslims diffused into the vocabulary of a still overwhelming non-Muslim and non-Christian population. Crowther's decision to refer to these terms rather than to expressions derived from the world of African religion indicated that according to his conception, in the early phase of the advent of modernity, Christianity had to be transposed into a translatable language within a hierarchy of languages and religions that could carry the monotheistic and universal religious message.²⁵ His concern, however, represented theological thought patterns. Whether, or not, for people to be converted this mattered most must still be left open to debate.

Drawing upon conversions and religious separatisms which occurred between the 1920s and 1960s, one of the major stimulating models of African conversion has been formulated by Robin Horton.²⁶ Horton argues that African conversion can only be understood against the backdrop of a broader process of religious change and political transition occurring in the region as a corollary of commercial development and communication. To the reformulation of religious cosmologies, Christianity and Islam added their share, even though the process itself was directed by people's needs and African agency rather than by the missionaries' zeal. Horton stresses the concept of the Supreme Being which helped people reinterpret the dramatically widening world intruding on local dynamics. Whether the idea of a High God proved to be particularly stimulating and led to conversion has, at least for an intermediate period, remained an issue of debate which cannot be recapitulated here in full detail. For the period before the advent of colonial modernity, however, it is rather difficult to argue that Christian conversion was in any way stringently tied to the idea of a Christian High God which possibly outdid African gods. Rather, it seems that the preoccupation with the Supreme Being was an issue inferred from hindsight to 'rehabilitate' the image of African religions against scholarship of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, marked as it was by evolutionary and racist frameworks. Early religious interaction, more poignantly points out the centrality of the history of politics and power through which to understand appropriately both

²⁵ Peel, *Religious Encounter*: 195.

²⁶ Horton, 'African Conversion'.

African religion and religious near-conversion.²⁷ Moreover, in the period before the advent of modernity, conversion seems to have hinged upon the fertile initiatives of mediators who, however, along the kingdoms of the West African coast, found it hard to conjunct in fruitful constellations.

Consolidation of Power and Conversion as Transculturation

Compared to the ‘history’ of religious conversions which failed to occur in West African kingdoms, the narrative paradigm prevalent in the history of conversion to Christianity in the Central African kingdom of Kongo, in the north of today’s Angola, emerged, again, in a different way from a locally distinct historical experience. With the conversions of Nzinga a Nkuwu in 1491 (baptised as Joao I), and of Afonso I in 1506, Christianity, coupled with the centralisation of political power and the consolidation of an aspiring lineage, received a place in the political narrative of the Kongo kingdom. As such Christianity was conceived of as a means to bolster and centralise the ancestral cult of an emerging political power. Christianity and conversion passed through distinct phases in Kongo’s history. First, they became associated with the greatness of the kingdom, while in a phase starting in the seventeenth century, they turned into reflections of a bygone power which, in turn, revival-oriented supporters envisaged to resurrect. In their hands, Christianity became a critique of political power and a direct inspiration for a return to former glories.²⁸ In the post-independence period, some 450 years later, Kongo Christianity acted as a powerful residuum of African self-worth as Christians. As, in contrast to the course of Christianity in West Africa, the experience of the Kongo kingdom represents a major ‘success story’, the historical rooting of Christianity in this region has served as the basis of a number of interpretations which, often competing for recognition, idealise Kongo Christianity and the conversions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as a deep-rooted and sometimes mythical source out of which a number of self-confident Christianities developed later, be they varieties of African independent, Atlantic slave or Afro-American Christianity.

²⁷ Greene, ‘Religion, History and the Supreme Gods of Africa’.

²⁸ Thornton, *The Kingdom of Kongo*.

Like the African societies along the West African coast, further down in Central Africa, along the coast again, societies were drawn into the Atlantic matrix via trade in goods and human beings, so that similar arguments apply with regard to periodisation. In the mid-seventeenth century, Central African commercial networks were realigned when northern kingdoms such as Loango opened up interior trade links. Salt deposits became strategically important centres around which clans consolidated their claims to rule. In this turbulent period of transition, aspiring lineages often specialised in rain-making and war-leadership. As a consequence, Kongo society became increasingly differentiated until internal competition and civil war resulted, in 1665, in the destruction of the formerly great kingdom.²⁹ Beyond the centralised kingdom, a wide range of inhabitants of the savannah woodland, highland and semi-arid region, south-west of Central Africa, participated as traders and providers of slaves in the 'Atlantic zone' between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries.³⁰ Here, as in West Africa, Europeans enriched themselves with minerals, cloth and slaves, but Portuguese officers imposed a marginal military and administrative presence along the coast only. Internally, it was, first and foremost, scarcity which drove people to compete for advantages derived from trade and political affiliation.

The conversion of the Manikongo³¹, achieved by Portuguese Jesuits, indicated that here, as in the West African context, conversion was a royal decision to link up with divine powers overseas. Such conversions changed the local religious landscape only marginally. Christianity rendered into royal hands potent ideas and the powers of a distant high god, corollary of the highest *nzambi* in Kongo cosmology.³² In this respect, conversion meant a new kind of coupling and connection, and the qualification of the responsibilities of local religious experts rather than an abrupt renouncing of Kongo religion in general. The rulers skilfully controlled the ways in which Christianity and its symbols were channelled into a local cultural idiom which, itself, started to change in the course of this transculturation. The new Kongo elite even managed to insert itself into Catholic institutions as the son of one of the royal envoys to Europe, Afonso I, Henrique, was trained as clergy and returned a bishop

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Miller, Joseph C. 'The Paradoxes of Impoverishment in the Atlantic Zone'.

³¹ Title of rulers in this area.

³² MacGaffey, *Religion and Society in Central Africa*: 203–11.

in 1518. After his death in 1531, however, and with the establishment of a new episcopate on São Tomé in 1534, Bakongo royal lineages lost their direct grip on the Catholic institutional hierarchies. In 1596, at the request of the Manikongo, the kingdom was created as a separate see with a bishop nominated for São Salvador but office holders were no longer drawn from the Kongo elite.³³ And yet, conversion remained associated with the former greatness of a declining royal power. When, after 1645, in the course of new mission initiatives by Italian Capuchins, conversion became an option for people from outside the royal ambit, a new generation of converts produced more popularised versions of Christianity. In the seventeenth century, a young leader, Kimpa Vita, alias Dona Beatriz, finally merged the prophetic idioms of Christianity and Kongo religion to criticise and challenge a seemingly paralysed royalty. Claiming to be possessed by Saint Anthony, she contested the decision of the Manikongo to leave the seized capital, Mbanza Kongo alias Sao Salvador, to the enemy. Moreover, she endowed Jesus and Maria with local ancestries rather than with Italian origins.³⁴ Now the idea of conversion came to be remodelled in yet another transcultural idiom until it powerfully backfired at the descendants of those who had once introduced and used Christianity to boost their position. Both the Manikongo and his Portuguese and Vatican missionaries fought this movement which, in 1706, they suppressed by burning its leader.³⁵

Through the adoption of Christianity, the Manikongo initially managed, in the sixteenth century, to centralise the position of an emerging royal elite and, concomitantly, qualified the responsibilities of local religious experts and rival chiefs. The successful internal consolidation of power partly depended on reference to religious, ritual and political power from beyond the seas, which constantly needed to be accessed and controlled. While the Manikongo controlled the introduction of Christianity, it was more difficult to check the implications of the growing slave trade enriching also the northern rival kingdoms. At least, with the arrival of Italian Capuchins, the idea of a divine power beyond the seas was linked to an alternative European power centre, the Vatican. At the same time,

³³ Thornton, 'The Development of an African Catholic Church in the Kingdom of Kongo, 1491–1750'.

³⁴ MacGaffey, *Religion and Society*: 208–11.

³⁵ Thornton, *The Kongoese Saint Anthony*.

in the situation of rivalry between the Manikongo and competing lineages, conversion and Christianity became a double-edged resource which began to serve different objectives, as the number of missionaries and converts continued to grow.

In Kongo, even more than in West Africa, intermediaries mattered crucially in the practical implementation of conversion and Christianity. Their roles changed in the long course of religious interaction. While in the sixteenth century the royal elite shaped and defined the productive intermediary constellations consisting of local ritual experts, the *nganga*, and the missionaries, who were also called *nganga*, this changed in the course of the seventeenth century, when the missionaries approached the people in the Kongo towns and villages. They cooperated with porters who concomitantly served as interpreters and who, in addition, introduced the mission parties to local chiefs. Some of the evidence left behind reveals that these interpreters were much more than mere adjuncts to the group. In a 1668 Capuchin work report, a drawing was inserted which portrayed how priests listened to people's confession. In this drawing, the confessor faces and addresses the carrier-cum-interpreter-cum-go-between, while the priest himself sits next to the two, leaning over his head as if just listening, or advising, the independent conversation between the other two.³⁶ Presumably, the missionaries acted more independently as far as ritual performance was concerned. Some of the drawings portrayed highly self-assertive missionaries eager to distribute the sacrament of marriage and passionate about burning the houses and insignia of so-called witches.³⁷ Dona Beatriz, leader of the Antonian movement between 1702 and 1706, appeared as a similar yet different kind of mediator.³⁸ Like the missionaries, she too drew on the *nganga* idiom, but went through death and rebirth herself before she became a Christian prophet-diviner legitimated to radically reinterpret the Christian message. She claimed that Mary had been born in a northern Kongo province and that Jesus had been black. Dona Beatriz, thus, converted a distant source of power into one that originated in local surroundings. In the context of her movement, conversion implied severing the link with an Atlanticly imbued power resource.

³⁶ Guattini and Carli, *La Mission au Kongo*: 238.

³⁷ *Ibid.*: 231, 235, 236, 241.

³⁸ Thornton, *The Kongolesse Saint Anthony*.

Compared to West African settings, African-authored text and translations into Kikongo figured prominently in the political relations of the Kongo kingdom with the outer world in Portugal and Rome.³⁹ Religious texts must be seen in the context of a substantial body of royal and diplomatic correspondence between Europe and the Kongo kingdom. Moreover, it is important to read the texts in the context of traditional rhetorical formats of public speaking and Catholic preaching, rooted and taking root in the region. Kongo oral and performative forms depended much on either dialogue with, or comment from, what has been termed ‘initiated audiences’, or ‘knowledgeable communities’.⁴⁰ Against this backdrop, a text such as the Kikongo catechism, printed in Lisbon, in 1624, became a mediating object between royal conversion and transculturations of Christianity. People sung and danced the catechism to memorise, spread and perform its messages. As a translation, the text articulates and shows, between Kongo and Portugal or Rome, Christianity was transculturated rather than imposed from afar.⁴¹ Equally important may have been that the catechism became an item of Christian culture that started to move through transatlantic networks. Through the agency of missionaries from Lisbon, the Portuguese–Kikongo catechism arrived in Brazil, where the texts were used to instruct slaves. Already in 1629, a Spanish rendition of the catechism was printed in Lima. While slaves perhaps took with them items which they held to be central for the performance of religious ritual, colonial powers and Catholic missionaries inserted catechisms into the transatlantic networks of forced migration and Christianisation. While slave traders transported humans across the Atlantic, and while political nations expanded their realms, missionaries translated Christian texts in Africa and took them as a medium of instruction to foreign destinations across the Atlantic. The texts connected individual, basically unconnected mission efforts at conversion. Texts derived from the situation in Kongo became part of the process of achieving conversions in locally completely different, but historically connected settings.

³⁹ Thornton, ‘The Correspondence of the Kongo Kings, 1614–35’.

⁴⁰ Janzen and MacGaffey, *An Anthology of Kongo Religion*: 7; Barber, ‘Preliminary Notes on Audiences in Africa’.

⁴¹ Bontinck and Nsasi, *Le catéchisme de 1624. Réédition critique*: 17–23; contains a photographic reprint of *Doutrina Christãa. Composta pelo P. Marcos Jorge da Companhia de Jesu Doutor em Teologia. De nouo traduzida na lingua de Congo, por ordem do P. Mattheus Cardoso Teologo, da Companhia de Jesu*, Lisboa, 1624.

It is this last scenario, rather than the local appropriation of Christianity, which has sparked grander narratives about African conversion to Christianity. Scholars of the African diaspora have stressed the supposed Kongo origins of conversions that took place in the Americas, and have reconstructed the ritual continuity of Kongo religion, baptisms there and the black Christianities which took off in the diaspora.⁴² In these narratives, Kongo either serves as a marginal space from which conversions and Christianity were rescued and imported or, in a second historiographical tradition, Kongo Christianity and conversions ‘back’ in Africa serve as a culturally maintained centric configuration, which for centuries to come provided a reference point for developing resilient and authentic Christianities in the Atlantic diaspora.⁴³ From the historiographical vantage point of entangled histories, however, an alternative conceptualisation of African conversion suggests itself. African conversion in this region, where conversion itself was an alien concept, stands for its multiple embeddedness into far-reaching programmes of political change and larger, possibly recurring, initiatives at the redistribution of power. Royals converted in order to connect religious sources and to make them run parallel. The entourage of the Antonians gathered around a prophetic leader used conversion as the initiation to a movement, or a cult (of affliction), in order to redistribute political power and the symbols of rule in the region. Enslaved Africans, different yet again, may have used rituals of Kongo Christianity as a means of cultural rooting, and routing, in a diasporic world.

Conversions in the Nexus of Conflict and Violence

In the case of southern Africa, a third empirical setting of African conversion to Christianity, a distinct narrative paradigm has emerged. It was here, along the tip of the continent that colonial contacts through settlers advanced most pervasively. The uninhibited violence of frontier society and of an early settler colonialism crystallised as permanent features of an encounter in which, only in the course of the eighteenth century, Protestant evangelisation created scope for religious change and African conversion. Here, the narrative of African conversion and religious change

⁴² Young, *Rituals of Resistance*: 42–104.

⁴³ For a review of the historiographical traditions, see Frey, ‘The Visible Church: Historiography of African American Religion since Raboteau’.

intersected with the multifaceted experiences of violence and racism. It converged with issues of people's deprivation of rights, or was developed in line with the converts' supposedly achieved or desired emancipation, a pre-requisite to form, and participate in, communities. As in southern Africa settlers, colonists and governments were most stringent in imprinting their versions of history upon the region; scholars of African conversion and Christianity have tried hard to consider these processes as expressions of African rather than 'European' or 'white' history.⁴⁴ Even though the evidence is of Protestant inclination, we encounter, just like in the cases explored earlier, descriptions from the outside; this time, however, with a particular angle on the individual as a reformable person. The reporting of dreams and life stories, for instance, represents yielding and at the same time, thorny evidence which the Catholics, of earlier generations, did not concern themselves with.

South Africa is probably the region where the antecedents of colonial modernity acquired immediacy at an early point. European migration, the transfer of deadly viruses, new plants and animals confronted local populations as 'white invaders',⁴⁵ provoked a succession of frontier wars along the south-east African coast in the hundred years between 1779 and 1880, and contributed to land and water alienation, the destruction and sometimes, even extinction of people further inland along the northern frontier. In this context, it is extremely difficult to decide when exactly historical struggles received a truly 'modern' imprint. Many of the settlers and colonists did not feature as protagonists of European modernity, but the tiny number of missionaries of the London Missionary Society (LMS) and the Moravians drew their visions from the experience of revolution and enlightenment which had seeped the background from which they originated. This, however, did not necessarily imply that missionaries behaved as ardent advocates of modernity. More than once, missionaries fled 'European' modernising settings only to become 'colonially' modern while enmeshed in the encounter in South Africa. Perhaps 'old' and 'new' times stood in tension most poignantly in southern Africa, thus creating a promising but highly limited space for options in the context of a gradually materialising and spatially advancing colonial modernity.

⁴⁴ Bredekamp and Ross, *Missions and Christianity*: chs 1–7; Elphick and Davenport, *Christianity in South Africa*: chs 1–7.

⁴⁵ Thompson, *A History of South Africa*: chs 2–3.

In this area, the ineffectual government of the Dutch East India Company up to 1795, and the subsequently alternating rule of the Dutch and the British, had ensured that Catholic missions did not gain ground. Only after Catholic mission efforts elsewhere on the African continent had substantially worn off, the first Protestant mission initiatives were launched, started by the Moravians in 1737. After a forced interruption between 1743 and 1792, the Moravians resumed evangelical activities and were soon joined by the interdenominational LMS. Protestants did not conceive of themselves as intermediaries between the worldly and the godly. Coming from a background where freedom constituted the great subject of debate, Christianity was, for them, intended as a community-enhancing and individually-liberating religious practice. They conceived of conversion as a depoliticised act, more a private matter of individual consciousness which, however, bore implications for the ordering of society, the colony and the nation. Through the adoption of Christianity, so they thought, converts would acquire the crucial qualifications, requisite for participation in the polity, African or European, not necessarily as citizens, but as civilised subjects. They conceived of their own role as teachers who guided the people in establishing a personal relation with God. Concomitantly, they guarded and protected, as best as possible, the order of the emerging, ethnically heterogeneous mission communities. And yet, at times, they ended up hastening the demise of such communities. This followed from the extraordinary fear and mistrust that missions aroused amongst certain colonial frontiersmen who tried to press the colonial government to disperse the settlements and prohibit mission activity. On the mission settlements, where people were not able to continue their way of living as before, it became easier for rival groups to raid the property of Christian converts.⁴⁶ Christianity, which was invariably a resource and a distinction, became in a context of settler politics and religious change, also a site of contestation. Especially settlers, who often did neither have ministers of their own nor sound school infrastructure for their children, feared that conversion, education and the availability of pastoral care for others would reverse or destabilise racial hierarchies.

In a region into which settlers intruded by force and where, internally, ethnic reconfigurations were taking place on an extensive scale, Christianity

⁴⁶ Penn, “‘Civilising’ the San: The First Mission to the Cape San, 1791–1806”.

was spread through a combination of itinerant lay preaching and the establishment of Christian communities, providing both the means for cross-cultural uniformity as for intra-cultural differentiation. Protestants represented a project of personal empowerment. They were committed to the mission of transforming the human subject whom, they believed, God Himself would remake inwardly. The idea that God would directly act upon the heart of the converts corresponded, at times, with local ideas of religious messages being received directly and, regularly interspersed, anew. By passionately promoting reading exercises, missions actually furnished ideas of revelation through an amalgamation of the spoken word and written message. In the Cape Colony as well as in the eastern Cape, a potent religious brew developed to which Christianity, Xhosa prophetism and Khoikhoi religion added their share and which occasionally resulted in millenarian or prophetic movements, in particular when chiefs were unable to solve serious problems.⁴⁷ On the one hand, the idea of an individual connection to God embarrassed many Africans who feared being severed from family, kin and ancestors. On the other hand, this kind of connection acted as a starting point for those in search for new community attachment. On the mission stations, inhabitants, even if not baptised, could start their families and deposit cattle they had earned on settler farms or when scouting hunting expeditions. In turn again, the mission stations, looked upon with envy and threatened by the European settler and hunting population, became reservoirs of coerced labour and military service.

Intermediaries were crucially important in this ambivalent setting of evangelisation and conversion. The Moravians, in particular, were known for their strategy of evangelising through 'first fruit' converts, committed as they were to itinerant lay preaching which attracted converts, while those missionaries specialising in holding the land and building and controlling communities, conducted the rites and tried to achieve compromises to solve the tensions between the settlers, government officials and people on the mission stations.⁴⁸ Theodor van der Kemp, on the other hand, stands out as a major example of an early generation of LMS missionaries who, himself married to a former Muslim slave woman who converted only three years after their marriage, advocated a possible

⁴⁷ Viljoen, *Jan Paerl, A Khoikhoi in Cape Colonial Society 1761–1851*; Peires, 'Nxele, Ntsikana and the Origins of the Xhosa Religious Reaction'.

⁴⁸ Elbourne, 'Early Khoisan Use of Mission Christianity'.

kind of cooperation and intermediation in the eastern Cape which made him part of the local African society and which was later, under the circumstances of colonial modernity, perceived as socially, racially and morally provocative.⁴⁹ Evangelising converts may have seized through preaching an opportunity for public religious speech. Compared to West and Central African settings of previous decades and centuries, political structures in southern Africa were less institutionalised or had been destroyed. So, the missionaries frequently found themselves in a stronger position to designate and control intermediaries. Basically, however, missionaries and converts acted as joint mediators, each of whom addressed and was familiar with particular audiences. Their alliances proved fragile, however, because there was always the possibility of missionaries being co-opted by the colonial community. This may have constituted one reason why converts often considered conversion a meaningful stage in their lives, but not an end in itself.

Text and translation also figured prominently in the southern African encounter, not only through immediate reading and the reduction of languages to written form. In missionary reports about African conversion, some of the ways in which Africans pronounced the incorporation of text into local religious idiom and self-confidently claimed ownership of biblical texts are striking. Most impressively, converts dreamt how they tried to achieve access to heaven and the divine through producing letters and documents which they carried with them for identification.⁵⁰ Those who were able to tell the missionaries their dreams were, of course, denied access to the heavenly crowds, and somehow frustrated or in a pensive mood. They engaged with the experience that often the appropriation of text did not lead to immediate conversion, or redemption, as Protestant missionaries guarded the gate to Christianity rigidly. The proliferation of texts by Protestant missionaries requires no further comment than the one that, of course and fundamentally, texts served as items which travelled between historical settings and contexts. The reported dreams of converts, however, indicate how as items of religion and as contested cultural resources, texts figured in religious communication of such people who did not necessarily act as the publicly active, rather more ambitious lay preachers.

⁴⁹ Enklaar, *Life and Work of Dr. J. Th. Van der Kemp 1747–1811*: 204–06.

⁵⁰ Elbourne, 'Early Khoisan Use': 78.

In the terms of Jean and John Comaroff, who formulated a model of religious change and colonial hegemony in the context of an ever more powerful cultural hegemony, such historical dynamics as exemplified above would constitute the beginning of the 'long conversation', which in the late nineteenth century finally led to the conversion as a 'colonization of consciousness'.⁵¹ Again, this is not the place to recapitulate the terms and extent of the controversial debate the model has sparked. Suffice to emphasise here that in the approach adopted by the Comaroffs, the dichotomy between 'European' and *sekgoa*, Tswana ways of doing things, remains a central category in order to argue how, over a *longue durée* of contesting the symbols of the mundane, one culturally hegemonic way of doing things overwhelmed older ways of being and seeing. The redefinition of the meaning of texts, as just described, fits perfectly into this paradigm. Interestingly, however, and probably despite the evidence available from this Protestant encounter, conversion processes are not a major concern of the study undertaken by the Comaroffs. They are somehow couched between complicity and resistance but not focused upon separately. A focus on mediating actors, however, brings to light the subjective side embodied and crucially decisive in conversions to Christianity at the edge of modernity.

Conclusions

Before the advent of modernity, the study of African conversion is implicated thoroughly with African religious change more generally, the organisation of access to power and with efforts towards the redistribution of wealth. It is also implicated with either acute failure to achieve conversions at all, with hesitant conversions, or, at best, with rather small-scale, impermanent achievements. Only with the tensed assertion of colonial modernity did Christian conversions arrive at a permanent, even if permanently altering, social significance. Therefore, it would be extremely daring to pronounce conceptual generalisations about African conversion in this early period, not only because the concept itself was alien to most African settings. When conversions occurred, they necessarily assumed a cultural and political symbolism missionaries could

⁵¹ Comaroff and Comaroff, 'The Colonization of Consciousness in South Africa'. The elaboration of the concept in the form of a book is to be found in Comaroff and Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, 2 vols.

not foresee. The various grand narratives which have been suggested to explain and interpret African conversion to Christianity are clearly derived from settings of modern religious change and therefore, do not offer broadly convincing entry points into the processes of the period before. However, when read in conjunction with conversions under review in this article, they do, however, call for more thoroughly historicised approaches to the formulation of grand narratives of later periods.

The focus on intermediary groups and constellations provided a lens towards understanding African conversion as a process in which converts and individuals who considered religious conversion were tied in to the social, political and religious activity of others without whom conversion would not have been valid. After all, conversion was a cooperative and collective undertaking. In this regard, conversion meant neither a personal nor a mass transformation. More often it represented, in groups and individuals, a reflection of broader change in a society or a polity. The study of conversion processes from the vantage point of intermediating groups and constellations constituted also an effort to understand conversion not as a purely religious and intellectual exercise but as a form of social and political activity.

The focus on texts and translations illuminates different aspects of African conversion, which for this early period under review proves so elusive. Again, the focus was conceived as an effort to reveal how different groups of actors became entangled. Through the production, reinterpretation, subversive use and distribution of items some groups inserted themselves, or their ambitions, into networks that began to cover the world. It is important to note that not only were objects of African cultures reinterpreted but, as important, items of Christian culture integrated into regional use. These items which frequently only emerged from a situation of religious encounter became, however, items of empowerment in the hands of those who launched the Christianisation process from other than African sites and who turned Christianisation and religious conversion into processes that began to rapidly encompass the globe. In that regard, African conversion and religious encounters in Africa produced tools which unfolded different meanings in the hands of different actors, and African conversion became a resource in the hands of mission societies and their emissaries who needed more than their own cultural background to knit the web of Christianisation.

References

- Ajayi, J.F.A. and Michael Crowder (eds). 1971, 1974. *History of West Africa*, 2 vols, London.
- Barber, Karin. 1997. 'Preliminary Notes on Audiences in Africa', *Africa*, vol. 67(3): 347–62.
- Bontinck, François and D. Ndembe Nsasi (eds). 1978. *Le catéchisme de 1624: Réédition critique*, Bruxelles.
- Bredenkamp, Henry and Robert Ross (eds). 1995. *Missions and Christianity in South African History*, Johannesburg.
- Buenaventura de Carrocera, 1949. 'Misión Capuchina al Reino de Arda', *Missionaria Hispanica*, vol. 6(16): 523–46.
- Chidester, David. 1993. *Savage Systems: Colonialism and Comparative Religion in Southern Africa*, Charlottesville.
- Comaroff, Jean and John Comaroff. 1989. 'The Colonization of Consciousness in South Africa', *Economy and Society*, vol. 18(3): 267–96.
- . 1991, 1997. *Of Revelation and Revolution*, 2 vols, London.
- Cooper, Frederick, 2005. *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History*, Berkeley.
- Ehret, Christopher. 2002. *The Civilizations of Africa: A History to 1800*, Charlottesville.
- Elbourne, Elizabeth. 1995. 'Early Khoisan Use of Mission Christianity', in Henry Bredenkamp and Robert Ross (eds), *Missions and Christianity in South African History*, Johannesburg: 63–95.
- Elphick, Richard and Rodney Davenport (eds). 1997. *Christianity in South Africa: A Political, Social and Cultural History*, Oxford and Cape Town.
- Enklaar, Ido H. 1988. *Life and Work of Dr. J. Th. Van der Kemp 1747–1811: Missionary Pioneer and Protagonist of Racial Equality in South Africa*, Cape Town and Rotterdam.
- Frey, Sylvia R. 2008. 'The Visible Church: Historiography of African American Religion since Raboteau', *Slavery and Abolition*, vol. 29(1): 83–110.
- Greene, Sandra E. 1996. 'Religion, History and the Supreme Gods of Africa: A Contribution to the Debate', *Journal of Religion in Africa*, vol. 26(2): 122–38.
- Guattini, Michelangelo and Dionigi Carli. 2006. *La Mission au Kongo des pères Michelangelo Guattini et Dionigi Carli (1668)*, Paris.
- Hastings, Adrian. 1995. *The Church in Africa 1450–1950*, Oxford.
- Horton, Robin. 1971. 'African Conversion', *Africa*, vol. 41(2): 85–108.
- Illiffe, John. 1995. *Africans: The History of a Continent*, Cambridge.
- Janzen, John M. and Wyatt MacGaffey. 1974. *An Anthology of Kongo Religion: Primary Texts from Lower Zaire*, Lawrence (Kansas).
- Killingray, David. 2003. 'The Black Atlantic Missionary Movement and Africa, 1780s–1920s', *Journal of Religion in Africa*, vol. 33(1): 3–31.
- Labouret, Henri and Paul Rivet. 1929. *Le Royaume d'Arda et son Évangélisation au XVII^e siècle*, Paris.
- Law, Robin. 1991. 'Religion, Trade and Politics on the "Slave Coast": Roman Catholic Missions in Allada and Whydah in the Seventeenth Century', *Journal of Religion in Africa*, vol. 21(1): 42–77.
- MacGaffey, Wyatt. 1986. *Religion and Society in Central Africa. The Bakongo of Lower Zaire*, Chicago.

- McCaskie, T.C. 1999. 'Cultural Encounters: Britain and Africa in the Nineteenth Century', in Andrew Porter (ed.), *Oxford History of the British Empire*, Vol. 3, Oxford: 665–89.
- McKenzie, P.R. and Peter Rutherford. 1976. *Inter-Religious Encounters in West Africa: Samuel Ajayi Crowther's Attitude to African Traditional Religion and Islam*, Leicester.
- Miller, Joseph C. 1983. 'The paradoxes of impoverishment in the Atlantic Zone', in David Birmingham and Phyllis M. Martin (eds), *History of Central Africa*, Vol. I, London: 118–59.
- Northrup, David. 2002. *Africa's Discovery of Europe, 1450–1850*, New York.
- Ogundiran, Akinwumi. 2002. 'Of Small Things Remembered: Beads, Cowries, and Cultural Translations of the Atlantic Experience in Yorubaland', *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, vol. 35(2–3): 427–57.
- Peel, J.D.Y. 2003. *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba*, Bloomington.
- Peires, Jeff B. 1979. 'Nxele, Ntsikana and the Origins of the Xhosa Religious Reaction', *Journal of African History*, vol. 20(1): 51–61.
- Penn, Nigel, 2001. "'Civilising" the San: The First Mission to the Cape San, 1791–1806', *BAB Working Paper* 3.
- Robinson, David. 2004. *Muslim Societies in African History*, Cambridge.
- Ross, David, 1969. 'The First Chacha of Whydah Francisco Felix de Souza', *Odu*, vol. 2: 19–28.
- Ryder, A.F.C. 1960. 'Missionary Activity in the Kingdom of Warri to the Early Nineteenth Century', *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*: 1–26.
- . 1961. 'The Benin Missions', *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*: 231–59.
- Thompson, Leonhard. 1990. *A History of South Africa*, New Haven (Conn.).
- Thornton, John K. 1983. *The Kingdom of Kongo: Civil War and Transition 1641–1718*, Madison.
- . 1984. 'The Development of an African Catholic Church in the Kingdom of Kongo, 1491–1750', *Journal of African History*, vol. 25: 147–67.
- . 1987. 'The Correspondence of the Kongo Kings, 1614–35: Problems of Internal Written Evidence on a Central African Kingdom', *Paideuma*, vol. 33: 407–21.
- . 1998. *The Kongolese Saint Anthony: Dona Beatriz Kimpa Vita and the Antonian Movement, 1684–1706*, Cambridge.
- Viljoen, Russel. 2006. *Jan Paerl, A Khoikhoi in Cape Colonial Society 1761–1851*, Leiden.
- Young, Jason R. 2007. *Rituals of Resistance: African Atlantic Religion in Kongo and the Lowcountry South in the Era of Slavery*, Baton Rouge.