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# 8 Transforming Spatial Formats: Imagined Commonalities, Imaginary Spaces, and Spaces of Imagination

The starting point of this contribution is an extremely broad understanding of "religious organization". Here, the category is used mainly to refer to religious communalization in a broad sense – ranging from loose networks to imagined communities invisibly structured by (assumed) systematic formations of togetherness. Against this background, the focus is on spaces of imagination, imagined and/or imaginary, that are generated by religious actors or what Bruno Latour calls "actants".[1] Occasionally, these actors and actants create new spatial formats, manifest and more or less "real" – such as missionary spaces or networks of holy places – but sometimes, they give rise to the evolvement of (re)invented or just replicated virtual spaces.

## Generative Cultural Hybridity Emerging from Transient Spaces

Let us begin with what could be termed generative cultural hybridity emerging from transient spaces[2] and examine a phenomenon quite widespread in several regions of West Africa, known as zongo settlement.[3] At first glance, the *zongo*

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**1** See B. Latour, "On Actor-network Theory: A Few Clarifications", *Soziale Welt* 47 (1996) 4, pp. 369–381.
**2** For a brief reference to *zongo* from the perspective of Sociology of Space see K. Hock, "Manifestation – Repräsentation – Imagination: Macht-Räume und Raum-Mächte islamischer Präsenzen in (West)-Afrika", in: D. Cyranka and H. Wrogemann (eds.), *Religion – Macht – Raum: Religiöse Machtansprüche und ihre medialen Repräsentationen*, Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2018, pp. 59–76, at 69–71.
**3** L. Müller, *Religion and Chieftaincy in Ghana: An Explanation of the Persistence of a Traditional Political Institution in West Africa*, Münster: LIT, 2013, p. 284.

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seems to derive from a pattern that can be traced back to the early Islamic presence in the region. According to a formative discourse of scholarship quite common in recent decades, the history of Islamization in West Africa has been conceptualized in three phases, namely Islam (1) as an isolated foreign body ("quarantine Islam"); (2) as a religion with strong ties to the house of the local or regional ruler ("court Islam"); and (3) as the prevailing religion in quantitative terms ("majority Islam").[4] While the first phase refers to a spatial pattern of what could be termed an extraterritorially encapsulated Islam outside of the majority society's areas, the second points to embedded Islam, and the third to expanding/expanded territoriality.[5] My concern here is less with the question whether this phase model still appropriately reflects the complex process of Islamization, nor with its depth or the relation between qualitative and quantitative Islamization. Rather, my focus is on the *zongo* (or *zango*, pl. *zanguna*) in its spatial dimension. Originally denoting a caravan camp and later, more generically, a transit camp, *zongo* came to refer to a settlement located close to (mostly: major) cities and inhabited by (mainly) Hausa-speaking migrants from the Sahel.[6] However, as we shall see, the *zongo* was generally inhabited by a population that was relatively hybrid, both in religious or cultural and in ethnic terms. This seems to have been – and still seems to be – due to the homogenizing effect of a perception derived from outsiders' perspectives.

From pre-colonial to post-colonial times, we can observe the transformative power of spatial rearrangements, combined with both (externally and internally induced) migration or resettlement and the renegotiation of societal (ethnic, religious, regional, genealogical, etc.) boundaries. Hitherto strong ties to a specific urban quarter can be dissolved, and ethnicity can be replaced by religion – or vice versa. One striking example is the spatial transformation of Accra since the nineteenth century. Here I rely heavily on the research of Deborah Pellow, not only with regard to her data, but also in consideration of changes in the discourses of scholarship.[7]

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**4** See D. Robinson, *Muslim Societies in African History*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 28 and passim.

**5** Hock, "Manifestation", p. 64.

**6** See E.A. Williamson, "Understanding the Zongo: Processes of Socio-spatial Marginalization in Ghana", SMArchS thesis, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2014, pp. 17–18.

**7** Particularly: D. Pellow, "Muslim Segmentation: Cohesion and Divisiveness in Accra", *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 23 (1985) 3, pp. 419–444; Idem, *Landlords and Lodgers: Socio-spatial Organization in an Accra Community*, Westport: Praeger, 2002; Idem, "Migrant Communities in Accra, Ghana: Marginalizing the Margins", in: R. Grant (ed.), *Globalization and the Margins*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002, pp. 111–129; Idem, "The Power of Space in the Evolution of an Accra Zongo", in: S.M. Low (ed.), *Theorizing the City: The New*

In what is today Ghana and in adjacent regions, the Muslim enclaves estab-lished around 1900 have retained their reputation as "aliens' quarters" – de-spite the fact that they were far from being uniform in terms of language, culture, and ethnic affiliation. Since the early twentieth century, we can ob-serve a significant rise in conversions to Islam of persons from southern Ghanaian ethnic groups. But this did not lead to a realignment of territorial al-legiance in accordance with religious affiliation. "The *zongos* in Ghana are seen as 'Muslim', whether everyone there is a Muslim or not; but native converts to Islam do not necessarily have to live in the *zongo*."[8] The *zongo* continued to serve as "the socio-spatial referent for northern identity",[9] as "indigenous" Muslims opted to live outside the *zongo*, occasionally establishing new "Muslim" quarters like Madina, while "immigrant" Muslim communities continued to maintain their asserted joint religious-cultural identity. Zongo Lane in the north-western area of the old capital centre may serve as a case in point. There, not-withstanding internal inter-ethnic disputes, primarily between Hausa and Yoruba, Islam became more and more a generative factor for identity formation, superseding ethnic identities. The tendency for religion as an identity marker to supplant ethnic allegiances continued up to early pre-independence times, when "indigenous'" conversions to Islam increased significantly. In spatial terms, how-ever, most converts chose not to move to Zongo Lane or to any other *zongo*. Rather, they continued to live in their original quarters or relocated to "mixed" districts, or to new Muslim quarters. In the long run, this brought about continu-ous friction and fusion within the Muslim communities, multiplying the number of *zanguna* in each Muslim quarter. While political representation in the secu-lar field was differentiated along ethnic lines, the fact that there can be only one Imam (who would likewise serve as a representative of Muslim unity) caused competition between different Muslim communities. With different constellations, coalitions and allegiances, this competition has continued to the present day.

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*Urban Anthropology Reader*, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005, pp. 277–314; Idem, "New Spaces in Accra: Transnational Houses", *City and Society* 15 (2003) 1, pp. 59–86; Idem, "Maps of What Matters: Community Colour", in: P. Konings (ed.), *Crisis and Creativity: Exploring the Wealth of the African Neighbourhood*, Leiden: Brill, 2006, pp. 142–162. See also H. Weiss, *Between Accommodation and Revivalism: Muslims, the State, and Society in Ghana from the Precolonial to the Postcolonial Era*, Helsinki: Finnish Oriental Society, 2008, p. 247 and passim.

**8** N. Samwini, *The Muslim Resurgence in Ghana since 1950: Its Effects upon Muslims and Muslim-Christian Relations*, Münster: LIT, 2006, p. 102.

**9** Pellow, "Muslim Segmentation", p. 424.

The spatial dimension of these developments may be exemplified by disputes about the building of the new central mosque on Abose-Okai Road[10] in the late 1970s and early 1980s, not dissimilar to those concerning the central mosque in Kumasi.[11] We might understand these disputes as power struggles between different segments of the Muslim community – between "immigrants' communities" in the *zanguna* and "indigenous' communities" in the new quarters. In reality, however, the divisions between those two groups are multifaceted, and we find quite varied segmentations of the Muslim community, particularly in Accra. While the decision to build a new central mosque at Abose-Okai Road – outside the traditional *zongo* – seemed to indicate a shift from "strangers'" constituencies to "Ghanaians'" constituencies, it was in fact an "alien" Muslim who was appointed Chief Imam of the new mosque. Clearly, space made a difference.

In colonial times, Accra was made up of three sectors: the indigenous/precolonial, the colonial/Western/"modern", and the migrants' settlements, reflecting social stratification. While the colonial administration designated a new settlement area (Adabraka) with the aim of relocating there what it called the "Hausa tribes" of the old Zongo Lane, the target group of this scheme preferred to establish its own new community area, Sabon Zongo, four kilometres to the northwest. While both districts started from the same environmental conditions – both were more or less bush areas – they developed in different directions. Sabon Zongo remained a marginalized *zongo*, with a weak infrastructure and a kin-based socio-political set-up, attracting migrants ("foreigners") from the lower classes. Adabraka, on the other hand, although likewise a settlement appealing to migrants, drew them mainly from "indigenous" and higher-income groups, and turned into an attractive "modern" quarter. Nima, a quarter that started as – and remained – a typical *zongo*, displays many features resembling the situation in Sabon Zongo but has not developed solid socio-political structures.

Compared to Adabraka, which received governmental assistance, and to Nima with its unstructured, if not disorganized societal form, Sabon Zongo is marginalized and suffers from a rotten infrastructure; but it accommodates a vibrant and somehow self-sustaining community. This points to the potential of

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**10** The Central Mosque in Accra was built in the 1970s for the Abossey Okai Muslim community. Since the 1980s it has been the Central Mosque for Accra. The Central Mosque at the central market at Mokola was burnt and demolished.

**11** See E. Schildkrout, "Islam and Politics in Kumasi: An Analysis of Disputes over the Kumasi Central Mosque", *Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History* 52 (1974) 2, pp. 111–138.

the *zongo* as an urban quarter combining a "traditional" ethos, Islamic values, kinship ties, neighbourhood loyalty, village atmosphere, and a sense of belonging with a "modern" outlook, an urban disposition, entrepreneurial dynamics, a metropolitan disposition, network-related activities, and occupational mobility. Against this background, *zongwanci*, "*zongo*-ness", signifies a new, dynamic identity that draws much of its power from the creative and transformative spatiality of the *zongo*.

All this points to the fact that *zongo* is – or has become – quite a fluid concept. While it originally may have referred to mainly Muslim "northerners" who settled in "strangers' quarters", making them agglomerations with a distinctly Islamic atmosphere,[12] in the course of time, due to a variety of factors – the intake of new migrants, ethnic, economic, and social changes or spatial resettlements – the *zongo* has transformed into a both spatial and conceptual entity characterized by a high degree of fluidity and hybridity. Once characterized by exterritorial encapsulation and in this regard similar to the "quarantine" model of early Islamization in West Africa, it has traversed its own spatial embeddedness and turned into a transformative and generative space,[13] turning *zongwanci* – a term referring to the procreative, dynamic identity of the *zongo*'s inhabitants – into a "sense of belongingness".[14] Vis-à-vis urban dwellers outside the *zongo*, this identity is characterized by an intersectional distinctiveness that is based on internal heterogeneity and generates a "new" residential community emerging from productive diversity. Against this background, space is a catalyst and an agent of change, challenging the juxtaposition of time as something dynamic and space as something static. Moreover, we can observe space-related agency in its own right with the ability to foster social, economic, political, and religious innovation, unleashing the creative potential of urban quarters shaped by dynamic migratory transformations. Social and cultural practices are informed by and inform spatiality in such a way that by means of space, the social imaginary[15] of *zongwanci* is constituted.

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**12** D. Pellow and N. Chazan, *Ghana: Coping with Uncertainty*, Boulder, CO: Westview, 1986, p. 102.

**13** See "[Z]ongo residents differ in background and orientation from those outside but are also more acculturated [. . .] than earlier residents are [. . .]" (Pellow, "The Power of Space", p. 307).

**14** D. Pellow, "African Materiality and the House", in: S. Low (ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Anthropology and the City: Engaging the Urban and the Future*, London: Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, 2019, pp. 356–376, at 357.

**15** "Social imaginary" must not be confused with "social imagery", a term in the sociology of scientific knowledge, consisting of "those beliefs which people confidently hold to and live by. In particular [. . .] the beliefs which are taken for granted or institutionalized, or invested with

The model of *sabon zongo* finds its antipodal complement in that of *sabon gari* ("new town") during colonial times, settlements of non-Muslim migrants outside the walls of Muslim cities. In the course of time, these settlements were incorporated into the expanding territory of the cities. Likewise, and due to forced segregation, sporadically in conjunction with violent conflicts, these cities have occasionally run the risk of disintegrating into homogeneous, nearly "quarantine" quarters, spatially separated from one another. This has been the case in the aftermath of recurring inter-communal riots in Kaduna and Jos.[16]

Inter-communal conflicts may bring about intensified segregation that can result in violent conflict; equally, radical segregation can cause major conflicts between the inhabitants of the *zongo* and the surrounding population. This happened, for example, in 1992 when clashes in Zangon Kataf (in southern Kaduna State) between Muslim Hausa traders – alleged "newcomers" or "foreigners" – and Kataf (Atyap) – "indigenous" or "residents" – caused hundreds of casualties. However, the fault-lines between the opponents are fluid and may change. Sometimes, these conflicts are the result of ethnic identity politics. Territorial as well as ethnic, political or cultural specifications of *zongo*-spaces are continuously renegotiated – both as *lieu*, and as *espace*, to draw upon the terminology of Michel de Certeau.[17]

# Permanent Pilgrims on Imaginative Pilgrimage

From a historical point of view, the *hajj* as an obligatory pilgrimage to Mecca proves the importance of space and spatiality in Islam. Other examples of Muslims' religious practice pointing to the importance of space in Islam include

authority by groups of people" (D. Bloor, *Knowledge and Social Imagery*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976, p. 5).

**16** Interestingly, the *sabon gari* of colonial Kaduna city had quite a balanced ethnic composition with more than 25 per cent Hausa, between 11 and 19 per cent Igbo, Yoruba, and Nupe and nearly 30 per cent "others" (O. Oshin, "Railways and Urbanization", in: T. Falola and S.J. Salm [eds.], *Nigerian Cities*, Trenton: Africa World Press, 2004, pp. 101–126, at 114). See also L. King, "From Caliphate to Protectorate: Ethnicity and the Colonial Sabon Gari System in Northern Nigeria", *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 4 (2003) 2, https://muse.jhu.edu/article/45737 (accessed 15 March 2019).

**17** Michel de Certeau conceived of a place (*lieu*) as "the order (of whatever kind) in accord with which elements are distributed in relationships of coexistence", whereas he wrote on space (*espace*): "A space exists when one takes into consideration vectors of direction, velocities, and time variables. Thus, space is composed of intersections of mobile elements" (Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984, p. 117).

the significance of the *qibla*, the direction that should be faced during the ritual prayer (*salât*), or the Islamic calendar, generally, as well as the beginning of Ramadan. Here, Islam links time to space in a special way by aligning temporality with spatiality: the position of the moon determines the calculation of time. The significance of the pilgrimage to Mecca in this context is somewhat different. Throughout its history and notwithstanding the standardizing pressure on the part of proponents of Islamic orthopraxy, varying interpretations of the legitimate format of the *hajj* have emerged. One of the most prominent is the claim that as a substitute for the *hajj* to Mecca a pilgrim may undertake a certain number of pilgrimages to other holy places in his or her home country. This understanding has become prevalent in popular Islam, frequently nurtured by Sûfi thought and ritual. It is widespread in southeast Asia, Africa, and beyond. Some pilgrims even hold that *ziyârât* – visits to holy places, mostly tombs or shrines of (habitually: Muslim) saints – are even superior to the *hajj*.[18]

But there is another, more singular phenomenon that has created a very peculiar understanding and practice of *hajj*, featuring a distinctive relation between spatiality and religion, between space and religious practice. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the West Sudan region was affected by two complementary developments: first, by the "push factor" of rapidly increasing migration in the context of growing Mahdist movements and the ascendancy of European colonialism, and second, by the sustained popularity of the *hajj* on long-standing and well-established pilgrimage routes, constituting a pull towards the east.[19] Over the centuries, pilgrims from Hausaland and adjacent regions on their road to Mecca voluntarily or unintentionally "got stuck" in the eastern part of what is today the Republic of the Sudan. For three, four, or even five generations, they have settled there in numerous village settlements of temporary construction. They still affirm their intention of performing the *hajj* and regard themselves as being in transit; yet there is no indication that they would seriously contemplate resuming their pilgrimage project. Interestingly, they are likewise considered pilgrims by observers, notably by "indigenous" Sudanese.

In terms of spatiality and its cultural and social dimensions, these village settlements of pilgrims in transition could be conceptualized as phenomena similar to the *zongo*. Many generations of Hausa traders once established

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**18** See C.W. Ernst and B.B. Lawrence, *Sufi Martyrs of Love: Chishti Sufism in South Asia and Beyond*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002, pp. 85–104, especially p. 94 and passim; or S. Bhardwaj, "Non-Hajj Pilgrimage in Islam: A Neglected Dimension of Religious Circulation", *Journal of Cultural Geography* 17 (1998) 2, pp. 69–87.

**19** See C.B. Yamba, *Permanent Pilgrims*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995.

networks of settlements in the immediate vicinity of existing indigenous villages, towns, and cities all over Sudanic Africa (and beyond). Hence what C. Bawa Yamba has referred to as "permanent pilgrimage" in a stationary mode: the pilgrims live in settlements serving as transition camps between their home and Mecca. At the same time, they outline a state of extended liminality, to be understood as an interim status not so much in terms of temporality; rather, it constituted something like a status of permanent temporality – or, in the words of Yamba: "not a 'between and betwixt' temporary construct, but one that persists as a permanent state".[20]

In this regard we can identify two contradicting spatial concepts: space defined by its geographical position in relation to Mecca (the nearer the pilgrims move to Mecca, the more spatial sacredness) and space that draws its sacredness from *baraka*, the blessing power of a shaykh, whose residence is transformed into an alternative centre of pilgrimage. The ultimate source of sacredness for both spaces is God, and the "vicarious pilgrimage", as manifested in the second case, coming along with suspension of the obligatory *hajj*, is sanctified by reference to the incomprehensible will of God. The phrase *in sha'llâh* – "if God wills" – turns into a dictum substantiating the "permanent" pilgrims' ontology. As pilgrims, they live in a state of permanent pilgrimage. This static time-space continuum is perceived by them as a transit station on their road to a final destination – an arrival point that they most likely will never reach: "these beliefs have led to a paradoxical conception and praxis of pilgrimage [. . .]; a praxis which does not necessarily entail the expected spatio-temporal progression, but if at all a progression that is analogous to life itself."[21]

Contrary to the usual understanding of pilgrimage, the "permanent pilgrims" conceive of the *hajj* as a symbolic journey. They develop a peculiar perspective on Mecca that does not exist now but solely in time future, since it can be only reached in the future.

> [I]t seems that the idea of 'the future', as the pilgrims conceive it and talk of it, is best understood in terms of space rather than time. This would account for why eastward movements towards Mecca, on the one hand, are seen as corresponding to the increasing sacralization of space, while movements between sets of pilgrimage villages in close proximity to each other are, on the other hand, talked of as bringing the pilgrimage closer to Mecca.[22]

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**20** Ibid., p. 2.

**21** Ibid., p. 3.

**22** C.B. Yamba, "Going There and Getting There: The Future as a Legitimate Charter for Life in the Present", in: S. Wallman (ed.), *Contemporary Futures: Perspectives from Social Anthropology*, London: Routledge, 1992, pp. 109–123, at 119.

By and by, the juxtaposition of Mecca "as a holy spot located in absolute space and time"[23] and the permanent pilgrims' villages "as located to relative space and time"[24] became inverted. Due to the symbolic and analogical understanding of Mecca, proximity to the *baraka* of a *shaykh* in the villages brought the "permanent pilgrims" closer to Mecca (in terms of transcendence) than the "spatialized" pilgrimage aiming at Mecca (in terms of immanence).

> In so far as the future (Mecca) is an immanent spot, it is sufficient (only) to *strive* to reach it. But in so far as it is a transcendental source of all that is holy, it has no true location in time and space, and the pilgrims live, as they do, *as if* they were trying to reach it. (italics in the original)[25]

From a perspective that focuses on the spatial dimensions, it may be helpful to introduce the distinction between imaginary and imagined spaces. While Mecca, the location of transcendence, so to speak – an immanent spot endowed with religious significance designating the pilgrims' destination – represents an imagined space, the "permanent" pilgrims' destination is an imaginary space located "somewhere beyond", virtually linked to the *shaykh'*s dwelling in settlements holding the status of "permanent transience".

Both in its imagined and in its imaginary configurations, space has been furnished with meaning, in this case mainly by pilgrims and their performances as well as by a variety of deployments moulding the parameters of spatiality. Inversely, even imagined and imaginary spaces make a difference by impacting on the pilgrims' acts, deeds and thoughts. Thus, space acquires a generative dimension, triggering changes and transformations as well as sparking creative reactions and dynamic courses of action.

The imaginative pilgrimage of these "permanent pilgrims" discloses an interrelation between imagined and imaginary spaces with regard to the pilgrim's destination that brings about both a redefinition of pilgrimage and a reconfiguration of the pilgrim's community. By this means, the dynamics of spaces implicitly shape distinctive religious practices and communities beyond their respective factual manifestations.[26]

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**23** Ibid., p. 121.
**24** Ibid.
**25** Ibid.
**26** See the figures relating to spatial and chronological dimensions in: ibid., pp. 116, 118.

# Divination Boards as a Cosmic Device

My final, more extensive example refers to the interrelation of divination and spatiality. In Africa – and indeed elsewhere – divination is a ubiquitous phenomenon, cross-cutting religion, politics, economy, and any other domain of society. As to the cosmological, ontological, and epistemological dimensions of divination, space seems to be of minor importance, traceable solely in cosmology that, as a specific concept of the world and its general structure, its "set up" and its particular characteristics, bears reference to spatiality, albeit more metaphorically. As regards the ontological dimension of divination, *prima facie* at least, spatiality does not seem to constitute a formative factor. Epistemology, again, as a specific rationale for the formation and circulation of knowledge, pre-shaping an elaborate knowledge system, seems to be geared towards abstract – and therefore beyond spatial – categories.

As to divination, it is unnecessary here to ponder about its semantics, usage, development, or occurrence. The following definition reflects current research on divination in this domain and implicitly references African aspects:

> Divination is a way to solve a problem of a client, by a technique to gain additional knowledge about the client's history and present situation in life. The technique involves a standardized knowledge that accesses hidden aspects of reality, often in a mediated interaction between specialist and client. The technical forms of divination are legion, and usually involve a randomizing agent or act (throwing or rubbing objects, animals or parts of animals), or the inducement of trance and intuition, which then lead to complex interpretations of calculations. Those interpretations and calculations are often based upon substantive bodies of local or regional knowledge, sometimes in the form of a fixed corpus, most often incorporated in more diffuse systems of insight.[27]

In this definition spatiality does not form a constitutive factor of divination, at least not at first glance. This seems to be the case for any type of divination in Africa, reflecting the entire variety of forms and expressions of divinatory practices and concepts that are found all over the world.

All such phenomena can be classified according to categories that we find already in "classical" discourses influenced by Cicero's treatise *De divinatio*,[28]

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**27**  W.E.A. van Beek and P.M. Peek, "Reality Reviewed: Dynamics of African Divination", in: Idem (eds.), *Reviewing Reality: Dynamics of African Divination*, Münster: LIT, 2013, pp. 1–22, at 1–2.

**28**  W.A. Falconer (trans.), *De Divinatione by Cicero*, vol. 22, *Loeb Classical Library*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1923, Latin text with facing English translation: http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Cicero/de_Divinatione/home.html (accessed 15 March 2019); D. Wardle (trans. with introduction and historical commentary), *Cicero on Divination: De Divinatione,* bk. 1, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.

and it seems reasonable to distinguish between two major types of divination, namely, inductive-(geo)mantic and intuitive-mediumistic divination. Inductive-(geo)mantic forms of divination start from decoding the meaning of randomly produced patterns or figures. Objects (like cowries, bones, seeds, etc.) thrown on the ground or traces left by animals in the sand form structures that, as complex codes, can be deciphered by the diviner who has acquired expertise in this field. This is performed in a complex process of communication and interaction with numerous human and non-human actors and powers involved. Intuitive-mediumistic forms of divination start from the (innate, acquired or transmitted) disposition of an expert who – due to this peculiar disposition – is himself the locus where complex codes are represented and performed. Methodically, the deciphering is done by the means of spirit possession, trance, or the acquisition of any other extraordinary altered state of consciousness, inducing hyper-sensory modes of perception.

However, the differences between those two types of divination should not be over-emphasized, as there are many mixed or intermediate forms. In order to reflect on the spatial dimension in divination, I have chosen an example of the first category: Ifá, the best-known type of divination in Africa and beyond.

Etymologically, Ifá is most likely derived from the verb *fá* – "to wipe, shave, clean, scrape"[29]– and accordingly denotes "that which is scraped off", "the act of wiping". But it also signifies, as an old dictionary puts it, "the god of palm-nuts" (evidently referring to the metonym of Òrúnmìlà) and "a tool with two handles (used to scoop out the pulp of green calabashes)".[30] William Bascom, the doyen of research into Ifá divination, interprets the deity's name Ifá thus: "because he 'scrapes' (*fa*) sickness and other evils away from those who are afflicted, or because he scrapes the powder of the divining tray in marking the figures."[31]

Unexpectedly, the spatial dimension appears in both a metaphorical and a tangible dimension, referring to the realm of Ifá/Òrúnmìlà and to the realm of the divination board. Further implicit references to spatiality show up in other aspects of Ifá divinatory practice. Let us take the example of the most important technique of Ifá, a cleromantic system providing for the interpretation of randomly produced figures by "casting Ifá".[32] This practice is based on the production and interpretation of patterns, *odù*, generated by operating with 16 palm

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**29** S.A. Crowther, *A Vocabulary of the Yoruba Language*, London: Seeleys, 1852, p. 130.

**30** Ibid., p. 110.

**31** W. Bascom, *Ifa Divination: Communication Between Gods and Men in West Africa*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991, p. 107.

**32** Ibid., p. 40.

nuts (*ikìn ifá*). For retrieving these patterns, the *babaláwo* shakes the palm nuts in his hands, then claps his hands, trying to catch as many nuts as possible with his right hand. Depending on the results, the *babaláwo* draws lines in the powder on the divination tray, arranged in two columns. For one nut left in his left hand, he marks two lines, for two nuts, one line; if more than two are left, the operation is invalid and must be repeated. After eight "drawings", the *odù* is found. Each half of the patterns can be combined with itself or with the other 15 remaining patterns, making up 16 × 16 = 256 possible *odù*/figures. In 16 cases, the figures on the right and left are identical, constituting the 16 major *odù*. A sort of hierarchy starting from the 16 principal *odù* and continuing with the 240 ordinary *odù* (with regional variations) becomes operative when alternative options are given during the consultation of Ifá and must be ranked.

While the patterns (*odù)* are derived from spatial arrays, represented in two-dimensional, binary-coded forms, they also refer to a metaphorical realm beyond spatiality. Of major importance in Ifá divination are the verses or poems corresponding to the figures and applied as tools of interpretation. They are likewise called *odù* and form a corpus of "orature",[33] orally transmitted, unwritten "scriptures", the *odù ifá*, made up of a broad variety of genres, from incantations to proverbs. The *babaláwo* with his expertise in divination is expected to memorize these *odù*s and be able to apply them in the appropriate way when consulted. This requires knowledge of Yoruba mythology, to which these *odù* are linked, providing intricate information on the relationship between the various actors and agents referred to in the *odù*, thereby endorsing the ranking of the *odù*, which is important for the appropriate application of the peculiar *odù*.

But there is another crucial reference of Ifá divination to spatiality, namely, its allusion to the place where, according to Yoruba self-perceptions, Ifá as well as Yoruba identity has got its very "mythological" foundation: Ilé-Ifè in southern Nigeria, the cosmogonic centre of the Yoruba and the world. Ilé-Ifè – literally "the place where the earth has been spread" – is in a way comparable to the sacred centres of the major religions and signifies for the Yoruba what Jerusalem signifies for Jews, Mecca for Muslims, or Benares for Hindus.[34]

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**33** Pio Zirimu, a Ugandan linguist, scholar, and literary theorist, is credited with having introduced this term. See P. Auger, *The Anthem Dictionary of Literary Terms and Theory*, London: Auger Anthem Press, 2010, p. 210; A.A. Roscoe, *Uhuru's Fire: African Literature East to South*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977, p. 9; N. Thiong'o, "Notes towards a Performance Theory of Orature", *Performance Research* 12 (2007) 3, pp. 4–7.

**34** See J.K. Olupona, *City of 201 Gods: Ilé-Ifè in Time, Space, and the Imagination*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011.

It is the place where the tangible-material of this world and the intangible-immaterial of the other world meet, a topographical representation of cosmogony and creation, a place of origin of the cosmic order and thereby the *axis mundi*, the axial centre of the world. Numerous mythological traditions link Yoruba culture, Yoruba religion, and Ifá divination to Ilé-Ifè, the centre of the world as well as of the cosmos that is represented in the diviner's divination tray. Accordingly, the cycle of festivals (including a specific Ifá festival) re-enacts the worldly order by referring to its mythological origin and demonstrates the vital importance not only of Ilé-Ifè as "orthogenetic"[35] epicentre of Yoruba civilization and history, but also of Ifá divination as a kind of genetic code of Yoruba tradition, or as the default mode of Yoruba identity. This again is reflected topographically in the location of the temples and shrines that have been allocated to certain spaces in Ilé-Ifè, thus incidentally determining the geographical site, expansion, and layout of the city. To put it in a different perspective: the overall set-up of Ilé-Ifè has been demarcated by a divinatory original resolution. Real (territory), imagined (map) and imaginary (cosmic) spaces coincide.

The cosmogonic foundation and cosmological extrapolation of Ifá divination is reflected also in every single feature of both the performances (which actualize a rich "ritual process") and the entire apparatus, including a variety of ritual paraphernalia related to Ifá consultation. Let us take just two more or less randomly selected examples of how instruments that at first glance serve just functional purposes become repercussive of the cosmos and of cosmic occurrences.

First, the divining tray (*opon ifá*) in itself represents the entire cosmos. This is reflected not just in the carvings on the tray, as Henry John Drewal has observed:

> While we marvel at the complex imagery on the tray's border and wax eloquent about such sights, we forget that the hollow area carved into the underside of the tray creates a sound chamber. The tray is a wooden drum. When an Ifa priest strikes its surface with the pointed end of a divination tapper, the sound reverberates in order to 'communicate between this world and the next' as the diviner Kolawole Oshitola (1982) explained to me. Sacred sounds, not just images, create a transcendent, evocative experience of art.[36]

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**35** D. Eck, "The City as a Sacred Center", in: B. Smith and H.B. Reynolds (eds.), *The City as a Sacred Center: Essays on Six Asian Contexts*, Leiden: Brill, 1987, pp. 1–11, at 2, referring to R. Redfield and M. Singer, "The Cultural Role of Cities", *Man in India* 36 (1956) 3, pp. 161–194.
**36** H.J. Drewal, "African Art and the Senses", http://www.sensorystudies.org/sensorial-investigations/african-art-and-the-senses/ (accessed 15 March 2019).

While the focus of our considerations is not primarily on the creative power of image and sound to induce transcending effects, it is evident that the ritual performance links the divination tool to the cosmos, thereby transforming the divination tray into a receiver of cosmic repercussions or, vice versa, evoking a cosmic resonance. By divinatory performance, the divination tray transmutes into a cosmic soundboard, a resonating body of cosmic signals.

The second example refers to the divining powder, *iyerosun*. It is taken from a piece of wood infested by termites that eat through the white-coloured parts of the African sandalwood tree. *Iyerosun* is occasionally referred to in Yoruba mythology, which even links it to Olódùmarè, the supreme being, and to the *orishá* Ifá/Òrúnmìlà.[37] While it is not clear why exactly termite-produced dust from other plants or trees is considered an unsatisfactory substitute, it is evident that the "production process" of *iyerosun* links micro- and macrocosmic dimensions as well as life and death; and so it makes sense that any other surrogate, like sand, is inacceptable.

We could refer to more examples of divination practices that closely relate to Yoruba cosmology, thereby linking microcosmic and macrocosmic dimensions. But it is more important to recognise the conceptual correlation between divination and cosmology, positioning divination in the primal set-up of the cosmos and its spatial arrangements, as a tool for linking the major cosmological realms. There is "this world" here (*ayé*) – with humans, animals, plants, minerals – and the subjacent realm of *ilè*, the earth below and the abode of Onile; and there is "that world" there (*òrun*) – where we find Olódùmarè, a more or less inactive supreme being, agents such as Odùduwà (commissioned by Olódùmarè), and other *orishá* (ambiguous beings, sometimes referred to as "gods"), as well as spirits and ancestors. *Ashé*, a foundational, performative and relational power pervading the entire cosmos, links both "worlds" and acts as the source of all individual powers and all empowerment, constituting communication and inter-relation between all beings and entities, these being all of the same ontic quality. There is no dualistic ontology between beings or entities in this world (*ayé*) and that world (*òrun*). Dead human beings become ancestors and can even transmute into *orishá*. In this context, due to *ashé*'s faculty for linking spatial cosmological layers, thereby accumulating cosmic powers and generating focal points of power, ancestral authority is enacted and put into effect.

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**37** See J.A.I. Bewaki, "Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief and the Theistic Problem of Evil", *African Studies Quarterly* 2 (1998) 1, pp. 1–17, at 9.

A quite recent aspect of the interface between spatiality and cosmology is the use of modern technologies such as electronic tablets for casting Ifá. What at first glance seems to be autodidactically acquired knowledge on Ifá, self-sustained and self-taught, proves on closer examination to be appropriated through "traditional" channels of learning. For example, an app for Ipads (unfortunately no longer available) was developed by Onaje X. Offley Woodbine,[38] who started his career as a basketball player in an Ivy League Team, but then decided to study philosophy and theology. Columbia University Press published his revised doctoral dissertation under the title "Black Gods of the Asphalt",[39] and it was longlisted for the 2017 PEN/ESPN award for literary sports writing. Between 2004 and 2012 he was trained in Ifá divination and initiated as a *babaláwo*.[40] Thus even those who advocate the use of cutting-edge technologies in Ifá divination are inclined to get their expertise officially accredited by initiation by a recognized *babaláwo*, preferably with credentials referencing back to Nigeria. On the other hand, we can observe a tendency towards "re-creating" assumed Yoruba identity in a concrete and material guise. This becomes evident in projects like the construction near Sheldon, SC/USA of Oyotunji village, which is closely related to Ifá divination. As to the intersection of spatiality and divination, we have multiple layers of spaces that refer to different modes of communalization and, derived from that, varied formations of togetherness – imaginary, imagined, and factual.[41]

Thus, Yoruba cosmology is characterized by attributing to the cosmos a holistic, equilibrium-like quality with highly permeable boundaries between this world and the other world. The non-dualistic, permeable set up of the Yoruba cosmos makes Ifá divination "work", as it gives experts in this field, diviners,

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**38** See A. Adogame, "Towards Digital Divination? Modes of Negotiating Authenticity and Knowledges in Indigenous African Epistemologies", in: K. Hock (ed.), *The Power of Interpretation: Imagined Authenticity – Appropriated Identity. Conflicting Discourses on New Forms of African Christianity*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2016, pp. 235–257, at 254–255.

**39** O.X.O. Woodbine, *Black Gods of the Asphalt: Religion, Hip-Hop, and Street Basketball*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2016.

**40** Interestingly, he was initiated by Bishop Ezekiel Lijadu, head of an African Instituted Church, the Evangelist Band Mission (EBM), which proves the strong permeability between different religious traditions and Ifá divination. See https://ifadivination.wordpress.com/about-bishop-e-a-lijadu/ (accessed 15 March 2019).

**41** K.M. Clarke, *Mapping Yorùbá Networks: Power and Agency in the Making of Transnational Communities*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2004, pp. 51–106 and passim. See the "Reading of the Year", https://www.oyotunji.org/reading-of-the-year1.html (accessed 18 March 2019) as well as other products and services in the same vein (https://www.oyotunji.org/spiritual-services.html (accessed 15 March 2019)) in Oyotunji village.

particularly the *babaláwos*, the prospect of "reading the signs" that link the individual's – or the community's – condition to its overall context, taking into consideration "signs" that hint at potential impacts beyond what is immediately evident. The coincidence of real (territory), imagined (map), and imaginary (cosmic) spaces is represented in the divination tray and activated by a high-ranking diviner or *babaláwo* ("father of the secrets"). The example of Ifá divination points to strategies of claiming religious authority and securing authorization to perform approved divinatory practices by triggering processes of interference between multidimensional layers of space – real, imagined, and imaginary – embodied in the divination board as a representation of cosmic communion and as an emblematic point of reference for ancestral authentication.

But Ifá divination is not just about religious authority and power. As a process of communication, it also constitutes community or, to put it more clearly: depending on the context, it may contribute to the integration of existing communities – particularly in traditional Ifá divination – and create both an imaginary community – embracing agents of this world and that world – and an imagined community of practitioners, that is: of both consultants and those seeking advice, generally, and of the community of experts, particularly.

## Conclusion

The topics touched upon in this chapter seem to reflect recurrent themes of a generic nature, which emerge both in my three case studies and in studies of transnational religious space in different contexts. From our case studies we draw seven observations.

1. At a general level, there is a dialectic interrelation between spatial flows, on the one hand, and phenomena of congealment, on the other. Whereas some *zanguna* prove to be dynamic catalysts of migration in territorial, socio-economic, and cultural terms, others turn out to be cul-de-sacs for individuals and groups in their search for a (new) home and a (new) identity. Likewise, while Muslim pilgrims on their way to Mecca "got stuck" in the eastern Sudan, with their terrene *hajj* coming to a standstill, the pilgrimage turned into a celestial project, opening up new routes for the transnational flow towards an imaginary spatial dimension. For its part, Ifá, one of the most mobile divination systems on a global level, seems, next to many other purposes, to serve individuals and groups all over the world as a fixed, but unconfined transcendental point of reference by

creating transnational religious spaces in all its real, imagined, and imaginary dimensions – at first glance, at least, devoid of any blockages.

2. A variety of factors hampering or facilitating global flows can be identified. Serious impediments to the mobility of religious ideas or practices are recognisable in only two of the three cases: the "permanent pilgrims" may be hampered by socio-economic, cultural (and partly: linguistic) divides; and the *zongo* may by confronted by inter-communal tensions in the context of divisions between the religious and the ethnic.

   As to facilitating factors, we have noted: (a) a multicultural fluidity, a flexible use of transport options and, outstandingly, the atmosphere of *zongwanci*, resonant of the ideal of transcultural fluidity in the social imaginary of the *zongo*; (b) multilingualism, aviation, and air traffic, computer-based communication and modern information technology; a manifest example of "portability" in the shape of Oyotunji village; and religious-cultural resonance of a peculiar type, both relating, transcending and relocating spaces in the case of Ifá divination; (c) the atmosphere of uttermost piety among the "permanent pilgrims", linking hardship with reverence for the *shaykhs* and their *baraka*.

3. With regard to the question of visibility vs. invisibility, we have a solid visible presence of (transnational) religious spaces in all three examples. We should also bear in mind the soundscape, which in the case of the *zongo* accompanies external and internal visual differentiation – for example, between different religious constituencies, predominantly between Muslims and Christians. In Ifá divination the soundscape pervades all layers of space – for example, the divination board provides a resonator for (and image of) the cosmic order, while the use of electronic tablets extends visually and audibly into cyberspace, making spaces of different layers permeable to each other.

4. Territorialization and de-territorialization are closely interlinked in all three examples, most prominently in the case of Ifá divination. Here, a spatial "interdigitation" refers not only to a territorially based linkage between palpable spaces, but transforms into an "interdigitalization" of de-territorialized virtual spaces.

5. Apart from the case of the "permanent pilgrims", there is a strong oscillation between privatization and (re)collectivization, as well as between individualization and communalization. The *zongo* provides options for redefining spatial borders in a flexible way. Spaces can be both enlarged and downsized, mostly to the advantage of women and young people who, by negotiating the boundaries of public and private spaces, have been successful in repositioning themselves in their respective communities. The same applies to Ifá

divination, where, due to the migratory and transcultural dimensions of transnational spaces in this field, the trend towards individualization seems more pronounced than in other contexts. In both cases, gendered spaces are transformed and redefined in a flexible way: they may effect emancipation in the case of the *zongo* – by shaping both protected and unrestricted zones for communication and novel lines of action; and in the case of Ifá divination they may facilitate participation by opening new avenues for women to assume functions hitherto restricted to male diviners.

6. In all three examples the notion of "nation", if used at all, is largely restricted to a more or less metaphorical meaning. While there are references to ethnic and cultural allegiances – "Hausa" in the cases of the *zongo* and the "permanent pilgrims", "Yoruba" in the case of Ifá divination – the entities referred to are fractured, at least conceptually. "Nation" becomes the signifier for the social imaginary. This is clearest in the *zongo* example, where *zongwanci* serves as a frame of reference for a nation that is more imaginary than imagined.

7. Last but not least, there is the question of "religion" as a discrete field – and the question of the relation between "religion" and its others. What is evident from our examples is that religion cannot be referred to as a given entity. Rather, it is categorized by a fundamental fluidity and hybridity, and what makes it "religion" is mainly the outcome of both emic and etic discourses. A case in point is the relationship between religion and divination. While at first glance Ifá divination from time immemorial seems to have been part of (Yoruba) religion, closer inspection shows that it has acted as a broker between what has been conceptualized as Yoruba religion, Christianity, and Islam.[42] Against this background, Ifá divination provided – in terms of manifest territory as well as in terms of virtual attribution – the space that the adherents of different "religions" were willing to share. In a *zongo* setting, again, space provided the metaphorical and material frame within which diverse religious groups emerged, differentiating and amalgamating themselves. We can deduct from these examples that due to its sort of generative properties, space can serve as a cause of religious integration, diversification, and transformation, even a transformation of religion into an elusive formation beyond one particular tangible religion.

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**42** See J.D.Y. Peel, "The Pastor and the Babalawo: The Interaction of Religions in Nineteenth-Century Yorubaland", *Africa* 60 (1990) 3, pp. 338–369; Idem, *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000; Idem, *Christianity, Islam and Oriṣa Religion: Three Traditions in Comparison and Interaction*, Oakland: University of California Press, 2016.

This chapter has argued that spaces are not simply "real" entities in the shape of a spatial frame for the deeds of actors or "real" entities formed and produced by actors. Spaces can likewise be created as imagined or imaginary entities by the generative power of imaginative practices. The example of the *zongo* has shown how spatiality informs the social imaginary, which in turn shapes spatiality; the "permanent pilgrims" have illustrated how "real" spaces may be transformed into both imagined and imaginary spaces that, in turn, affect and transmute the spatial and social set-up of the pilgrims' settlements and model their social imaginary; and Ifá divination, in turn, exemplifies the manifold layers of space and their interrelation with varied categories of communalization. The impact of "real", imagined and imaginary spaces contributes to the emergence of novel organizational structures, ranging from loose networks to de-territorialized imagined communities, invisibly structured by (assumed) systematic formations of togetherness.