

## RELIGIOUS DUALISM AND SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY IN CYPRIAN EKWENSI'S *BURNING GRASS*

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**Abstract:** This article intends to elaborate on african traditionalism, magic and spirituality as they peacefully coexist with the Fulani's islamic practices in *Burning Grass*. It becomes actually interesting to probe into how the islamic Fulani of Ekwensi's novel get african traditional and magical practices coexist side by side with their islamic religion to favor social sustainability. The Fulani islamic group portrayed in the novel constitutes an excellent model of religious dualism, since it shows how african and imported islamic beliefs can coexist and collaborate. In *Burning Grass*, the two religions are never opposite against one another as it has for long been proclaimed to create religious chauvinism and clashes. This article shows how, in *Burning Grass*, the islamic religion peacefully coexists with the Fulani's traditional african values, magic and spirituality in accordance with the dualistic ideology. Besides, the study demonstrates that religious dualism avoids religious discords and promotes social sustainability. A major result is that religious dualism better fits the african context for a peaceful collaboration between different religions to guarentee development. Religious purism has no chance to survive in a highly religious African continent. Another result is that the policy of association as promoted by the dualistic ideology transpires in the way Ekwensi's characters make coexist African and islamic practices.

**Keywords:** Traditional african religions, islamic religion, religious dualism, social sustainability.

### DUALISME RELIGIEUX ET DURABILITE SOCIALE DANS *BURNING GRASS* DE CYPRIAN EKWENSI

**Résumé :** Cet article a pour but d'analyser le traditionalisme, la magie et la spiritualité africaine qui coexistent pacifiquement avec les pratiques islamiques des Fulanis dans *Burning Grass*. Il est intéressant d'examiner comment les Peuls islamiques du roman d'Ekwensi font coexister les pratiques traditionnelles et magiques africaines avec leur religion islamique pour favoriser la durabilité sociale. Le groupe islamique Peul décrit dans le roman constitue un excellent modèle de dualisme religieux, car il montre comment les croyances africaines et les croyances islamiques importées peuvent coexister et collaborer. Dans *Burning Grass*, les deux religions ne sont jamais opposées l'une à l'autre comme on l'a longtemps proclamé pour créer du chauvinisme et des affrontements religieux. Cet article vise à montrer comment, dans *Burning Grass*, la religion islamique coexiste pacifiquement avec les valeurs traditionnelles africaines, la magie et la spiritualité des Peuls, conformément à l'idéologie dualiste. En outre, l'étude démontre que le dualisme religieux évite les discordes religieuses et privilégie la durabilité sociale. Un résultat majeur est que le dualisme religieux s'adapte mieux au contexte africain pour une collaboration pacifique entre les différentes religions afin de garantir le développement. Le purisme religieux n'a aucune chance de survivre dans un continent africain très religieux. Un autre résultat est que la politique d'association promue par l'idéologie dualiste se manifeste dans la manière dont les personnages d'Ekwensi font coexister les pratiques africaines et islamiques.

**Mots-clés :** Religions traditionnelles africaines, religion islamique, dualisme religieux, durabilité sociale.

## Introduction

Despite the growth of research in the field of religion in african literature, the relationship between the islamic religion and african traditional religions in african literary productions seems to have rarely been discussed by critics. Since colonialism, multiple religious traditions exist in Africa and therefore interact with african indigenous traditions, religions, beliefs systems and cultures. In the process, many studies have been conducted to work out the relationships between african religions and newly imported european religions which mostly see to it to assimilate africans. Relationships between the african traditional religions and the imported religions such as christianity and islam have long been controversial in scholarship. The christian religion developed a chauvinism with which it denies and disregards african traditional religions that it labelled satanic, paganism and primitive. In "Religious Chauvinism and the Indomitability of the African Spirit: A Reading of *Purple Hibiscus* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie", T. Adi comments that "There is no denying that Christian religion and African traditions, most of the time, reject one another letting the reader see an opposition between the two religions" (2018: 77). What is more, the article has demonstrated that:

The chauvinism with which Christian religion wants to achieve the taboula rasa of the African traditional values faces a sharp resistance of an indomitable African spirit [...] the deep-rootedness in African values compulsorily permeate Africans' daily life at a point where it becomes a necessity for both African traditions and Christianity to come together for a better religious development of the African continent.

Adi (2018: 80)

As a result of the indomitability of the african religious beliefs and to avoid religious clashes across the world and especially in Africa, some scholars, mostly theologians, have promoted policies such as syncretism, dualism, indigenization or acculturation for a peaceful coexistence and collaboration of different religions to guarantee social sustainability which is central to sustainable development. By so doing, these scholars encourage understanding and mutual respect among religions. In this context, T. Adi in his "Understanding African and Christian Religious Practices as Assets for Social Cohesion: A Study in Selected Novels by Chinua Achebe and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie" compares and contrasts Christian and african traditional religions. For this purpose, he argues that an "in-dept understanding of religious practices through their differences and similarities may greatly contribute to social cohesion to avoid religion-based conflicts" (Adi, 2022:14). Previous scholarship shows that the christian religion in its beginnings has not been tolerant towards african traditional religions. Is it not therefore interesting to investigate the relationship between islam and african traditional religions? It is to work out the relationships between islam and african traditional religions that this article discusses religious dualism through african traditionalism, magic and spirituality as peacefully coexisting and collaborating side by side with the islamic religion which does not display chauvinistic attitudes towards african religions. Such a relationship between islam and african traditional religions falls therefore, under the religious dualistic ideology. In "Religious Dualism and the Problem of Dual Religious Identity", J. A. Seitz made the following comment:

Dualism is something used to describe the attachment to two discrete religious or cultural traditions. Dualism better describes the reality with which many people live than do more general terms like indigenization or acculturation and it resists an understanding that religious traditions simply blend together rather, they are segmented and retain elements of coherence even when held simultaneously (2015:49-50).

This quotation equips readers with the knowledge that religious dualism allows for the recognition that people may belong to two or more distinct religious traditions. More recently, J. A. Seitz adds that:

Dual religious belief has been used by theologians such as Paul Knitter and Rose Drew. Dualism affirms the 'both-ness' of holding to two traditions simultaneously. Essentially, dualism proposes a 'both/and' understanding, a type or personal or religious emulsion where two systems are mixed together but resist a full integration. For some scholars, this is fundamentally a positive thing since it allows for the integrity of the different systems. In others, it is seen as a type of failure to arrive at a reconciled identity.

J. A. Seitz (2015:49-50)

What is important to point out in this quotation is that religious dualism grants the individual the freedom to belong to different religious faiths while it guarantees the "integrity of different religious systems". This is an inclusivist approach of religion and it is replete throughout *Burning Grass* where the Fulani characters combine traditional african magic, spirituality and the islamic faith. Though it is seen by some theologians and critics as having a negative connotation, dualism in religion as portrayed in Ekwensi's novel favors peace, collaboration, mutual acceptance of religions and consequently, it becomes a guarantee for social sustainability. Explaining the concept of social sustainability, T. Klarin comments that: "*social sustainability* strives to ensure human rights and equality, preservation of cultural identity, respect for cultural diversity, race and religion" (2018:68). And for A. Pewissi, "Sustainability is steadiness, perpetuation of progress or at least the maintenance of success" (2017:196).

In his "Islam and Traditions in Africa: Friends or Foes ? ", J. B. Yusuf (2013), arrives at the conclusion that islam and african traditions have been friends and not foes. Some scholars among whom J.S. Trimmingham (2013) argues that islam has tolerated african traditions more than christianity. Moreover, J. B. Yusuf opines that : "While in some continents, the islamic presence has caused some discomfort and even 'clash of civilizations', the islamic presence in Africa, especially, in its encounter with some african traditions and cultures, has been relatively calm" (2013:paragr. 1). Clearly then, islam coexists and better collaborates with african religious practices. Discussing african traditionalism in *Burning Grass*, M. Laurence described *Burning Grass* as containing "...many of the qualities of the traditional african tales, magical occurrences, mysterious and seductive women, acts of phenomenal heroism, swift-paced adventure" (1968:158). In the view of O. Taiwo: "In *Burning Grass* he [Cyprian Ekwensi] deals with what might be called an anthropological theme, the way of life of the cow herdsmen in Northern Nigeria" (1967:55) . It becomes therefore interesting to study the portrayed Fulani's religious ways of life to work out traditionalism, magic and spirituality usage side by side with islamic practices which is reminiscent of the

dualistic ideology. While in “Thematic Analysis and Significance of the Cyprian Ekwensi’s Novel *Burning Grass*”, U. M. Dognon-Daji (2016: 10388) sets out, on the one hand to “show that Ekwensi’s novel focuses on the Fulani nomadic life” (2016:10388) and on the other to highlight “Fulani’s real life scenario, showing their struggles, rivalries, conflicts, challenges, cultures, religion and their occupation” (2016:10388); my research essay reads tradition in the Fulani’s islamic practices and more importantly reveals how a proper use of magic in the form of talisman or gri-gri as depicted in the novel goes beyond a mere narative style to free Mai Sunsaye from his wandering sickness. This lays bare how africans should make use of magic to contribute to african development. This article shows how, in *Burning Grass*, the islamic religion peacefully coexists with the Fulani’s traditional african values, magic and spirituality in accordance with the religious dualistic ideology. Besides, the study demonstrates that religious dualism avoids religious discords and promotes social sustainability. To achieve the purpose of this work, I am particularly interested in the reader-oriented theory. This theory sustains that in a text, the reader and the text share a transactional experience (Bresler, 2011:72). This study is based on textual analysis of the selected novel. The article is structured around two major sections. The first section discusses the coexistence of african traditionalism and islamic practices in the Fulani of *Burning Grass*. It is the task of the second section to examine the use of magic and spirituality side by side with the islamic religion in *Burning Grass*.

### **I. Coexistence of African Traditionalism and Islamic Practices in the Fulani of *Burning Grass***

Any reader of *Burning Grass* from a religious perspective perceives religious dualism through a peaceful coexistence between african traditionalism and the islamic religion through the Fulani’s daily life and religious practices. These issues are clearly perceptible in the portrayal of some shared values between african traditions and islam such as polygamy, the use of traditional medicine, using nature elements to cure diseases and most importantly the use of african spirituality and magic to enable individuals make ends meet. What is amazingly powerful and attractive in the novel is the craft with which the author grants his characters a freedom and an ease to combine and bring side by side african religion and islamic religion any time and anyhow they wish provided that it enables them achieve something valuable for themselves and for others. Abundant evidence abounds that the novel mostly portrays african values as they agree with islamic ones. Polygamy is illustrative for this purpose. The perception of polygamy in the islamic religion fits african traditional context, since it is not seen as a serious marital problem. Children constitute a major african value exactly the way it is in islamic religion through the policy of polygamy: “It was always Rikku’s mother. She was his only wife though under Muslim law he could have had three others beside her” (*Burning Grass*, 1962:4). Clearly then, aspects of traditional african practices in the institution of marriage as A. Rich (1995) would call it are similar with “Muslim law”. This rapproches both religious belief systems and chances are they can safely coexist and collaborate for an african social sustainability.

The traditional african society is basically that which values children as a major accomplishment an individual should be proud of. It goes without saying that having many fertile wives predisposes one to having as many children as he/she would want. What attracts the readers’ attention is the way the islamic religion

carefully sets things from childhood in both male and female islamic education to teach them that polygamy is not a social problem and he who ventures into it should have appropriate means to face its demands of non-discrimination among wives. It is no wonder polygamy issues featured prominently in the novel under consideration for readers to see for themselves how close islamic religion and african traditional religions are.

Apart from polygamy, the author portrays many traditional practices as they coexist with the islamic religion. U. Abdurrahman (1988), in his “Cyprian Ekwensi’s *Burning Grass: A Critical Assessment*” reveals that even though converted to islam, the Fulani portrayed in *Burning Grass* still retain certain pre-islamic customs, freely mixing elements of african traditions and islam. This sounds as a support to my standpoint that african traditionalism freely permeates islamic practices and therefore, this makes of islam a religion closer to african realities than any other imported religion. Such systems of coexistence among african tradition and imported religions is very important for a better african religious development. The observation made by U. Abdurrahman in his previously paraphrased view reads throughout the novel under study. The reader sees that the author has granted an amount of freedom to Fulani characters to embrace islam and traditionalism. This implicitly implies that there should be collaboration rather than exclusion between religions. It is therefore secured to say that most islamic practices better fits african realities since african traditions, institutions, religious customs and ways of life are recognized and preserved by the Fulani islamic group.

*Sharro* for example is a rite or ceremony in the Fulani society where two rivals will test their manhood so as to know who is strong enough to win a hand of a bride. It is a game of pride among the Fulani people. That is why Ekwensi while portraying the above culture in the novel sums up as follows: “It was the *sharro*, the test of young manhood a Fulani youth who had not taken flogging at the *sharro* would never find a maiden to marry him” (*Burning Grass*, 1962:65). It is quite clear from this passage that strength and courage are central to the Fulani culture and determine who is ready to take a wife he loves and who is not. In respect of the game and how it is performed, the narrator comments as follows:

As ice he stood with feet astride hand interlaced above his head motionless he did not even budge one inch when his opponent began to circle round him with long whip. The leather-hide or koboko looking for a tender spot on which to cut him. There was plenty of exposed skin above the waist but from the waist down the challenger was heavily girded in leader cloth.

*Burning Grass* (1962:66)

Commenting the above extract, U M. Dognon-Daji has it that : “This quotation also mirrors the greatness, strong heartedness and value of the Fulani youth and their women, how well-built they stand, how full of courage they are and how ready they appear for the test of their manhood through the game of *Sharro*” (2016:10389). Explaining the *sharro* tradition, U. Abdurrahman opines that:

This is a rite of passage from childhood to adulthood. It has both physical and spiritual dimensions. It is a time when worldly wisdom and social and religious obligations are entrusted to the initiates. *Sharro* tests both the physical and mental endurance of the initiate. There is no room for laxity or an open display of emotions. Any youth who runs away because of either fear or pain, brings

disgrace upon himself and his family...When Jalla runs away from the ring he is bitterly rebuked by his father. He is called, among other things a "coward" whose action brings shame to the whole family. By allowing himself to be defeated, Jalla willfully violates sacred social values such as patience, bravery and pride, the true foundations of the cattle Fulani's culture

U. Abdurrahman (1988:paragr.23)

This quotation is powerfully telling of the centrality of the *sharro* ceremony in the life of the islamic Fulani. Seen the implications of that tradition for young men and their parents, Mai Sunsaye, a well-known muslim and traditionalist, sees to it that his son Jalla attends the *sharro* ceremony even though he has been defeated. What retains one's attention is the freedom and blessings Jalla enjoys from his muslim parents to participate into a traditional ceremony. This implies that in the fictitious world portrayed in *Burning Grass*, characters are allowed to practice both traditional and islamic prescriptions. Some readers may read shame in Jalla's defeat but it appears to be a narrative element in Ekwensi's hand to exhibit the joy and pride of the Fulani to attend their traditional ceremonies since Jalla's defeat does not prevent him from remaining "...the old man's [Mai Sunsaye] greatest pride" (*Burning Grass*, 1962:117) and consequently "...that defeat at the *sharro* must be turned into victory some day" (*Burning Grass*,1962:117). This proves the portrayal of religious dualism throughout the novel. It is, therefore, more accurate to say that Ekwensi depicts such a scene to let readers know how the Fulani embrace both their african traditions and islamic norms. Does therefore not the author calling Africans to make different religions and traditions peacefully coexist for a social sustainability? Furthermore, U. Abdurrahman adds that:

By reflecting upon these traditional beliefs and heroic qualities of the cattle Fulani, Ekwensi makes the reader more familiar with the Fulani people and culture. Through fictional characters, Ekwensi is able to project realistic social situations. Through a single family, a whole ethnic group is studied and through this group the entire society is reflected. This is the essence of the literature of realism

U. Abdurrahman (1988:paragr.24)

From Abdurrahman's view, Ekwensi deals with a realistic depiction of the Fulani and their culture. Through Mai Sunsaye's family, the reader gets to know about the whole Fulani ethnic group and their religions. As for A. Kirk-Greene: "The ceremony of *sharro* is the trial whereby a Fulani boy in his late teens proves that he is now worthy to be looked on by the menfolk of his clan as one of themselves. It marks the beginning of manhood, the pulling away of the name boy" (1959:26). The *sharro* tradition is central to Fulani's culture and muslim parents see to it that their children are fully involved in such a traditional ceremony. This is reminiscent of religious dualism. In such circumstances of religious understanding and coexistence, social sustainability is guaranteed. The fact of the matter is that, nowhere in *Burning Grass* is the reader introduced to religion-based hatred, discrimination or chauvinism. Therefore, religious dualism exhibited through characters' life stories preserves individuals' cultural and religious identities. In exhibiting these previously discussed scenes, Cyprian Ekwensi pictures the tradition of *sharro* as it is performed by the Fulani even though they are well-known in the novel as Muslims. What attracts readers' attention is the combination of traditional and islamic practices by the Fulani in the novel. They are muslims but, they remain closely attached to their

traditions as is evidenced through the *sharro* ceremony which is highly regarded among the Fulani. M. Bovin (2001), as quoted by U. M. Dognon-Daji added that “by the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the Fula people across West Africa were among the first ethnic groups to embrace islam, were often leaders of those forces which spread islam, and have been traditionally proud of the urban, literate, and pious life with which this has been related” (2016:10390). The above quotation informs readers that being “forces which spread islam” does not prevent the Fulani from performing their traditional ceremonies in the likes of the *sharro* dance. Therefore, facts speak for themselves that the Fulani characters are endowed with a freedom and ease to freely move from tradition to islam. This shows how tradition and islam can peacefully coexist to save Africa and africans from religion-based clashes and misunderstandings. These episodes forcefully attract he who reads *Burning Grass* from a religious dualistic perspective. The narrator of *Burning Grass* goes further to introduce readers to the use of traditional medicine along with nature elements to cure diseases. This is a traditional practice which intrudes the islamic Fulani’s daily life. Scenes are legion in the novel which describe how characters heavily rely on the traditional medicine regardless of their muslim faith. One major episode through which medicinal herbs are used is when Mai Sunsaye was ill. Let’s read the following passage to be fully aware:

Early on the night of Rikku’s departure, Sunsaye called him and told him he was feeling a queerness. By late night he was boiling hot and delirious. Now they saw that the old man had exhausted himself. He had under-estimated the strenuousness of his lone wandering over the veld. Rikku and Shaitu, with the aid of all the best herbs they knew, doctored him. It was to no avail. ‘On the day of death there is no medicine’, Sunsaye told them, smiling. It was the third day of his illness and they had battled bravely with death.

*Burning Grass* (1962:118)

By the time we flip through the last pages of *Burning Grass*, we are apprised that Rikku and Shaitu make use of the traditional means to save their father from death. The use of the “best herbs they knew” indicates their attachment to nature elements to save those who are sick. What is more, they do this with a certain pride and do not under-estimate traditional medicine. They should have sent their father to an imam for prayer, but the author sees to it that they resort to traditional medicine in order to tell readers how central tradition is in the islamic Fulani’s life. Moreover, traditional medicine has been given to Mai Sunsaye by Fatimeh to help him cure of the wandering disease. She gives him some magic portion to cure him of the *Sokugo*. It is therefore obvious that Ekwensi gets tradition and islam peacefully coexist in his *Burning Grass*.

## **2.The Use of Magic and Spirituality Side by Side with the Islamic Religion in *Burning Grass***

This second section maps and examines how african spirituality and magic are highly regarded and used by the islamic Fulani of *Burning Grass*. Though being essentially muslims and using the Koran and islamic religion, the fictitious muslims of Ekwensi’s novel under study resort abundantly to magic and spirituality on a daily basis. It becomes interesting to investigate how the islamic Fulani make use, side by side, of the Koran (islamic religion) and the traditional magic and spirituality to make

ends meet. In his novel, *Burning Grass*, Cyprian Ekwensi deals with the way of life of the cow herdsman in Northern Nigeria. According to the narrator:

Mai Sunsaye sat outside the hut, reading under the dorowa tree. He was much versed in the Koran, and he read and wrote Arabic with a fluency not unusual among the high priests of the wandering Fulani. He made charms and amulets, he doctored the sick, he was a sage highly respected in the village of Dokan Toro. From far and near, his clients brought him their wounds of body and soul.

*Burning Grass* (1962: 9)

This passage clearly demonstrates that the islamist Fulani pictured in the novel are under different influences such as islam and animism, priesthood and magic. The extract obviously shows how traditional magic and spirituality stand side by side with islamic religion among the Fulani through Mai Sunsaye, a famous medicine man, and other characters. The author gets Mai Sunsaye use both the Koran and his traditional magic to exhibit the possibility for coexistence and collaboration between different religions for the sake of peace for the individual. In "Three Weeks Among the Fulani", C. Ekwensi notes: "One of the first things that struck me was the atmosphere of magic and superstition which dominated their every thought and action" (1960:125). As for U. Abdurrahman, "Magic and superstition clearly dominate the lives of the characters in the novel. Even the plot of the novel is built around the superstitious belief in the affliction called *sukugo*, as it is believed that magic is responsible for Mai Sunsaye's case of this wandering disease" (1988:paragr.7). It is mostly through the characterisation of Mai Sunsaye and his family that the reader gets to know about the use of magic and spirituality in the novel. By the time readers go through the first pages of *Burning Grass*, they are made to notice magic and spirituality in Shehu and Mai Sunsaye's conflict over Fatimeh. The conflict is made clear when Shehu's servant warns Mai Sunsaye that: "As long as you keep Fatimeh with you, you shall have no respite! Shehu will persue you and kill you one by one. He never forgives" (*Burning Grass*,1962:3). Mai Sunsaye laughs at that threat from Shehu introduced to the reader as "the killer" (*Burning Grass*, 1962:2). In discussing magic, spirituality and superstition in *Burning Grass*, Mai Sunsaye's wandering sickness becomes central for the reader to actually grasp the complexity of african magic and spirituality as it coexists with islamic practices to achieve individuals' goals. Mystery and magic becomes therefore important elements to explore. While U. Abdurrahman argues that "The arrival of Fatimeh signals the deterioration of relationships within Mai Sunsaye's fairly stable family because Fatimeh's presence tragically leads to the family's disintegration" (1988:paragr.9), I rather see Fatimeh as a narrative element through which Ekwensi provides readers with interesting conflicts and plot development in *Burning Grass*. She is the one through which the reader reads the depiction of spirituality and magic in the novel because it is to save her from her master Shehu that Mai Sunsaye gets into many conflicts leading him into a wandering disease which is much expressive and illustrative of how spirituality functions in the novel. Most definitely, readers may safely arrive at the conclusion that Fatimeh has both deteriorated Sunsaye's family and has facilitated the introduction of magic through charms, talisman, amulets in Ekwensi's novel *Burning Grass*. What is more, it is the struggle for Fatimeh that precipitates the major conflict in Sunsaye's family. What is particularly interesting is how the author portrays religious dualism in the nomadic Fulani. Though muslims,

they stick to their traditional spirituality to solve and save some situations. This makes islam closer to african values than any other imported religion. The strategy of association used by Ekwensi consists into making stand side by side traditional religion and islamic religion. About Sunsaye's wandering sickness, M. Dogon-Daji comments:

Mysteriously, one day, *Mai Sunsaye* was found to be absent from the family because he promised to pursue and find out Fatimeh for Rikku. On the other hand, *Mai Sunsaye* had a political conflict with *Ardo*. *Ardo* afflicted *Mai Sunsaye* with a wondering disease called *Sukugo*. Under the effect of the disease, *Mai Sunsaye* continues to follow a flying dove which was carrying a tablet (*Laya*) under the effect of which he continued to wander endlessly in the vast forest of the Sahel savannah of northern Nigeria.

M. Dogon-Daji (2016:10392)

To fully understand magic and spirituality in *Burning Grass*, the mysterious wandering sickness from which *Mai Sunsaye* suffers becomes a relevant narrative element which needs a special attention. It is relevant to reiterate that:

Mystery is present throughout many forms: the wandering sickness, *Sukugo*; the dove that *Mai Sunsaye* follows aimlessly; *Baba*, the old man of the forest; the mysterious cattlemans; and the mystery of *Fatimeh* and her jungle abode. These mysterious elements sustain the suspense of the story...The affliction of *Mai Sunsaye* by the dreaded disease. *Sukugo*, appears mysterious. *Mai Sunsaye* follows the dove wherever it goes. He has "no desire to go back. Only forward. [...] Where does the bird come from? Who sends it? There is wide speculation that it has been sent by *Mai Sunsaye's* sworn enemy, *Ardo* but nobody is really certain [...]

Abdurrahman (1988:paragr.16, 17, 24)

Readers are informed that *Ardo* casts a spell on *Mai Sunsaye* with *sokugo* disease by the aid of a talisman bound to the leg of a flying dove. The curse, known as the *sokugo* or the "wandering sickness" is a magic charm. The coming passage is powerfully insightful:

If only *Mai Sunsaye* had at that moment remembered the *sokugo*, that charm of the Fulani cattlemen; a magic that turned studious men into wanderers, that led husbands to desert their wives, Chiefs their people and sane men their reason, *Sunsaye* would have refused to pursue the dove any further. Instead, all he could feel now was an exhilaration of the spirit that gave a strange buoyancy to his whole bearing. He felt he could easily grow wings and overtake the dove.

*Burning Grass* (1962: 10)

In *Burning Brass*, magic and spirituality are shown in the case of *Mai Sunsaye's* predicament after being cursed with the wandering sickness by sending a bird to him, which made him wander around. The purpose of the *sokugo* is to make him wander without purpose or destination to the world's end. What strikes us in this passage is how magical and spiritual practices are portrayed for readers to see how far the *sokugo* magic charm can metamorphose a situation or an individual. The abundant use of charm and magic throughout the novel by the Fulani who at the same time believe in the islamic religion does not escape readers' attention in that

it reveals the combination of african religious practices and the islamic faith by the fictitious Fulani of *Burning Grass*. Equally significant is the picture the reader sees on page eleven (11) of *Burning Grass*. A picture showing Mai Sunsaye persuing a dove and most importantly he wears a charm in the form of amulets around his neck. U. Abdurrahman gives a detailed account of Mai Sunsaye's endless wandering when he opines that:

The hero's journey also contains elements of the fantastic because throughout his wanderings he is conscious of neither his direction nor the physical world around him. Everything appears like a dream. In the course of his wandering, he encounters many strange things. First. He meets a strange old man called Baba, who lives alone in a village deserted because of the tsetse fly invasion. Why does Baba live alone? Nobody really knows the reason except that, as he explains the city is 'too clean' for him. There is also the story of the mysterious woman 'who wandered about the savannah always dressed in white'. One might ask who is this woman? Is this woman in white the same as Fatimeh? The object of Sunsaye's search? Ekwensi is here introducing oral traditional elements to make his fictional account more interesting. When Mai Sunsaye meets a woman living alone in the forest with her twins and cattle it takes him quite a while to realize that the woman is Fatimeh. His mind suddenly flashes back to the woman in white of the legend.

Abdurrahman (1988:paragr. 18, 26)

What can be deduced from the above passage is that apart from giving a detailed report about Mai Sunsaye's wandering, Abdurrahman goes further to tell the relevance of the introduction of oral traditional elements in Ekwensi's fiction. Without rejecting the critic's standpoint it can also be said that the introduction of oral traditional elements in the life of the islamic Fulani stands for ways and means to portray religious dualism through the coexistence of islam and tradition. It is therefore accurate to say that Mai Sunsaye becomes a narrative element in the hands of Cyprian Ekwensi to show how tradition and magic are openly and without any restriction used by islamic Fulani. In fact, Mai Sunsaye reads the Koran as a muslim and makes charms to cure people in need of his services. The combination of charm and Koran are extremely telling about Ekwensi's strategy of making coexist tradition and islam as an alternative to insure african development through social sustainability. Religion is part and parcel of the ingredient that should come together in african development and Ekwensi sees to it to create a peaceful coexistence between islam and african traditional and magic practices that are related to african spirituality. The use of magic and spirituality is best exhibited in the novel through the character of Mai Sunsaye at two levels. First, the reader is informed that he is a manufacturer of charms, amulets, etc (*Burning Grass*,1962:9). Next, it is through his characterisation that the reader gets to know the whole spirituality described through the *sokugo* charm ; a talisman which takes hold of Mai Sunsaye's life story in the novel under study. Clearly then, though a custodian of traditional authority in *Burning Grass*, Mai Sunsaye practices islam as well. A combination of spiritual beliefs that fits african context where imported religions and indigenious traditional religions have to coexist. Facts speak for themselves that Sunsaye believes in and worships Allah. For this purpose, readers are informed that: "By the help of Allah, if Fatimeh is still breathing in this world of ours, I will find her and bring her to you" (*Burning Grass*, 1962:8). In the novel, numerous references are made to Allah. This indicates that Ekwensi's characters are fictitious muslims. What is interesting is that this does not

distach them from their african traditional magic and spirituality. All members of Mai Sunsaye's family believe that there are unnatural causes for his wandering. It is believed that his wandering disease, *sokugo*, is caused by an evil spell cast on him by his enemy and defeated rival, Ardo. U. Abdurrahman thinks that:

Mai Sunsaye's lack of consciousness of his affliction is significant in the development of the plot. This ignorance helps to sustain the flow of events. When Mai Sunsaye becomes fully aware of his plight, the spell is automatically broken and he is cured. This occurs only toward the end of the story, when the plot and themes are fully developed. His ignorance is a technical device to maintain the suspense of the novel: every reader is interested in knowing the outcome of the protagonist's illness.

Abdurrahman (1988:paragr. 12)

The above passage surely equips the reader with the knowledge that magic and spirituality exhibited through the *sokugo* sickness are central to plot and character development in the novel. They become narrative styles through which the author keeps suspenses and thus pushes readers to know the outcome of Mai Sunsaye's wandering sickness. As the story goes on, the narrator informs readers that:

Shaitu's life, like that of the any other cattle Fulani, was ruled by beliefs for which she could find no logical explanation. She accepted happenings but associated them with inanimate objects and peculiar circumstances. A talisman could bring luck...A man may strike his enemy down by calling his name aloud and firing a needle into the sky. A man could send his enemy wandering to his death by striking him with the *sokugo*, the wandering charm. This was what she concluded had been done to her husband. Her belief in omens and portents was steadfast, and Leibe's description tallied with the manner of the black magicians among the cattle Fulani. Leibe told how Ardo men let out a dove with a talisman tied to its foot, how the dove flew into a tree with Sunsaye following after it.

*Burning Grass* (1962:12-13)

This expert reveals Shaitu, Mai Sunsaye's wife, as a strong believer in charm, talisman, magic and spirituality. Like most Fulani characters, she devotes special attention to the traditional faith though she finds no concrete explanation to these beliefs. At list, we are delighted to know that a talisman brings luck. Traditional medicine and magic can be therefore used for protective purposes. What is important is that those who believe in these forces or possess their power must use them at the right time. This is particularly telling about the good aspects of traditional practices that need to stand side by side with islamic good practices to contribute to the development of the african continent.

Apart from the magic and spirituality portrayed through the *sokugo* talisman, Ekwensi pictures the *Baduhu* charm to capture readers' attention about the place of tradition in the islamic fulani's life. This charm and its usage bring together tradition and islam in the Fulani's ways of life who freely draw from both religious practices to solve their daily issues. The *baduhu* charm is used more than once in the novel by characters who at the same time belief in islam. There is more than ample evidence that magic and spirituality transpire in the *sharro* during which people use the *Baduhu* traditional medicine to defeat their opponents. The centrality of the *baduhu* magic preparation is emphasised by E. Emenyonu as follows: "one does

not go to *sharro* without adequate preparation" (1974:95). Consequently, Jalla is defeated in a *sharro* dance because he has refused to make use of *baduhu* charm to protect himself. He could easily have applied this supernatural power in the form of a charm to protect his body and honor the Sunsaye's family. It appears from such episodes that he who refuses to use the traditional charm is mostly doomed to failure. Put the other way round, the individual in the fictitious Fulani community of *Burning Grass* is forced to value traditional practices such as talisman, magic and spirituality to guarantee success. Jalla violates that rule and his failure during the *sharro* ceremony is the immediate consequence. As a result, a resolution is taken to avoid defeat during the next *sharro* ceremony. For this purpose, the narrator says: "As soon as he was a bit more settled he would prepare and send to Jalla a bundle of magic whips which he must use at the next *sharro* meet. True, he could wish for no more beautiful bride than Fiddiggo, but the Sunsaye name must be retrieved" (*Burning Grass*, 1962:117). In his "Three Weeks among the Fulani", C. Ekwensi (1960) remarks that the use of these magical powers whether for positive or negative purposes, is typical of the belief systems of the cattle Fulani. To borrow Ekwensi's words, the Fulani seem helpless in the face of nature and talisman. Clearly then, african magic and spirituality coexist side by side with islamic beliefs in Fulani's beliefs systems and ways of life. They do not reject their african tradition and its practices for the sake of the imported islamic faith. By getting his characters to combine both african and islamic religious practices, Ekwensi implicitly shows the way africans should cope, through religious dualism, with imported religions for a social sustainability. Elsewhere in the novel, Mai Sunsaye uses magic to regain his chieftaincy. A position he lost as a result of his wandering disease. Ardo must be compelled to give him back his position as the chief of Dokan Toro. Here again, Magic has proved useful for Sunsaye to fulfill his ambition. According to the narrator:

But he has lost his position among the people of Dokan Toro and to return to them now he must wrest from Ardo his chieftaincy. He and his family had taken great care not to set up camp near the village. One night Sunsaye and Rikku crept to the door of Ardo's hut. The dogs could not bark for their mouths were tied with magic meat. They woke Ardo up and confronted him with a choice between instant death and instant flight. In his scanty clothes, Ardo ran out of the village. He had not gone far when the flames began to burst out in each hut in turn.

*Burning Grass* (1962: 118)

This scene depicts the end of Ardo's tyrannical reign and shows readers how Sunsaye regains his position. In the process, magic and spirituality have been once more useful since "the dogs could not bark for their mouths were tied with magic meat" and Ardo in response made flames "burst out in each hut in turn". The use of african magic and spirituality side by side with the islamic religion is replete in *Burning Grass* for readers to see how central tradition is in Fulani's ways of life. Through such scenes, readers see the islamic Fulani as a role model of religious dualism that guarantees social sustainability which is central for a sustainable development of the African continent.

### Conclusion

It has been the task of this article to examine how, in *Burning Grass*, the islamic religion peacefully coexists with the Fulani's traditional african values, magic and

spirituality in accordance with the religious dualistic ideology. In the process, religious dualism is revealed to promote social sustainability which constitutes one of the pillars of the sustainable development. The first section has discussed the religious dualism in *Burning Grass* through the coexistence of african traditionalism and islamic practices in Fulani's ways of life. This section mainly discovered that Ekwensi grants his characters a freedom and an ease to combine african religion and islamic religion any time and anyhow they wish. As a result, the african traditionalism permeates the islamic Fulani's ways of life who freely move from traditional ceremonies like the *sharro* dance to their muslim faith. The second section, has dealt with the use of magic and spirituality side by side with the islamic religion in *Burning Grass*. Here, it has been found that being essentially muslims and using the Koran along with the islamic religion does not prevent the fictitious Fulani of Ekwensi's novel to abundantly resort to african traditional magic and spirituality on a daily basis. Most definitely, this study comes up with the result that the fictitious Fulani depicted in *Burning Grass* are a role model of religious dualism to be followed by africans to better cope with african religions and imported religions for a social sustainability. It has been revealed that though mostly muslims, the fictitious Fulani highly regard their traditions and cultures and succeed in making both religions coexist. In this logic, this study has discovered that the islamic religion collaborates with african values and beliefs and fits therefore the african context through the policy of association which transpires in the way Ekwensi's characters make coexist african and islamic practices. Last of all, it has been found that religious dualism preserves cultural identity and religious diversity to promote social sustainability. It is my hope that this study inspires a peacefull collaboration of different religions to participate in Africa and the world's development. Africa is a highly religious and spiritual continent. It is therefore important to see to it that its spirituality and magic serve for development goals and individual achievement as is the case in *Burning Grass*. It will be of interest to any student or scholar of religion concerned with the dynamics of culture contact and change.

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