Secret self-knowledge: Considering sex magick as post-theistic spirituality in Eastern, Western, and African esotericism

By

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY (Ph.D.)

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August 2024

Plagiarism Declaration

I, Tristán Kapp, student number **u16079818** hereby declare that this thesis, "*Secret self-knowledge: considering sex magick as post-theistic spirituality in Eastern, Western and African esotericism,*" is submitted in accordance with the requirements for the *Philosophiae Doctor* (Ph.D.) degree at the University of Pretoria, is my own original work and has not previously been submitted to any other institution of higher learning. All sources cited or quoted in this research paper are indicated and acknowledged along with a comprehensive list of references.

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Tristán Kapp

29 August 2024

Thesis Acknowledgements and Dedication (in 666 Words)

One of my biggest goals, since placing my feet on the UP campus, was to obtain my Doctorate before the age of 30. Never in my wildest dreams did I think I would achieve such a feat. But I could not have done this alone. Therefore, I would like to dedicate this thesis to everyone who made this journey possible! I am incredibly grateful for the patience and guidance of my supervisor, prof. Jaco Beyers, without whose kindness, open-mindedness, and dedicated expertise this entire thesis would not have been possible. The University of Pretoria, for their financial support in awarding me a Doctoral research bursary, without which a PhD would not have been possible. My psychiatrist, Dr. Melinda Lombard, who helped me with treatment for my *ADHD*, depression, and anxiety, without which, I could not have completed this mountainous task.

Additionally, I dedicate this thesis to my late grandmother, Marie-Louise Thomas (*1934–2022*), who would have loved to see me graduate but unfortunately passed in the 2nd year of my PhD studies. As well as to my sister and my mother, Petrea, who sustained me, fed me, clothed me, chased me out of bed, and provided me with the resources necessary to complete my thesis without asking for anything in return. My late cat, Yasmin, who had been with me since I finished matriculation, she passed away in my first year of my PhD. My friends, Liezel and Nadia for their unwavering support. To Lilith and Renesmé, my other two cats, for keeping me company with their antics and shenanigans during my thesis. Furthermore, I owe a debt of gratitude to my dad, Kobus, who not only accommodated me during my conferences in Cape Town but also provided emotional support throughout my PhD each time I was on the verge of quitting. I am also deeply indebted to the patience and dedication of my better half, Chané, for her unwavering love and support: consistently reminding me about

Abstract and Summary

Since Antoine Faivre's emergence and establishment of "Western esotericism" in the late twentieth century, the discourse of globalising esotericism (beyond the West) has been fraught with controversy. As there are several polemical conversations about how such an effort should manifest itself in esoteric scholarship. This comparative, descriptive, and religionist approach to esotericism explores the intricate relationship between sexuality and spirituality by understanding the intersections of these aspects as manifested in Western, Eastern, and African esoteric currents, from Aleister Crowley's magia sexualis to Marie Laveau (The Widow Paris)'s "Gris-Gris". Firstly, this is achieved by bringing said geographical regions into dialogue with one another, determining how esotericism fits into the overall trajectory of the origins of religion. Secondly, delving into the polemics and history of sexuality: from Foucault to Freud. Thirdly, positioning an esoteric spirituality in the digital era. Consequently, through identifying currents in the West, East, and Africa: including Paganism, Thelema, Satanism, New Age, and Theosophy in the West and Egyptian Paganism, Hinduism, and Buddhism in the East, in addition to African Traditional Religion (ATR), Sufi Islam, and Afro-American "Conjure" in Africa. This study, when intersected with philosophical conceptualisations of the self, contributes to a novel understanding of sexuality as sacred post-theistic (self-) spirituality, with esotericism serving as the foundation for such an approach.

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CHAPTER 1

Esoteric Religion, Sexuality And Spirituality: Introducing The Whats, Whys, Hows, And Wheres

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 Background And Motivation

Since the 14th century, spirituality and sexuality have been regarded as sensitive topics due to their deeply personal and private nature. Additionally, there has been an ongoing conflict between religious and dogmatic authorities regarding the nature, practice, and origin of these aspects (Ingram 2017:390; Tukker 2013:1-7). This study proposes that the act of monopolising something typically hinders and conceals the foundation, thus facilitating a thoughtful discussion regarding our diverse interpretations of intricate narratives. This is especially applicable to spirituality and sexuality, as they are personal aspects that we encounter on a daily basis in contemporary society (Wood 2013:155). Esotericism encompasses the exploration of concealed or confidential knowledge pertaining to the internal or spiritual awareness, approached from mystical, speculative, and transpersonal viewpoints of faith (Masaeli 2017:1-4).

This thesis aims to investigate the historical progression and evolution of perspectives and practices surrounding sex magick in esotericism. It seeks to comprehend the distinct applications of "secret self-knowledge" in relation to sexual practices within various cultural and religious contexts. The study will focus on narratives within Western esoteric traditions such as Theosophy, Occultism, and Satanism, as well as Eastern traditions like Hinduism, Buddhism, and Pharaonic Egyptian Paganism, and African traditions including

Hoodoo/Voodoo, Sufi Islam, and African Traditional Religion. This study suggests that both individuals and society as a whole play a role in enhancing our comprehension of the connection between sexuality and self in esotericism. Additionally, it aims to explore the interplay between spirituality and sexuality as an inseparable phenomenon, and to extract valuable insights from these discussions for the development of a modern, non-theistic approach to sexual narratives. The main objective of this work is to address the existing gaps in research by conducting a comprehensive and comparative study of esoteric religions in Western, Eastern, and African regions. Moreover, the recognition of "sex magic" in the mentioned esoteric religious practices is seen as a means to gain self-awareness and is therefore considered as inherent illustrations of a post-theistic, anthropocentric spirituality. These practices offer valuable insights into modern sexual viewpoints.

The discursive interpolation of spirituality and sexuality has been discussed by Helminiak (1989), Johnston & Longhurst (2010), Tukker (2013), Horn *et al.* (2015), Erasmus & Lombard (2017). While esotericism in English-speaking scholarship is largely discussed exclusively in relation to predominantly Western paradigms, see De Michelis (2005), Hanegraaff & Kripal (2008), Urban (2006), Bogdan & Starr (2012), Urban (2016), Hedenborg- White (2020) and many more (see pp. 23-39 of this document) with significantly less attention to Eastern esotericism, with the exception of Watts (1991), Irwin (2001), Strube (2020), Putzu (2021), *et al.* (see pp. 40-43 of this document) and even less attention to African esotericism and related traditions and practices, except vaguely in Njoku (1991), Vos (2002), Kleinhempel (2017), Anozie (2017), Podolecka (2019), *et alia* (see pp. 45-49 of this document). It is therefore emphasized that when discussing sexual practices within Western esotericism there is a more direct focus as opposed to Eastern and African esotericism.

The decision to undertake this study of spirituality and sexuality in the context of esotericism is motivated by the desire to explore comparatively unique examples of often stigmatized and ignored self-spiritual so-called "sex magick" - "magick" being a unique occult term, the coined by Crowley (1929:17-26) in relation to his esoteric philosophy (see Moore 2009:189-191) of Thelema, from the Greek θελημα "will", which, as explained by DuQuette, refers to any willed action as magick (e.g. walking the dog, brushing teeth, paying taxes, etc.) in contrast to unwanted (unmagical) actions, which are described as "habitual or reactive behaviour that overrides the momentum of one's life's focus" (DuQuette 1994:1 -2). According to Payne, the suffix "k" is largely unknown but may derive from the Greek μαγικη (*magike*) but was chosen specifically to mark it as an occult practice, in contrast to the modern definition of "magic" (Payne 2004:ii-iii), referred to as "the secret power of appearances to make impossible things happen by saying particular words or doing particular things" (Hornby 2010:894).

"Magick" is therefore better suited to this thesis' consideration of esoteric sexual practices and perspectives in the East (i.e., Hinduism, Buddhism, and Pharaonic Egyptian Paganism), the West (i.e., Satanism, Paganism, and the broader Occult philosophy), and Africa (i.e., Hoodoo/Voodoo, Islam, and African Traditionalism). This is therefore also seen as necessary to introduce a new way of perceiving sexuality and spirituality via a post-theistic approach to physicality (bodiliness). Furthermore, by deconstructing the history and development of specific esoteric sexual traditions and their spiritual applications in specific cultures (past and present), as well as by explaining their esoteric nature (i.e. why and how they are perceived as esoteric) in terms of the way, how they are esoterically perceived. This thesis will therefore attempt to explain how the aforementioned esoteric discourses each individually approach spirituality and sexuality, in relation to their understanding of sexuality and the body. In addition, such research will subsequently provide a rationale for how the above views and

applications in relation to the body relate to post-theistic contemporary narratives and attitudes, surrounding spirituality and sexuality. Conclusively, this study will also attempt to pave the way for a novel discourse on how sexuality practices in esotericism (sex magick), can be perceived and practiced as esoteric vehicle for self-knowledge. Thereby forming part of what can be considered a post-theistic spiritual practice, aimed towards unveiling secret knowledge within the self.

1.1.2 Problem Statement

In the reviewed academic conjecture on esotericism, it appears quite clearly as though esotericism is only ever discussed in its Western contexts (cf. pp. 4; 30-44 of this document). In light of this, it is argued that there is no unique paradigmatic distinction pertaining to West(ern), East(ern) and Africa(n) esoteric discourse. Furthermore, whilst the West enjoys considerable attention, practices in the East and Africa are seldomly explored, or given credit for their contributions to the esoteric discourse. Another issue is the notion that sexuality and spirituality are properties of "exotericism", meaning that knowledge about self-spirituality and sexuality is provided by an external (divine) reality (see Grekov 2020:5 cf. Musashi 2003:86). In the view of this thesis, this is unnecessary, and the primary view that this thesis posits is that self-knowledge ought rather to be obtained through harnessing the post-theistic nature of one's own esoteric-spiritual-sexuality, which retrospectively could be understood via the examples present in esoteric, religio-spiritual traditions.

1.1.3 The Purpose Of This Study

As previously stated, esoteric traditions in the East and Africa (approached for the purposes of this thesis as such based on geographical/cultural demarcations); aside from the West,

have not been thoroughly investigated or acknowledged, resulting in a negative perception due to the limited information about them. Hence, this thesis seeks to elucidate and furnish insights into the essence and significance of these customs in the pursuit of self-awareness. Sexuality practices, which are regarded as religious and spiritual discussions, are often vulnerable due to ongoing repression in various contexts. This repression is primarily caused by prevailing viewpoints rooted in exoteric asceticism found in religions such as Christianity and Islam (cf. Kirabaev & Christyakova 2020:3-8). This thesis offers suggestions on how esoteric practices, within their respective contexts, can enhance autonomy, freedom, and independence. It provides methods for achieving healing, enlightenment, and autonomy in the post-theistic spiritual sexual pursuit. These methods aim to separate from the monopolistic and dogmatic religious narratives that restrict the exploration of sexuality and embodiment as obstacles to spirituality (cf. Hartenstein 2015:459-460).

1.1.4 The Research Hypothesis

Esoteric traditions, along with their sexual approaches, provide novel ways of understanding the dynamics of the self and one's bodily relation to spirituality in connecting with oneself/partner(s) intimately. When comparatively studied, a comparative understanding of various esoteric wisdoms (beyond pure religionism) about embracing the body can be achieved. In addition, that as a definitive discourse, esotericism should not remain restricted to the Western hemisphere; as will be seen, its reach spans much wider into the Eastern and African hemispheres, as well. Therefore, this study avers; the studying of spiritual-sexual dynamics and practices in esotericism within the aforementioned relevant traditional paradigms (i.e. West, East, and Africa), contain valuable hidden ancient knowledge about the self, restricted by their respective cultures and/or marginalised by hegemonic cultures, for

centuries (see Stone 2018:8-24 cf. Hanegraaff 2019:146, 149-152; 2012:478-479) which can prove beneficial and enriching to contemporary post-theistic spiritual discourse.

1.1.5 Proposed Methodology

The methodology for this thesis will follow a broad and diverse qualitative, critical literature analysis research model (see Cresswell 2009:22,127-128), through using the works of Foucault (1978) to discuss the origins of sexuality finding its roots in Greece. The theoretical framing, towards the comparative study of religions for this thesis, will be undertaken not as theological endeavour (see Beyers 2017:1-3) but rather an endeavour regarded by scholars as a scientific one, in other words, the descriptive analysis of religion through examining it phenomenologically, historically, psychologically and sociologically (Wiebe 1984:419; Klippenstein 2014:62-64; Ranganathan 2018:1-4). Moreover, in connection to this, the dominant approaches within the prescribed various religious perspectives to sexuality will be illustrated as premises from which an understanding and definition will be outlined to denote spiritual sexuality as an anthropocentric phenomenon in which wisdom (about the self) could be obtained; thereby acknowledging esotericism as but one path out of many within the said religio-spiritual traditions. Furthermore, for clarity this thesis will differentiate between precepts like (anthropocentric) spirituality, religion and esotericism through illuminating the key definitions for each, towards explaining how they differ and/or complement one another.

Building on this, individual perspectives on esoteric paradigms from 1) the Eastern hemisphere, using the works of Liana Saif, Edward Said & Irwin (2001) 2) the Western hemisphere; Wouter J. Hanegraaff, Anton LaVey & Aleister Crowley, as well as pioneers of esoteric scholarship in 3) the African hemisphere such as Ulrich Kleinhempel end Cheryl

Stobie *et alia* will be broadly explored via a systematic approach, as seen in Versluis (2007) in his work "*Magic and Mysticism: An Introduction to Western Esoteric Traditions*" in accompaniment with a historical-critical approach, as exemplified in the work of Goodrick-Clarke (2008) "*The Western Esoteric Traditions: A Historical Introduction*", towards not only understanding the origins of esotericism in these geographical contexts, highlighting the influence of colonialism and Eurocentrism in contemporary approaches to the East and Africa.

This thesis will also explore the unique religio-spiritual approaches and practices regarding spiritual bodiliness, found within specifically minority traditions in the aforementioned geographical paradigms. Therefore, in the East – Hinduism, Pharaonic Egyptian Paganism, Buddhism, IZangoma, Conjure, and African Traditional Religion (ATR) will be explored comparatively, to create a multi-dimensional phenomenological analysis of the interpolation between sexuality, the body and spirituality. In order to indicate how these precepts are not mutually exclusive but a unit, which when harnessed work together to facilitate increased wisdom about oneself. Finally, this study will attempt to connect the esoteric endeavour of attaining self-knowledge through embracing bodiliness and sexuality as something that paves the way for discourse on post-theistic expressions of religion (see Urban 2006:18-20 cf. Dingemans 2017:1-2). In doing so, this thesis will aim to enhance the meaning, spirituality and sexuality of individuals in post-modern society who seek alternative forms of spiritual-sexual expressions which contain the holistic benefits of looking inwards and embracing oneself intimately in order to accept oneself fully.

1.2 Literature Review: Sexuality, Religion And Esotericism In West, East, And Africa

The following literature review gives priority to relevant, influential and authoritative extant research literature that illustrates the key-themes which are integral to indicating the research gap of this study. Compartmentalising the review thematically (namely eroticism, spirituality, religion and esotericism) in conjunction with specific geographical paradigms of East, West and Africa the below-listed contributions to academic discourse, respectively not only showcases the complex and multi-faceted natures of esotericism *vis-à-vis* religio-spiritual traditions, but also provides a somewhat comprehensive understanding of the diversity of scholarly research extant in their relative fields. Furthermore, the body of literature cited in each category, comparatively showcases the gap (need) for a balanced discourse: in other words, along with exploring prevailing researched paradigms (such as Western Esotericism), it is also important to give an equitable voice to neglected and often marginalised paradigms (such as Eastern- and African Esotericism). All the thematic and geographical frameworks illustrated are important to this study.

1.2.1 Origins Of Sexuality

Buffington, R. M., Luibhéid, E. & Guy, D. J. (eds.) 2014, *A Global History of Sexuality: The Modern Era*, Wiley-Blackwell, West Sussex.

Buffington, et alia provides a stimulating and thorough examination of the history of sexuality, covering the period from the late 18th century to the present. The researchers analyse the importance of sexuality in the everyday lives of individuals throughout the last two centuries and organise the content around four main themes: the formation of sexual identity, the regulation of sexuality through societal norms, the regulation of sexuality through institutions,

and the intersection of sexuality with globalisation. Analysed from a comparative and global perspective, the subject of the history of sexuality was examined. The analysis incorporated meticulously chosen case studies that illuminated more extensive themes. The examination also included input from eminent historians, sociologists, anthropologists, and experts in sexuality studies, promoting an interdisciplinary approach. In addition, significant theoretical concepts were presented in a manner that was both lucid and readily comprehensible. Buffington *et alia* thoroughly analyse the historical dimensions of sexuality, considering a comprehensive and worldwide perspective. The study incorporates comprehensive case studies that aptly exemplify noteworthy themes. The themes encompass interdisciplinary contributions from esteemed historians, sociologists, anthropologists, and scholars in sexual studies, accompanied by a lucid and comprehensible exposition of significant theoretical concepts.

Cornwall, A. & Jolly, S., 2006, 'Introduction: Sexuality Matters', *IDS Bulletin 37(5), 1-11.*

Sex and sexuality play a crucial role in the realm of human development. The purpose of this IDS Bulletin is to demonstrate the importance of sexuality. This IDS Bulletin showcases papers presented at the "Realising Sexual Rights" workshop, which took place at the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) from September 28th to the 30th of 2005. It also includes additional contributions. The text examines various perspectives on sexual rights, including their origins, promotion, and novel methods of implementation. IDS is organising and producing an IDS Bulletin on this subject for the inaugural time. The unique nature of the contributions in this IDS Bulletin aligns with the innovative content they offer.

Dabhoiwala, F. 2012, *"The Origins of Sex: A History of the First Sexual Revolution"*, Oxford University Press, New York.

The groundbreaking research conducted by Dabhoiwala, as presented in his influential work "The Origins of Sex," has significantly transformed our understanding of the development of sexuality in contemporary Western society. Dabhoiwala argues that throughout history, the church, state, and society have exercised stringent regulation over sexual activity, imposing harsh penalties for any sexual behaviour that takes place outside the institution of marriage. However, in the 1800s, a significant transformation occurred. Dabhoiwala examines the multiple factors that played a role in this notable transformation and its beginnings, drawing on a diverse range of sources including Canon Law, legal precedents, literary texts, and explicit material. He identifies a convergence of intellectual trends, religious and cultural shifts, and political and demographic factors that contributed to the emergence of the belief that sex was a private matter and that moral norms could not be imposed.

Dabhoiwala contends that the Enlightenment era exerted a substantial influence on the prevailing belief that men, as opposed to women, possessed a stronger propensity towards sexuality. The expansion of urban areas undermined the implementation of community-based moral regulation, while religious disputes reduced the authority of the church and the apprehension of divine punishment. In the 1700s, it became possible for a Church of Scotland leader to support the idea of complete sexual freedom for both men and women. Dabhoiwala argues that the substantial sexual revolution occurred prior to the cultural movement of the 1960s. He provides a compelling and distinctly original analysis of the origins of the Western world's relationship with sexuality.

Foucault, M. & Hurley, R. (transl.), 2012, "*The History of Sexuality: Volume 1 Introduction*", Vintage, New York.

In Volume 1, Foucault argues that the "repressive hypothesis," which posits that Western society repressed sexuality as a result of the emergence of capitalism and bourgeois society, is fundamentally flawed. He contends that, on the contrary, discussions on sexuality flourished during this period, as scholars extensively explored sexuality from a scientific perspective and promoted the practice of individuals openly admitting their sexual thoughts and behaviours. According to Foucault, the 18th and 19th centuries saw an increasing fascination with sexualities that deviated from the accepted norms of marriage, such as those involving children, the mentally ill, criminals, and homosexuals. During the 19th century, sexuality underwent examination and analysis through the means of confession and scientific inquiry. Foucault explores the importance of sexuality in ancient Greek and Roman civilisations in Volumes 2 and 3.

Michel Foucault's influential book, The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction, examines the ways in which Western societies have understood and regulated sexuality since the 18th century. Foucault's 1976 publication challenges the conventional notion that the modern era brought about a liberation of sexual discourse and behaviours. Instead, he suggests that sexuality experienced heightened regulation and surveillance, resulting in the emergence of new types of power and knowledge. Foucault presents the concept of "biopower," which refers to the way institutions and discourses shape and supervise populations through methods such as surveillance, categorisation, and standardisation. He examines the ways in which sexuality was employed in different domains, including medicine, psychiatry, and education, to mould and control societal standards and individual identities. Foucault's analysis challenges the credibility of the repressive hypothesis and posits that

sexuality has played a pivotal role in the exercise of power and the formation of identities in contemporary societies. His research has a lasting influence on discussions about sexuality, power relationships, and the formation of social standards in contemporary academia.

Foucault, M., 1990, *"The History of Sexuality, Volume 2: The Use of Pleasure"*, Vintage, New York.

Michel Foucault's book, The History of Sexuality, Volume 2: The Use of Pleasure, published in 1990 by Vintage Books, expands his exploration of how Western societies have understood and regulated sexuality. In this book, Foucault focusses on the ancient Greek and Roman civilisations, exploring their ideas and practices related to sexual pleasure. He presents a counterargument to the idea that there has been a continuous progression towards greater sexual repression over time. Instead, he proposes that different periods in history have given rise to distinct frameworks of understanding and patterns of behaviour related to sexuality.

Foucault examines the impact of ancient philosophical dialogues and moral frameworks on perceptions of sexual morality, desire, and satisfaction. Moreover, he explores the importance of practices like pederasty and self-cultivation in the context of sexuality in ancient times. Foucault challenges conventional assumptions about the historical development of sexuality through rigorous historical analysis and philosophical inquiry. He consistently explores the complex relationships between power dynamics, the production of knowledge, and individual subjectivity in relation to sexual behaviours and identities.

Foucault, M., 1986, *"The History of Sexuality, Volume 3: The Care of the Self",* **Pantheon, New York.**

Michel Foucault's book, The History of Sexuality, Volume 3: The Care of the Self, was published by Pantheon Books in 1986. It is the final part of his important series that examines the evolution of sexuality in Western societies. In this volume, Foucault explores ancient Greco-Roman society, focussing on how individuals in that era practiced self-preservation and moral self-cultivation within the context of sexuality. By analysing ancient philosophical manuscripts, particularly those written by Plato and Epictetus, he aims to elucidate how these intellectuals and their followers promoted ethical behaviours related to desire, satisfaction, and self-control. Foucault argues that these behaviours were intended not only to improve individual well-being, but also to shape the manner in which individuals engaged with others and with the larger social structure. Foucault challenges dominant understandings of sexuality and personal identity by examining the historical origins of self-preservation and moral principles. He offers insights into how these concepts have evolved over time and continue to shape modern discussions.

Foucault, M., & Gros, F. (transl.), 2018, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 4: Confessions of the Flesh,* **Pantheon Books, New York.**

Michel Foucault's fourth treatise, titled "The History of Sexuality, Volume 4: Confessions of the Flesh," thoroughly examines the Christian practice of confession as a central point for the formation of Western views on sexuality. Foucault's posthumously published work critically examines the intersection of power, knowledge, and the human subject. He does so by analysing early Christian manuscripts and their depictions of longing, transgression, and self-control. Foucault argues that the institutionalisation of confession, which involves the act of revealing one's thoughts and actions, plays a crucial role in establishing Christian moral

principles on sexuality. This, in turn, has a significant impact on subsequent discussions in the Western world regarding the physical body, desires, and ethical behaviour. He questions the idea of a repressive hypothesis regarding sexuality, suggesting instead that Western civilisation has historically operated through mechanisms that encourage conversations and shape individual perspectives on sexual behaviours and identities. Foucault's research challenges traditional accounts of sexuality by examining the impact of power dynamics and systems of truth on individuals' understanding and regulation of their desires within broader societal frameworks.

Johnston, L. & Longhurst, R., 2010, *"Space, Place, and Sex: Geographies of Sexualities",* Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Plymouth.

Johnston and Longhurst analyse the interdependence of "space, place, and sex" at different levels, spanning from the individual body to the global scale. Johnston and Longhurst highlight the complex interconnection between sex, sexuality, virtual environments, and physical locations by utilising queer, feminist, gender, social, and cultural studies. The authors' main objective is to improve understanding of a wide range of sexual identities and behaviours, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, asexual, queer, and heterosexual orientations. According to their theory, bodies are moulded and linked together through different forms of communication like television, movies, ads, and the internet, as well as physical environments such as homes, religious buildings, sports arenas, cities, coastlines, and natural landscapes. The authors convincingly argue that sexual dynamics are present in various historical and modern situations, asserting that they are widespread in all spatial contexts and at every geographical level. Therefore, they illustrate the influence of sexuality on individuals' lifestyles and interactions with their surroundings, as well as the reciprocal impact of their surroundings on their sexual expressions.

Kapp, T., 2020, *Spiritual Sexuality: Towards a holistic and a-ecclesial sexual ethic*, MDiv. Dissertation, Department Systematic and Historical Theology, University of Pretoria.

Since the 11th century, the Christian church's control over sexuality has resulted in the spread of a repressed narrative. Enforcing restrictions on sexuality, rather than promoting its positive influence, hinders the progress of a contemporary society that is in desperate need of guidance in both sexual and spiritual matters. This research, conducted for my Master of Divinity degree in the Department of Systematic and Historical Theology at the Faculty of Theology and Religion, University of Pretoria, suggests that spirituality is anthropocentric. Thus, this concept revolves around the existence of humans and seeks to acknowledge the importance of physicality and sexuality as both secular and spiritually holy. It promotes principles of 'spiritual sexuality' that aim to encourage responsible sexual behaviour based on inclusive principles, regardless of individual theological or spiritual beliefs. The text examines various spiritual and philosophical perspectives to create a framework that integrates spiritual principles with contemporary understandings of sexuality. This research adds to broader discussions in theology and ethics concerning the intersections of spirituality, sexuality, and ethical frameworks outside of traditional religious institutions.

Ryan, C. & Jethá, C., 2010, *Sex at Dawn: The Prehistoric Origins of Modern Sexuality*, Harper Perennial, New York.

According to Ryan and Jethá, it has been widely recognised since Darwin's time, that sexual monogamy is a fundamental characteristic of the human species. The dominant consensus in mainstream scientific circles, as well as within cultural and religious institutions, is that the evolutionary progress of men and women took place within family units characterised by the exchange of a man's resources and protection for a woman's reproductive abilities and loyalty.

However, the credibility of this conventional story is diminishing as fewer heterosexual individuals are choosing to get married. This trend has resulted in a significant increase in divorce rates, which can be attributed to infidelity and a decrease in sexual desire. These factors are undermining marriages that may seem stable. One may wonder how to harmonise the current observed realities with the well-established accepted narrative.

Ryan and Jethá propose an alternative perspective that challenges the conventional wisdom on human sexuality, debunking many established beliefs by suggesting that early human societies functioned within egalitarian groups that shared resources, childcare responsibilities, and sometimes even sexual partners. Drawing upon a wide range of evidence from disciplines such as anthropology, archaeology, primatology, anatomy, and psychosexuality, the authors present a compelling argument that sheds light on the true nature of monogamy in human beings. They illustrate how human behaviour in relation to intimate relationships has varied across different cultures and time periods, highlighting the diverse approaches taken by individuals worldwide. Furthermore, the authors delve into the ancient origins of human sexual behaviour while envisioning a more positive future shaped by humanity's inherent capacities for love, collaboration, and altruism.

1.2.2 Origins Of Religion

Anati, E., 2020, The Origins of Religion, English Edition, Atelier Essays VI, Capo di Ponte.

In this literary work, Anati raises the query: what were the circumstances surrounding the emergence of religions and at what point in time did this occur? He posits that the examination of ancient art is causing a significant shift in our understanding of early religious practices (see Linderfors 2020:767-768). Over the course of millennia, the rock art sites have functioned as sites of reverence and communal identification, retaining records of legends, faith systems, and ceremonial practices, all of which underwent development, divergence, and the incorporation of local and cultural distinctions. Nevertheless, artistic representations are not the initial indications of religious presence. Unearthed archaeological findings pertaining to burial traditions and grave items interred with the deceased on their passage to the afterlife, along with recently unearthed ancient sanctuaries, disclose ideologies and convictions dating back to periods preceding the advent of art. Anati delves deeper into the inquiry: At what juncture and through what means were the earliest religious ideologies and customs formulated? Additionally, how did religions progress to their current forms? Anati asserts that advancements in archaeological and anthropological data and interpretations offer a fresh perspective on the beginnings and evolution of religious practices.

Bellah, R. N. & Joas, H., *et al.* 2012, *The Axial Age and Its Consequences*, 1st ed., Harvard University Press, MA.

Bellah and Joas critically analyse the significant cultural achievements of early human history, including literary, philosophical, and theological works that have endured since the middle centuries of the first millennium BCE. They discuss these works in their publication titled "The Axial Age and Its Consequences." The authors analyse various texts from different traditions,

such as the Hebrew canonical scriptures, the philosophical works of Plato and Aristotle, *The Analects* of Confucius and the *Daodejing*, as well as the *Bhagavad Gita* and the teachings of the Buddha. These texts all emerged during a specific historical period known as the Axial Age, as defined by Karl Jaspers (see Cottesta 2017:218-219). The argument they presented is that all of these works represent the emergence of intellectual sophistication on a worldwide level during this crucial period. Bellah and Joas argue that during the Axial Age, a new introspective mindset towards human existence emerged in Eurasia. This was accompanied by a heightened awareness of transcendence. The thinkers of this time period provided us with a view of the world that went beyond mere experiential purposes. They saw it as a realm for exploration, contemplation, and transformation through human cognition and actions. The authors have engaged a wide range of scholars to act as interpreters of this extraordinary increase in religious and philosophical creativity. They explore the different types of philosophical investigation that arose during this era and contemplate how these intellectual endeavours led to utopian ideals that ignited both societal advancement and regulation. They claim that the fundamental discussions on religion, secularisation, inequality, education, and the environment can all be attributed to the advancements made during the Axial Age. The authors contend that understanding this period of transition is not only an intellectual pursuit, but also a pursuit that relates to the study of human culture and values.

Bourrat, P., 2015, Origins and Evolution of Religion from a Darwinian Point of View: Synthesis of Different Theories, in: Handbook of Evolutionary Thinking in The Sciences, Heams T. *et al*. (eds.), Springer Science, Sydney, 761-776.

The phenomenon of religion is characterised by its multifaceted nature and intricate complexity. Bourrat's work highlights the emergence of several theories within a Darwinian framework that aim to explain the origins and evolution of religion. Nevertheless, there is

substantial controversy regarding the precise elements of the Darwinian model that most effectively explain the development of religion. An important inquiry revolves around whether religion is simply a secondary outcome of other evolutionary changes, or if it is an evolutionary adaptation in its own right, fulfilling the needs and goals of individuals or collectives. Bourrat subsequently examines different theories that establish a connection between religion and cooperation, illustrating that these theories, despite common academic beliefs, can coexist without contradicting each other.

Bourrat thoroughly analyses each theory and develops a comprehensive framework that allows for distinguishing between the various perspectives presented. This analysis demonstrates that certain theories offer compelling explanations for the origin of religion but face challenges in explaining its enduring nature, and vice versa. Similarly, certain explanations successfully address the development of religious characteristics at the individual level but struggle to explain traits that are difficult to define on an individual basis. Therefore, Bourrat suggests that a thorough comprehension of the religious phenomenon can be attained by methodically incorporating the different theories and empirical data.

Chung, D., 2018, 'Evolutionary Origin of Religions and Religious Evolution: Religious Neurosociology', *Journal of Behavioural and Brain Science* **8(9), 485-511.**

Chung's research suggests that the development of religions can be explained by the theory of mind, which arises from the interdependent division of labour among specialised groups in early human environments. In order to collaborate efficiently, it was necessary for each group to acknowledge the presence of others, which in turn fostered the ability to comprehend individual perspectives. The concept of imaginary specialists and labour division played a role in the development of religion, which is characterised by imaginative behaviours. Religion

is defined as a belief system and set of behaviours based on the concept of consciousness, which encourages a shared imagination to enhance the chances of survival in the face of existential difficulties.

In addition, Chung proposes that the development of religion involves premodern forms of creative expression that were specifically designed for local communities during the time when humans walked on two feet. This was followed by modern rational beliefs that were shaped by imagination and were more suitable for regional societies starting from the Axial Age. Finally, in the era following the Information Revolution, there emerged postmodern diverse rational imaginings that are relevant to global societies. Ultimately, it is contended that the religious facet of the human brain is intricately connected with imagination, as evidenced by the social behaviours linked to religious practices. This process of evolution emphasises the significance of human imagination in improving mechanisms for survival in the face of existential pressures. This includes strengthening social connections within groups and reducing stress and anxiety at the individual level.

Feierman, J.R. & Oviedo, L. (eds.), 2020, *The Evolution of Religion, Religiosity and Theology: A multi-level and multi-disciplinary approach,* **Routledge, New York.**

Feierman and Oviedo employ a multidimensional and interdisciplinary approach to investigate the evolution of religion, encompassing its origins and extending to the present era. Their approach encompasses the study of religion, religiosity, and theology. Their research uniquely integrates natural sciences and theology to examine the origin and development of religious practices across four domains: Evolutionary biology; Philosophical linguistics, psychology, and neuroscience; Theology and Anthropology. The compilation features a diverse group of contributors from around the world who offer an innovative

depiction of religion as a culturally constructed social institution, religiosity as a subjective aspect of individuals studied through anthropology, and theology as the exploration of the divine. In light of changing conditions, this study provides a vital analysis of a swiftly growing field, as all organisms must undergo adaptive evolution to flourish (see Bellah & Joas, *et al.* 2012:191).

Ginex, P. N., 2013, 'Provide History of Religion and God', *Contemporary Issues In Education Research 6(2),* **199-207.**

Ginex's study emphasises the imperative for educators at the secondary and tertiary levels to acquaint students with the historical evolution of religions and belief systems centred around the concept of God. They contend that this delicate subject is frequently overlooked, resulting in students being deprived of comprehending how humanity has developed ethical and virtuous conduct to promote harmony among competing factions within an expanding society. Ginex's research, based on the studies of esteemed Egyptologists like James H. Breasted and E.A. Wallis Budge, definitively proves that the initial organised religion of ancient Egypt has been imitated by the Judaic, Christian, and Islamic religions. Furthermore, the historical evidence offers valuable insights into the metaphysical essence of human beings, the rise of monotheism (specifically Amun), and the progressive development of concepts such as truth, the soul, the afterlife, the Son of God, and a universal divine being. These findings make significant contributions to the fields of theology, humanities, psychology, and sociology. Furthermore, it provides a profound comprehension of the human condition, which has the capacity to motivate religious leaders and the general public to collaborate with individuals possessing insightful intellect and a caring disposition, in order to develop practical and successful resolutions.

Lewis, J.R. & Tøllefsen, I.B. (eds.) 2016, The Oxford Handbook of New Religious Movements: Volume II, Oxford University Press, New York.

This comprehensive volume, edited by Hanegraaff and Tøllefsen gathers contributions from not only established, but emerging scholars as well to explore a wide range of topics reflecting current research trends and methodological advances in the field of New Religious Movements (NRMs). The text specifically examines how NRMs are classified, offering theoretical insights into their diversity via a variety of methods, including social-scientific and religious studies approaches. Additionally, this handbook also delves into historical contexts to illuminate the origins and development of movements like Satanism, New Age, Conspiracy Theories, and Shamanism, while also incorporating cultural, sociological, psychological, and anthropological perspectives to assess their societal and individual impacts regarding misrepresentations as well as stereotypes. Furthermore, this edited volume introduces various innovative theoretical and methodological strategies that enhance the academic study of NRMs. Its detailed case studies analyse specific movements, while addressing contemporary issues such as legal challenges, media portrayals, and the influence of digital technology on religious praxis. This handbook is an invaluable resource for understanding the complexities and variations within NRMs, providing a comprehensive overview of the landscape for the origins of contemporary religious movements and setting the stage for future scholarly inquiry, paving the way for placing esotericism in contemporary religious ontologies.

Lindenfors, P., 2020, 'Emmanuel Anati: The Origins of Religion. A Study in Conceptual Anthropology', *Human Ecology* 48(6), 767-768.

Lindenfors highlights that Emmanuel Anati, the author of The Origins of Religion A Study in Conceptual Anthropology, has extensively published on various subjects, encompassing not only the genesis of religion but also the genesis of art and music. A significant portion of this output is published by Atelier Publications in Conceptual Anthropology, a publisher that primarily showcases Anati's own work. In addition, Anati fulfils the role of General Editor for the journal Expression, as stated in Lindenfors 2020:767. These publishing arrangements indicate that the researcher has a strong dislike for peer review and opposing viewpoints. The primary emphasis of The Origins of Religion revolves around the inquiry into the precise moment at which humans initially encountered religion. The response to this question depends greatly on the specific definition of the ambiguous term "religion," as this definition dictates what can be considered as evidence of religion in the archaeological findings. As a result, Anati's book focusses extensively on these discussions about definitions, rather than just providing information about the sequence of archaeological sites and features (Lindenfors 2020:767-768).

Peoples, C. H., *et al.,* 2016, 'Hunter-Gatherers and the Origins of Religion', *Human Nature* 27, 261-282.

Peoples, *et alia* contend that recent discoveries regarding the evolution of religion have shed light on the cognitive underpinnings of belief in supernatural entities, the function of rituals in fostering cooperation, and the influence of moralising deities in the formation and maintenance of human society. Religion is present in all human cultures due to its profound evolutionary origins. However, the specific traits that define emerging religiosity and their origins remain unclear. The researchers analyse the development of religious beliefs and practices in early modern humans by examining a worldwide collection of hunter-gatherer societies. They focus on seven significant religious attributes, namely ancestor worship, spirit

baptism, belief in an afterlife, shamanism, and the worship of active ancestor spirits or high gods.

In their study, Peoples *et alia* investigate the ancestral character traits by examining the correlated evolution and cultural changes of these traits. They achieve this by utilising a time-calibrated supertree, which is constructed using published phylogenetic and linguistic data. Research indicates that animism, the belief in spiritual beings that are not human, was the earliest religious practice observed in the most recent common ancestor of modern hunter-gatherers. This discovery corroborates longstanding theories regarding the fundamental significance of religion. The practice of venerating ancestors and engaging in shamanistic rituals gradually transitioned into the belief in the existence of an afterlife. Surprisingly, the fact that prehistoric human societies did not have ancestor spirits or active high gods suggests that there has been a significant history of equality.

Pyysiäinen, I. & Hauser, M. D., 2010, 'The Origins of Religion: Evolved Adaptation or By-Product?', *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* **14(3), 104-109.**

The inquiry into the origins and evolution of religion has sparked extensive scholarly debates. One perspective suggests that religion is perceived as an adaptation that emerged to enhance cooperation among individuals. On the other hand, an alternative perspective views religion as a byproduct of evolved, non-religious cognitive functions. Pyysiäinen and Hauser conduct a thorough analysis of these approaches, with a specific focus on the relationship between religion and morality. Pyysiäinen and Hauser propose in their research article that recent empirical studies in moral psychology offer stronger evidence in favour of the latter byproduct approach. Specifically, regardless of their diverse religious affiliations, individuals exhibit no notable variations in the manner in which they make moral judgements when faced

with unfamiliar moral situations. Moreover, these findings indicate that religion originated from pre-existing cognitive functions, which were subsequently influenced by selection, resulting in the development of an adaptively designed system to address the issue of cooperation among humans.

Westh, P., 2013, 'Anthropomorphism in god concepts: the role of narrative', in A.W. Geertz, *Origins of Religion, Cognition and Culture*, pp. 396-414, Acumen Publishing, Denmark

Current cognitive theories of religion are increasingly reaching a consensus that the fundamental aspect of religion involves the recognition and representation of intentional actors and their actions. This theory is not a single, unified idea, but rather a collection of different arguments and pieces of evidence that support it. In this chapter, Westh (2013) specifically examines the notion that humans tend to instinctively form beliefs about gods based on intuitive, ontological assumptions. One of the main supporting pieces of evidence for this assumption is the Experiments on narrative understanding conducted by psychologists Barrett (1996) and Keil (1998).

1.2.3 Western Esotericism

Blavatsky, H.P., Besant, A. & Mead G.R.S. (eds.) 1888, The Secret Doctrine: The Synthesis of Science, Religion and Philosophy 3rd rev. ed. (1893), Library of Alexandria, USA.

In this seminal work in the field of Western esoteric scholarship, Blavatsky offers a critique of the association between the rise of Theosophical literature in England and the teachings presented in Sinnett's *Esoteric Buddhism* (1883). Therefore, as an old proverb states, "Error

descends effortlessly on an inclined plane, while truth must laboriously ascend uphill." Time-tested sayings are frequently the most insightful. It is difficult for the human mind to be completely unbiased, and people often form strong opinions without thoroughly examining a subject from all angles. The source of the text is "Introductory (vol 1) - The Secret Doctrine" from theosociety.org. She supports this idea by referring to the common error of 1) restricting Theosophy to Buddhism, and 2) confusing the teachings of Gautama, the Buddha, with the broader principles of Esoteric Buddhism.

According to Blavatsky, it is difficult to imagine anything more incorrect than this. The author argues that these narratives have provided adversaries of theosophical doctrine with a powerful tool to undermine Theosophy. Consequently, she criticises Sinnett for not including references to either Esotericism or Buddhism in his work. In addition, she asserts that the obscure truths, which were later revealed in Sinnett's publication "Esoteric Buddhism", lost their esoteric nature as soon as they became known to the public. Furthermore, the book did not encompass the entirety of Buddha's religion, but rather only a small number of principles from a previously concealed doctrine. In her work, Blavatsky contends that the latter, while presenting several key principles from the Secret Doctrine of the East, only reveal a limited portion of the profound mystery. No one, not even the most skilled and knowledgeable practitioner, would be allowed or able, even if they wanted to, to freely disclose to a sceptical and unbelieving society the hidden knowledge that has been so successfully kept secret for centuries.

Nevertheless, Blavatsky regards *Esoteric Buddhism* as a commendable piece of literature, despite its regrettable title. Moreover, she laments the tendency of individuals to consistently evaluate things solely on their outward appearance, rather than engaging in thoughtful

analysis of their underlying significance. Due to the extensive prevalence of this error, a significant majority of individuals belonging to the Theosophical Society have also succumbed to the same misinterpretation. Nevertheless, Brahmins and other individuals expressed their opposition to the title right from the beginning. In all fairness, Blavatsky argues that Arthur P. Sinnett's book, *Esoteric Buddhism* (1883), was given to her as a finished volume and she was fully aware of the author's intended spelling of the term "Esoteric Buddhism". In the process of creating this edition, the editors have made efforts to rectify insignificant aspects of the literary structure, while refraining from making any alterations to the more significant aspects of Blavatsky's original work.

Bogdan, H. & Starr, M.P., 2012, *Aleister Crowley and Western Esotericism*, Oxford University Press, USA.

This book, authored by Bogdan and Starr, provides a thorough analysis of Aleister Crowley (1875-1947), a prominent figure known for challenging traditional beliefs and norms in the 20th century. It is the first comprehensive study of his life and work, highlighting his contradictory nature. This study reveals that Crowley was born into a devout Christian family and received his education at Cambridge. He was both criticised as a traitor, drug addict, and debauchery by some, and admired as possibly the most influential thinker in modern esotericism by others. Crowley rejected the impact of current psychological theories and modern interpretations of the occult and proclaimed himself as the revealer of a new era characterised by individualism. Crowley's occult Bricolage Magick was a syncretic amalgamation of spiritual practices derived from Western European magical rituals and Indian traditions of meditation and yoga. The process of achieving personal freedom reached its peak through the utilisation of sexual energy as a form of mystical practice, known as the

"sacralisation of the self," which was carried out within Crowley's diverse Masonic organisation, the *Ordo Templi Orientis*. Thelema, the religious system established by Crowley, conferred legitimacy upon his position as a charismatic proclaimer and harbinger of a forthcoming era characterised by liberation. The lasting impact of Crowley can be observed in the counterculture movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s, as well as various other expressions of alternative spirituality and popular culture. The essays in this collection offer valuable perspectives on Crowley's pivotal contribution to the examination of Western esotericism, emerging religious movements, and human sexuality.

Fortune, D., 2007, *Esoteric Orders and Their Work*, The Aquarian Press, Wellingborough.

Fortune explores the reasons behind the exclusion of certain individuals from esoteric schools, as well as the ways in which they have concealed their organisational structures and secretive memberships. Secret traditional science that investigates the causes of observable phenomena is what these schools have safeguarded and revised over the years by outstanding teachers. Furthermore, every facet of these covert organisations and the training they provide for initiates is disclosed in Fortune (2007). A new introduction and index are also included in this revised edition, written by renowned author and occultist Gareth Knight.

Fortune, D. 2000, *The Esoteric Philosophy of Love and Marriage*, Samuel Weiser Inc., Maine.

Although readers with no prior knowledge or experience on the subject are intended for this overview of esoteric teachings on marriage, relationships, and sex, it is encouraged that

seekers keep an open mind in order to discover information that might provide insight into life's challenges. Fortune (2000) asserts that every race possesses a customary secret knowledge that is passed down orally and through manuscripts given to individuals who were thought deserving of its knowledge. This knowledge is never revealed to the public. Moreover, he says that the different esoteric traditions concerning relationships and sexuality date back to the furthest ages in an uninterrupted line. Furthermore, despite the different ways to approach this discourse, they all converge when one goes toward their common source. To shed more light on the previously mentioned teachings regarding sexuality, this book offers a general overview of the various esoteric doctrines. Furthermore, although Fortune (2000) invites introspection in response to the content, he distinguishes between the Eastern and Western schools of esotericism according to different methods, despite the fact that he regards both as essentially the same in encompassing a particular facet of the "left-hand path", in contrast to the arguments made in this thesis attempting to distinguish West from East.

Granholm, K., 2014, *Dark Enlightenment: The Historical, Sociological, and Discursive Contexts of Contemporary Esoteric Magic*, Aries Book Series, Vol. 18, Brill, Leiden.
Granholm explores the historical, sociological, and discursive backgrounds of contemporary esoteric magic. This text primarily discusses the Sweden-founded Left-Hand Path magic order Dragon Rouge. However, a detailed contextual analysis of this case study offers a more comprehensive understanding of contemporary esotericism in general. Granholm (2014) utilises a transdisciplinary approach to comprehensively examine esotericism in the context of late modernity. This approach is influenced by both the sociological study of new religions and religious change, as well as the historiography of Western esotericism.

Hanegraaff, W. *et al.* (eds.) 2019, *Hermes Explains: Thirty Questions about Western Esotericism*, Amsterdam University Press, Amsterdam.

This work by Hanegraaff*, et alia* is dedicated to honouring the legendary Egyptian philosopher, Hermes Trismegistus, on the academy's ten-year anniversary. The University of Amsterdam established the "Centre for History of Hermetic Philosophy and Related Currents (HHP)" in 1999, and we are collaborating with them. The title of this volume is "Hermes explains" because he is regarded as a pivotal figure in the study of the history and symbolism of Western Esotericism. This volume encompasses research on various Western esoteric traditions, such as Rosicrucianism, Christian theosophy, illuminism, occultism, spiritualism, traditionalism, neopaganism, New Age, botanical magic, astrology, alchemy, natural magic, Hermeticism, Gnosticism, and neo-platonic theurgy. Consequently, numerous recurring subjects require ongoing explanation. This volume is dedicated to addressing thirty common "journalistic" questions, which serve as the basis for its content. Considering the propensity for research in the realm of esotericism to generate firmly established misunderstandings, presumptions, and biases. Thus, these opportunities allow academics to carefully consider and respond to the complexity of the specialised discussion on esotericism. Some responses are serious, while others are more light-hearted. It is important to note that studying esotericism goes beyond simply studying esotericism, as Hanegraaff and others paradoxically argue (Hanegraaff 2019:10–11).

Hanegraaff, W.J., 2012, *Esotericism and the Academy: Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture*, Cambridge University Press, New York.

In this book, Hanegraaff makes the claim that academics tend to deride "esoteric," "occult," or "magical" beliefs, but they are typically unaware of the philosophical and religious traditions that these terms are associated with, or of their significance to intellectual history. Thus,

Hanegraaff presents the little-known tale of how intellectuals have attempted, since the Renaissance, to reconcile a variety of late-Antiquity "pagan" ideas that called into question the fundamentals of Greek and Biblical rationality and religion. Protestant and Enlightenment traditions, which led to their expulsion from the academy, are now seen as "the other," and this perception helps academics define who they are today. Hanegraaff asks what implications the forgotten history of exclusion has for established textbook narratives of religion, philosophy, and science. He bases his discussion on a thorough analysis of primary and secondary sources and takes the reader on an intellectual journey that begins in the 15th century and ends in the present.

Hanegraaff, W. J. & Kripal J. J. (eds.), 2008, *Hidden Intercourse: Eros and Sexuality in the History of Western Esotericism*, Brill Academic, Boston.

The history of Western esotericism contains numerous mentions of eros and sexuality, ranging from gnostic orgies and subtly encoded erotic symbolism in alchemical texts to the practice of sexual magic by contemporary occultists and the reinterpretation of Asian Tantra by countercultural movements. This extensive publication, authored by Hanegraaff and other notable scholars, brings together a diverse group of experts in the field of Western esotericism. It is the first work to thoroughly examine the erotic aspects of esotericism, focussing on rigorous academic research and meticulous analysis of textual and historical evidence, rather than relying on sensationalism or broad generalisations. There are few other fields that provide as much freedom for the imagination as this one. Nevertheless, the diverse contributions strive to distinguish historical truth from fiction, frequently uncovering that the former is even more peculiar than the latter. By their actions, they reveal the outlines of a predominantly obscure history that extends over a period of two thousand years.

Hedenborg-White, M., 2019, *The Eloquent Blood: The Goddess Babalon and the Construction of Femininities in Western Esotericism*, Oxford University Press, New York.

Hedenborg-White examines the traditional dichotomy between the chaste, "pure Madonna" and the sexually promiscuous "whore," as the former is commonly regarded as the ideal embodiment of femininity. Hedenborg-White suggests the existence of a modern religious movement that both elevates and reverses the negative stereotype of the harlot. The Eloquent Blood examines the impact of different interpretations of the goddess *Babalon* on the construction of femininity and feminine sexuality. *Babalon* holds a significant role in Thelema, the religious system established by the notorious British occultist Aleister Crowley (1875–1947). *Babalon* is associated with the concept of liberated female sexuality and the spiritual aspiration for a fervent connection with existence. This association is derived from Crowley's positive interpretation of the biblical figure known as the "Whore of Babylon." This study examines the interpretation of *Babalon*, a figure in the Anglo-American occult milieu, from historical and modern written sources, qualitative interviews, and ethnographic fieldwork. It focusses on the writings of Aleister Crowley and his influential disciples, including British occultist Kenneth Grant and rocket scientist John "Jack" Whiteside Parsons, up to the present time. This study showcases how, beginning in the 1990s, female and LGBTQ esotericists have challenged conventional interpretations of *Babalon* by integrating queer and feminist concepts and redefining the concept of femininity. Hedenborg-White traces the development of a particular symbol associated with gender from the late 19th century to the present day.

Pasi, M., 2019, 'But What Does Esotericism Have to Do With Sex?', in Hanegraaff, W., Forshaw, P. & Pasi, M. (eds.) Hermes Explains: Thirty Questions about Western Esotericism, pp. 207-215, Amsterdam University Press, Amsterdam.

In this book, Pasi emphasises the correlation between sex and esotericism by leveraging the historical prominence of sex within Western esotericism. Although "sex" is a broad term that encompasses various human experiences, Pasi highlights three key points in this chapter. Initially, he employs Plato's writings to establish a connection between the notion of eros and the "universal law of attraction," which is believed to serve as the counterbalancing force to repulsion. This implies that love is of utmost importance in both the organisation of the cosmos and interpersonal connections. Pasi argues that the fundamental laws of attraction and repulsion that govern human existence are believed to also govern the universe. Renowned Renaissance authors such as Giordano Bruno (1548–1600) and Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499) believed that magic, the intricate organisation of the cosmos, and the principles of attraction were interconnected. They further expanded on this concept. The dichotomous characteristic of sexuality itself, along with the genesis of sexual attraction between males and females, can be elucidated by the myth of the original androgyne. This concept, the author contends, finds its origins in Plato's writings and, to a certain extent, the biblical narrative of Genesis.

Steiner, R. & Creeger, C.E., 1997, *Classics in Anthroposophy: An Outline of Esoteric Science*, Anthroposophic Press, New York.

This translation into English of a masterwork of esotericism places humanity at the centre of the vast, unseen processes of cosmic evolution. Esoteric science is the study of what happens esoterically, or internally, in the sense that it is experienced where one's soul turns when it directs its inner being toward the spirit, rather than outside in nature. Natural science's

opposite and counterpart is known as esoteric science. For many years, Steiner (1997) worked and reworked Rosicrucian cosmology to make it more precise and accurate, and the result is an influential work that is still as relevant and important as when it was first published in 1910. The spiritual alternative to modern materialist cosmologies and the Darwinian theory of human nature and evolution is thus presented in this work in a way that is still the most persuasive to date. The study presented in this foundational work of spiritual science explores how human creation and evolution are interwoven with a vast and invisible web of interacting cosmic beings, which facilitates the alchemical processes of cosmic evolution. Additionally, there are explanations of the various human bodies and how they relate to death and sleep, as well as a thorough, useful guide to the exercises or methods—such as the "Rose Cross Meditation"—that can be used to obtain this kind of initiated knowledge. Perhaps the most amazing and groundbreaking of all is the central role Steiner (1997) gives to the Christ and the Mystery of Golgotha, which marks Christ's entry into earthly development.

Strube, J., 2020, 'Chapter 8: Hinduism, Western Esotericism, and New Age Religion in Europe', in K.A. Jacobsen & F. Sardella (eds.) *Handbook of Hinduism in Europe*, pp. 152-173, Brill, Leiden.

What is generally referred to as "Western esotericism" is largely attributed, according to Strube (2020), to the adoption of Indian concepts. Traditionally, tantra and yoga were understood within the framework of esotericism in either Europe or America. Modern spiritual and health cultures have incorporated notions like karma, chakra, and the kundalini, which were frequently interpreted by esotericists and spread throughout the world. Here, Strube (2020) offers multiple instances of how esoteric interactions with Hinduism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries had a long-lasting impact on Europe's religious landscape. The most

notable example of this is the vague field of "New Age," which first appeared in the 1960s. Studying the relationship between esotericism and Hinduism sheds light on the complex interactions between the "East and West" that occurred, at least a century earlier, against the backdrop of orientalism, colonialism, and the emergence of new religious identities in Europe. It also explains why Indian ideas have persisted since the emergence of New Age religions.

Urban, H. B., 2016, *36.* Sexuality, In: Magee, G. (ed.), *The Cambridge Handbook of Western Mysticism and Esotericism,* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp. 429-440.

Sexuality has played a significant and meaningful role in Western esotericism throughout history. Without a doubt, the idea of distinguishing between males and females and the act of sexual intercourse are widely present, frequently occurring, and intricate subjects in esoteric traditions, spanning from ancient Hermeticism and Gnosticism to contemporary occult and magical societies. The explanations for the common correlation between esotericism and sexuality are readily accessible. Sexuality is commonly employed as a metaphor in esotericism to refer to hidden or exclusive knowledge. According to Urban (2016:429), sex is considered to be the ultimate secret. Furthermore, there is a strong similarity between eroticism and esotericism in their intricate interplay of hiding and revealing. Esotericism specifically involves a sophisticated process of both revealing and concealing secret knowledge. In his analysis of sexual imagery in Murmuring Secrets: Eroticism and Esotericism in Mediaeval Kabbalah, Elliott Wolfson (2008) observes that the convergence of eroticism and esotericism occurs at the point where they diverge. According to Wolfson, eroticism appears to reveal what is hidden, while esotericism hides what is revealed (Wolfson 2008:65).

Similarly, the combination of the male and female bodies during sexual activity is often employed as a metaphor (and sometimes as a physical manifestation) for the concept of divine union, for sexual activity between the spiritual and physical realms, and for a state of divine androgyny. If we consider the etymology of the word "sex" from Latin, which implies the separation or division of male and female bodies, then engaging in sexual intercourse can serve as a powerful symbol or even a ritualistic instrument for the process of spiritual reunification. Finally, due to the inherent nature of esoteric traditions being mostly concealed and veiled in layers of deceit and obscurity, they have frequently faced allegations of engaging in sexual promiscuity, explicit deviance, and various rebellious rituals. Indeed, esoteric traditions often face baseless allegations of participating in aberrant, infernal, or blasphemous sexual rituals. This accusation originated with the early Gnostics and has been associated with mediaeval heresies, Freemasons, and contemporary occult movements.

Urban H. B., 2006, *Magia Sexualis: Sex, Magic, and Liberation in Modern Western Esotericism*, University of California Press, Los Angeles.

Sexuality has been commonly linked to occult practices in Western culture, but it was not until the 19th century that a significant and refined collection of literature on sexual magic, which involves using sex as a means of harnessing magical energy, emerged. To comprehend the transformation of sexual magic from a frightening mediaeval phenomenon associated with heresy and social rebellion to a contemporary concept of individual empowerment and societal liberation, Urban (2006) situates these practices within the broader discussion on sexuality in American and European culture during the past 150 years. Urban (2006) presents

a comprehensive account of the origins and development of Western sexual magic, highlighting its emergence as a contemporary spiritual practice.

Urban (2006) examines the historical roots of sexual magic, which can be traced back to ancient Western esoteric traditions such as Gnosticism and Kabbalah. Over time, these traditions merged with newly discovered Eastern practices like Hindu and Buddhist Tantra. Urban examines several significant individuals, such as American spiritualist Paschal Beverly Randolph, Aleister Crowley, Julius Evola, Gerald Gardner, and Anton LaVey. This study provides fresh insights into several current issues related to sexuality, such as the political aspects of birth control, the concept of sexual "deviance," the connection between feminism and homosexuality, and the role of sexuality in our contemporary society characterised by consumerism, spirituality, and the Internet.

Versluis, A., 2007, *Magic and mysticism: an introduction to Western esotericism*, Rowman & Littlefield, USA.

Versluis (2007)'s Magic and Mysticism: An Introduction to Western Esoteric Traditions provides a concise overview of the prominent esoteric movements in Western religions, spanning from ancient times to the present. The course covers various subjects including Rosicrucianism, Theosophy, Gnosticism, Hermeticism, and alchemy. Magic and Mysticism is a valuable resource for individuals interested in Metaphysics and Esoterica, particularly for those studying mysticism and New Religious Movements. Versluis examines the philosophical origins and historical progression of esotericism by analysing Renaissance occultism, contemporary mystical movements, and ancient Gnosticism and Hermeticism. The book delves into the significant characters and texts that influenced these traditions, while also exploring their beliefs, rituals, and mystical experiences. Versluis not only emphasises

the impact of esotericism on literature, art, and spirituality, but also examines the broader cultural and social environments in which it flourished. Overall, "Magic and Mysticism" provides a comprehensive and accessible examination of the wide-ranging field of Western esoteric philosophy and its practical applications.

Zoccatelli, P., 2017, 'Esotericism, Deviance, and Repression: An Introduction to the Movement for Spiritual Integration into the Absolute (MISA)', *Journal of CESNUR* 1(1), 10-19.

The movement for spiritual integration into the absolute (MISA), started in 1990 by Romanian esoteric yoga teacher Gregorian Bivolaru, is the subject of this paper by Zoccatelli. Zoccatelli provides an overview of the MISA's doctrines and history in the first section, as well as a discussion of the legal disputes that arose as the movement gained traction. Notwithstanding the movement's origins in Tantric Shivaism in Kashmir and Siddha Yoga in Tamil Nadu, Bivolaru has actually invented a fresh and innovative approach to theoretical and practical esotericism that combines Western and Indian elements. The author primarily addresses the MISA sexual techniques that have garnered the most attention from critics and scholars, which are based on male continence. Along with its interest in extraterrestrial life—which some have referred to as "conspirituality," a combination of conspiracy theories and esoteric spirituality—Zoccatelli also looks at MISA's ongoing anti-Masonic discourse. The esotericism of MISA, the charismatic leader, eclecticism, ritual, and eschatology are some of the themes he suggests more research on. These themes are also important for evaluating how society has responded to the movement.

1.2.4 Eastern Esotericism

De Michelis, E., 2005, *History of Modern Yoga: Patanjali and Western Esotericism*, Continuum, London.

De Michelis states that Western esoteric ideas were initially introduced into the intellectual circles of Bengal during the 18th century, coinciding with the emergence of modern yoga. De Michelis showed that Vivekananda's publication of Raja Yoga in 1896 played a crucial role in establishing Modern Yoga. This was achieved by reinterpreting Patanjali's Yoga Sutras to align with the emerging New Age occultist style, which emphasised secularised and individually focused religious practices. This book proposes a classification system for modern yoga based on four categories: modern psychosomatic, modern meditational, modern postural, and modern denominational. These categories are derived from the progress made in the 20th century. The text explores the prominent school of modern postural yoga, Iyengar Yoga, within the context of a framework. It concludes by showing how a typical modern postural yoga session can be seen as a secular religious healing ritual, highlighting its structures and elements.

Irwin, L., 2001, 'Western Esotericism, Eastern Spirituality, and the Global Future', *Esoterica* 3, pp. 1-47.

The notion of esotericism, according to Irwin in this article, has historically been cantered on the idea that a specific spiritual or religious teaching can only be taught to others after receiving the necessary training and preparation. Such preparations and/or trainings are hailed as necessitating unique empowerment rituals and protracted, gruelling journeys of discipline. He also contends that historically, only a select group of people have had access to this kind of knowledge. The elitism in the central doctrines of esoteric traditions is further criticised by Irwin, who also points out that there is conflict in the esoteric realm due to

disagreements about what defines esoteric, not only from the Catholic Church but also from individual philosophers like Mikhail Aivanhov and Peter Deunov, who have their own subjective views (often influenced by Eastern spiritual traditions) about the subject. He acknowledges the unique Eastern esoteric traditions that had a big impact on Western esotericism, including Daoism, Buddhism, Orientalism which is the European-borne tradition involving the study of Asian traditions (see Kleinhofa 2021:31-32), and Hinduism. He also gives credit to the Eastern influences on esotericism.

Putzu V., 2021, 'Heretical Orthodoxy: Eastern and Western Esotericism in Thomas Moore Johnson's "Platonism"', in M. Sedgwick & F. Piraino (eds.) *Esoteric Transfers and Constructions: Palgrave Studies in New Religions and Alternative Spiritualities*, pp. 273-296, Palgrave Macmillan, Cham.

Thomas Moore Johnson (1851–1919) played a central role in the development of Anglo-American interest in esotericism and the occult during the 1870s and 1880s, despite residing in a secluded rural town in Missouri. Johnson's extensive international correspondence, rare book collection, editorial work for the journal The Platonist, and leadership involvement in the Theosophical Society and the Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor were the factors that shaped this network. However, Johnson also contributed to the development of a peculiar understanding of esotericism, alongside his efforts to disseminate esoteric concepts. Putzu argues that Johnston, despite being criticised as unoriginal, developed his own distinctive interpretation of secret religious knowledge by incorporating elements from both Eastern and Western traditions, including Kabbalah, Sufism, and yoga. This challenges Johnston's belief in the authoritative and timeless truth of Platonic philosophy. Therefore, during a period when the occultist factions he was associated with are dividing over whether to follow Western or Eastern esotericism, Johnson displays his intellectual autonomy (or his "heretical orthodoxy").

Strube, J., 2020b, 'Towards the Study of Esotericism without the "Western": Esotericism from the Perspective of a Global Religious History', in J. Strube, & E. Asprem (eds.), *Supplements to Method & Theory in the Study of Religion Vol. 17: New Approaches to the Study of Esotericism*, pp. 45-66, Brill, Leiden.

As occultists of the 19th century rejected a purportedly "Eastern," Theosophical esotericism, Strube argues in this chapter that the "Western" demarcation of the study of esotericism should be abandoned. This emphasises how deeply ingrained this polemical division has been in history and how discussions regarding the definition of esotericism have always taken place in a global setting. According to Strube (2020), there is still a lack of theoretical and methodological reflection on this baggage. This has even led to a "diffusionist reaction" that is Eurocentric and avoids engaging with global and postcolonial perspectives. The reaction has been misinterpreted and is not grounded in reality. In order to address these viewpoints, the chapter will present the idea of "global religious history" as a useful direction.

Watts, A. W., 1999, *The Way of Zen,* Vintage Books, New York.

The brief history of Taoism and Buddhism provided by The Way of Zen serves as a prelude to the formation of Zen Buddhism, which drew heavily from both traditions. Watts (1999) continues by providing a comprehensive yet perceptive overview of Zen as it was and is practiced, as a component of various East Asian arts and disciplines as well as a religion. The story by Watts (1999) enhances the mystique of Zen while dispelling the mystery. Since this book was first published in 1957, Zen Buddhism has gained significant traction in the West. As Zen has spread throughout the West, it has adopted a lot of the mindset and methodology presented in Watts (1999), which is still regarded as one of the most significant introductions to Western Zen. Therefore, Watts (1999) provides Western readers with an in-

depth introduction to Zen Buddhism, outlining the core ideas and practices of this age-old faith. In order to explain what Zen means for the modern world, Watts (1999) explores the history and roots of the practice with an uncommon blend of clarity and freshness. According to Watts (1999), Zen is one of Asia's greatest gifts to the world and a constructive path forward.

Watts, A. W., 1991, *Nature, Man and Woman*, Vintage Books, New York.

Much of Western thought and culture are predicated on the ideas that humans stand apart from a nature that must be subdued, that the mind is somehow superior to the body, and that all sexuality involves seduction. Watts (1991) challenges these presumptions by re-examining humanity's place in the natural world and the spirit's relationship to the flesh in the context of Chinese Taoism. And they're all the reasons behind our abuse of the environment, our mistrust of feelings, our loneliness, and our resistance to love. In this work, as well as in his insightful and captivating book The Way of Zen, Watts (1991) directly questions these presumptions. Watts (1991) presents an alternative theory of the cosmos and humanity based on the ideas of Taoism. One where a more comprehensive understanding of the aspects of sexuality, spirituality, and relationships replaces the divisions between self and other, spirit and matter.

1.2.5 African Esotericism

Podolecka, A., 2019, Esotericism in Vusamazulu Credo Mutwa's writings, Ph.D. Thesis, Faculty of Oriental Studies, University of Warsaw.

By examining Vusamazulu Credo Mutwa's esoteric ideology and how it is viewed by readers worldwide, Podolecka (2019) seeks to uncover and analyse esoteric motives in the writings of the South African author and Zulu Sangoma. Mutwa is highly regarded globally as one of

the luminaries of modern South African esotericism. Mutwa identifies as a shaman in addition to being a Sangoma, a wise man, clairvoyant, diviner, and healer. He has written six books about the mythology, religion, and customs of the Bantu peoples of Southern Africa, particularly the Zulus. He also writes about South Africa's racial and political issues. His writings and art transcended national and racial boundaries, making him a symbol of the New Age and emerging esoteric movements. Agnieszka (2019) adds that Mutwa's goal in writing his first book in the 1960s was to increase awareness of and respect for South African cultures among both Africans and Westerners. Then, in the 1990s, he started working with New Age activists and publishers, and his writings and ideas began to be used to further the New Age ideology.

Anozie, S.U., 2017, African Esotericism with a Concentration on the Igbos, in Masaeli, M. (ed.), *Spirituality and Global Ethics***, pp.162-181, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle Upon Tyne.**

Through the presentation of the intricate rituals and religious practices of the Igbo people of Nigeria, Anozie (2017) offers a hermeneutical investigation of African traditional religions and philosophy in this essay. She also explains how these people uphold their social ethics of duty and common good in the community of people, particularly in light of hidden meanings (i.e. esoteric knowledge), which is discernible to cult members, youth groups, and secret societies. According to Anozie (2017), these organizations give morally admirable adults and young people access to "secret spiritual teachings" and "a guide" for identifying moral people and valuing moral behaviour. He says, "The Igbos recognize in particular the relationship between spirituality and cultural and socio-political values, religion and religious experience, and the esoteric intimacy that transforms individuals and the community morally". As a result, Anozie (2017) believes that these moral shifts are consistent with universal ideals such as

tolerance (including tolerance toward religion), human dignity, and respect for one another. In the discourse of Igbo esotericism and its role in modern global ethics, these are pertinent shared values or virtues.

Chidester, D., 2016, *Wild Religion: tracking the sacred in South Africa*, **University of California Press, Los Angeles.**

Chidester's *Wild Religion* takes readers on a captivating journey through recent South African history, starting from the establishment of democracy in 1994 and culminating in the excitement of the *2010 FIFA Soccer World Cup*. Chidester analyses the African Indigenous-religious heritage in the context of South Africa's political evolution and religious diversity. The claim made is that portrayals of indigenous South African religions have consistently incorporated a narrative of national subjugation and emancipation. Churches, mosques, temples, synagogues, and other religious institutions have been recognised for their resistance against apartheid, their steadfastness in the struggle for freedom, and their contributions to the growth of the post-apartheid nation. However, the DRC (Dutch Reformed Church) is seen as the perpetrators of apartheid and is not included in this recognition. In this book, Chidester deviates from the typical redemptive narrative by highlighting the emergence of various narratives concerning religion in South Africa. "In this book, I have considered various audiences while examining the dynamics of the sacred." I have primarily considered two types of readers - those who have an interest in religion but may not have a specific interest in South Africa, and those who are concerned about South Africa but may not have a particular interest in religion. I have consistently made an effort to communicate with both individuals at all times" (Chidester 2016:10).

Finley, S.C., Biko, M.G. & Page, H.R., 2021, 'Africana Esoteric Studies and Western Intellectual Hegemony: A Continuing Conversation with Western Esotericism', *History of Religions* 60(3), pp. 163-187.

This essay builds upon the initial discussion in *Esotericism in African American Religious Experience: 'There Is a Mystery'* (2015) by delving into the topic of *Africana* esoteric traditions and the emerging field of *Africana Esoteric Studies (AES)*. Finley, among others, provides a comprehensive rationale for this intricate project in 2021, while also acting as a collaborative response to Wouter Hanegraaff's criticism of *AES* in his article *The Globalisation of Esotericism* (2015). The main assertions put forth by Finley, *et alia* are that their distinct focusses should not be limited by or assimilated into the interpretive frameworks or organisational classifications that are essential to Western esoteric studies. Additionally, they argue that the exclusionary and centralising assertions made by Western esoteric studies should be recognised as part of a broader European colonial endeavour that influences conceptions of the "West." According to Finley, *et alia*, African peoples' epistemologies are distinct as a result of the West's colonial history, which marginalised them. This essay deliberately challenges the dominant forces by examining how members of an African global community use tactics like secrecy, concealment, and selective disclosure to ensure their survival and prosperity.

Kleinhempel, R.U., 2017, 'Covert Syncretism: The Reception of South Africa's Sangoma Practise and Spirituality by "Double Faith" in the Contexts of Christianity and of Esotericism', *Open Theology* 3, pp. 642-661.

In this article, Kleinhempel, a leading expert on African Traditional Religion (ATR), examines the influence of South African "mediumism" or "Sangoma" style on South African Christianity,

specifically within African Instituted Churches (AIC). These churches have adopted and modified elements of mediumistic rituals and practices from African Traditional Religion (ATR) and rural cultures. Moreover, he asserts that it has recently infiltrated white social environments and urban cultures in South Africa and Europe, where it is embraced as a form of alternative healing in esoteric settings and other places. Jungian psychoanalysts, specifically, have interpreted the spiritual elements as a reflection of a "universal" spirituality.

Contrarily, Kleinhempel disputes this notion by asserting that the understanding of such reception requires a reevaluation through the lens of Jungian theory, which can be perceived as having multiple interpretations. Although certain individuals recognise the ideas, occurrences, and encounters associated with it, these lie beyond the scope of Jungian or Esotericist frameworks. The analyst is named J. A. G. Laubscher. The utilisation of experiential anthropology methods has proven advantageous in academic dissertations exploring the authors' initiation and training as IZangoma. Kleinhempel observes significant transformations and intriguing consequences for knowledge on both the spiritual or religious and therapeutic paths, as well as in their scholarly endeavours. The effects of reductionism can be observed when IZangoma in academia reframe their practice and its epistemic concepts using the frameworks of Pragmatism, Positivism, or Esotericism. However, Kleinhempel recognises that the reverse is also valid. This means that the cosmological and anthropological concepts embedded in Sangoma experience and practice have the ability to change the environments of Jungian psychoanalysis and esoteric spirituality, as well as broader audiences who engage through various mediums such as literature, television, and the internet, in addition to personal interaction and practice. This mediated "dual practice" provides chances for both receiving and adapting, sparking a vibrant debate about how culture influences perception and the enigmatic realms of reality.

Njoku, O.N., 1991, Magic, 'Religion and Iron Technology in Precolonial North-Western Igboland', *Journal of Religion in Africa* 21(3), 194-215.

The most skilled and significant of Igboland's precolonial craft industries, according to Njoku (1991) in this article, was undoubtedly iron working. It is not unexpected that Igboland archaeologists have given it a great deal of attention. Though Igboland's anthropologists and historians have yet to follow the archaeologists' lead. There are two main issues that have been the focus of existing archaeological literature. One is the method of smelting iron that precolonial Igbo iron workers used. Another contentious issue concerns the technology's origins, which extend beyond Igboland and the present-day Nigeria region to encompass Africa as a whole. Thus, the aspect of the production process that is magico-religious has been disregarded.

Vos, D. 2002, *Dancing under an African Moon: Paganism and Wicca in South Africa*, Zebra Press, Cape Town.

By examining the beginnings of the neo-Pagan movement in South Africa, its influences, and the prominent figures involved, Vos (2002) expands our understanding of paganism in the country while adding to it. In addition, Vos (2002) examines the various facets of "magick," scrutinizing its heterogeneity and examining Wicca and Pagan practices in South Africa. She also talks about the important distinction between Pagan practices in the Northern and Southern Hemispheres. In order to shed light on the attitudes, beliefs, and methods of specific South African Pagans and to portray the genuine essence of Pagan and Wiccan practices in that country, Vos (2002) conducted interviews with South Africans who were actively engaged in Pagan practice.

1.2.6 Esotericism And Sex Magick

Alexandrian, S., 2015, *The Great Work of the Flesh: Sexual Magic East and West*, Simon and Schuster.

Alexandrian examines the varied customs of sexual magic from both Eastern and Western viewpoints in this book. Alexandrian explores the historical and cultural backgrounds in which sexual practices have been incorporated into spiritual and magical rituals across various traditions. He analyses the ways in which these practices are perceived as transformative procedures that utilise and enhance sexual energies in order to achieve spiritual enlightenment and personal development. The book delves into the philosophical underpinnings and ethical dilemmas associated with sexual magic. It examines the controversies surrounding this practice and the different perspectives on its effectiveness and moral implications in today's society. Alexandrian provides a comprehensive analysis of sexual magic by examining both Eastern and Western traditions. This study reveals the universal elements as well as the cultural nuances of sexual magic, emphasising its ongoing significance in esoteric practices across the globe.

The book explores the sexual rituals and practices of P. B. Randolph, Aleister Crowley, Austin Osman Spare, Julius Evola, and Maria de Naglowska. In addition, it offers a thorough examination of mediaeval love magic, including the utilisation of potions, powders, spells, and enchantments. The exploration encompasses Eastern practices of sexual magic, including Taoist sexual alchemy. Alexandrian's book highlights the intricate connection between sexuality and magic, specifically through the use of natural magic of love within sex magic, which harnesses the forces that bring lovers together. Alexandrian's research encompasses both Eastern and Western Mystery traditions, demonstrating the pervasive presence of sex magic in diverse religious, spiritual, and initiatory societies.

Barratt, B.B., 2019, 'Sexuality, Esoteric Energies, and the Subtleties of Transmutation Versus Transformation', *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies* 38(1), 166-184.

In her article, Barratt explores the intricate intersections between sexuality, esoteric energies, and the distinctions between transmutation and transformation. In addition, Barratt delves into various esoteric traditions and practices, examining how sexual energies are perceived, harnessed, and channelled towards spiritual growth and personal evolution. She critically evaluates the differences between transmutation, which involves the redirection or refinement of sexual energies towards higher states of consciousness, and transformation. Which entails a more profound and holistic change in one's being. Through an interdisciplinary approach that draws on psychology, spirituality, and esotericism, Barratt offers insights into how individuals can navigate and integrate their sexual energies in ways that contribute to spiritual development and self-realisation. Her article contributes to the understanding of human sexuality beyond conventional perspectives, highlighting its potential for transformative experiences within the framework of esoteric practices.

Bogdan, H., 2016, 'Chapter 16, Esotericism Practiced: Ritual and Performance', in in A.D. DeConick (ed.), *Religion: Secret Religion*, pp. 249-262, Macmillan Interdisciplinary Handbooks, Michigan.

In this chapter titled 'Esotericism Practiced: Ritual and Performance', Bogdan (2016) explores the practical dimensions of esotericism through the lens of ritual and performance. Bogdan examines how esoteric traditions utilise rituals as a central means of accessing spiritual knowledge, transformative experiences, and communion with divine or hidden forces. He discusses the significance of ritual practices in various esoteric traditions, highlighting their role in creating and sustaining mystical states of consciousness, fostering community

cohesion, and transmitting esoteric knowledge across generations. Bogdan also addresses the performative aspects of esoteric rituals, emphasising how practitioners enact symbolic gestures, use sacred objects, and engage in specific sequences of actions to achieve desired spiritual outcomes. Through a comprehensive analysis, Bogdan contributes to a deeper understanding of how ritual and performance constitute fundamental aspects of esoteric practice and belief systems within the broader framework of religious studies.

Dixon, J., 2022, 'Sex Magic as Sacramental Sexology: Aleister Crowley's Queer Masculinity', *Correspondences* **10(1), 17-47.**

Dixon explores the convergence of sex magic and Aleister Crowley's notion of queer masculinity in the context of sacramental sexology. In addition, Dixon explores Crowley's explicit esoteric rituals, specifically his reinterpretation of sexuality and gender roles within the framework of magic(k). The article delves into Crowley's theories regarding the profound impact of sexual rituals and their sacred essence, highlighting how these practices defied traditional norms and played a significant role in his overarching spiritual philosophy. Dixon further examines Crowley's personal investigation into gender and sexuality, emphasising the impact of his unorthodox views on masculinity on his magical practices and teachings. Dixon provides a critical analysis of Crowley's writings and rituals, examining them from the perspectives of queer theory and sexology. This interpretation focusses on Crowley's impact on sexuality, magic, and gender identity within esoteric traditions.

Drury, N., 2011, *Stealing Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Modern Western Magic***, Oxford University Press, New York.**

Drury's notable study examines the historical and cultural progression of Western magic from the Renaissance era to the present. Drury examines how magic evolved from its esoteric

roots into a sophisticated and influential cultural force, intertwined with scientific advancements, religious movements, and social changes. The book explores key figures, such as John Dee and Aleister Crowley, and discusses how their ideas and practices shaped modern magical traditions. Overall, Drury argues that Western magic has played a significant role in shaping broader cultural and intellectual trends throughout history. Drury also addresses sex magic within the broader context of esotericism and Western magical traditions. Sex magic, a practice that harnesses sexual energy for spiritual or magical purposes, is explored as part of the evolution of esotericism. Drury discusses how figures like Aleister Crowley and other occultists incorporated sexual rituals into their magical practices, viewing sexual energy as a potent force for transformation and spiritual enlightenment. The book situates sex magic within the continuum of esoteric practices, illustrating its role in the broader tapestry of Western magical thought and its implications for understanding human spirituality and consciousness.

DuQuette, L.M., 1994, The Magick of Thelema: A Handbook of the Rituals of Aleister Crowley, Weiser Books, Maine.

In this seminal work *The Magick of Thelema: A Handbook of the Rituals of Aleister Crowley*, DuQuette elucidates the intricate rituals and spiritual philosophy integral to Aleister Crowley's Thelemic tradition. This book serves as a comprehensive guide for both practitioners and scholars interested in understanding the ceremonial aspects and transformative potential of Crowley's mystical system. DuQuette meticulously outlines rituals such as "the Lesser Banishing Ritual of the Pentagram" and the "Greater Ritual of the Pentagram", offering not only practical instructions but also delving into their symbolic meanings and deeper metaphysical implications. By providing clear explanations and interpretations of these rituals, DuQuette bridges the gap between theoretical understanding and practical application within

Thelema, enhancing accessibility to Crowley's complex magical techniques. Consequently, *The Magick of Thelema* is widely regarded as a valuable resource that contributes significantly to the scholarly discourse on Western esotericism, offering insights into how the teachings of Crowley exert a lasting influence on current occult practices and spiritual ideologies.

DuQuette's book, *The Magick of Thelema: A Handbook of the Rituals of Aleister Crowley*, primarily offers a comprehensive manual for the rituals and practices that are essential to Aleister Crowley's Thelemic tradition. Aleister Crowley's ascent as a prominent figure in unconventional spirituality was firmly established by his inclusion on the album cover of The Beatles' Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band. Nevertheless, he gained greater recognition due to his provocative designations "The Beast 666" and "The Wickedest Man in the World," which attracted attention but detracted from his teachings. The author's esoteric and intricate writing style, specifically crafted for his peers rather than present-day readers, further hindered comprehension of his work. DuQuette emerged on the scene with the purpose of deciphering and elucidating Crowley's texts and important rituals. This edition, originally named "The Magick of Thelema," has undergone significant revisions, featuring substantial corrections, a fresh introduction, and the addition of the "The Rites of Eleusis" ritual. It provides a convenient introduction for readers who are interested in exploring Crowley's actual literary works beyond his exaggerated public image. DuQuette elucidates the rituals and writings of Crowley in a clear and concise manner, providing a well-organised course of study that includes practical illustrations and comprehensive interpretations of their significance. In addition, the book offers a comprehensive curriculum for examining Crowley's original writings, accompanied by a thorough list of recommended readings and precise explanatory notes.

DuQuette, L.M. & Crowley, A., 2013, *The Best of the Equinox, Sex Magick: Volume III*, Weiser Books, Maine.

In this follow-up to DuQuette's earlier publication in 1994, DuQuette (2013) delves further into the intricate realm of Aleister Crowley's esoteric discipline known as sex magick. This practice involves the utilisation of sexual energy and sacred rituals to attain elevated levels of consciousness. This practice, which has been kept secret for many centuries, is believed to have ancient origins, with certain scholars tracing its lineage back to prominent figures such as Jesus and Mary Magdalene. Crowley, a prominent 20th-century English occultist and leader of the O.T.O., was intrigued by sex magick, a practice that has been transmitted through different secretive organisations such as the Knights Templar, Rosicrucians, and Freemasons before reaching the O.T.O. He devoted a substantial amount of his life to exploring its enigmas, convinced that it held the solution to unveiling the mysteries of the universe. "Sex Magick" is a compilation of Crowley's writings specifically focused on the subject. It includes notable works such as "The Gnostic Mass," "Energised Enthusiasm," "Grimorium Sanctissimum," "Star Sapphire," "Liber Ash," "Liber Chath," and "Liber Stellae Rubeae." Curated by DuQuette, an esteemed scholar and Deputy Grandmaster General of the O.T.O., this volume compiles a wide range of sources, including both commonly accessible and scarce materials. It offers a comprehensive anthology of Crowley's profound understanding and teachings on the subject of sex magick.

Furthermore, DuQuette specifically examines the subject of sex magick within the wider framework of Crowley's teachings. This compilation encompasses Crowley's writings on sex magick, featuring notable works like "The Gnostic Mass," "Energised Enthusiasm," and "Grimorium Sanctissimum," among others. The book showcases Crowley's profound

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observations, ceremonial practices, and conceptual frameworks concerning the utilisation of sexual energy for spiritual and mystical objectives. Curated by DuQuette, this book offers a comprehensive overview of Crowley's exploration of sex magick, drawing from diverse sources. It showcases the theoretical foundations and practical applications of sex magick as seen from Crowley's perspective. 'The Magick of Thelema' provides a comprehensive examination of Crowley's rituals and their practical use, whereas 'The Best of the Equinox, Sex Magick: Volume III' specifically delves into Crowley's writings and teachings on sex magick, offering a specialised exploration of this specific facet of his mystical philosophy.

Lycourinos, D., 2017, 'Sexuality, Magic(k) and the Ritual Body: A Phenomenology of Embodiment and Participation in a Modern Magical Ritual', *Journal of Ritual Studies* **31(2), 61-77.**

In this unique contribution, Lycourinos (2017) explores in his article, the experiential dimensions of sexuality and magic within the context of modern magical practices. In addition to this, Lycourinos employs a phenomenological approach to investigate how participants embody and engage with ritualistic experiences that integrate sexuality and magical symbolism. Examining the transformative potential of these rituals, he highlights how they facilitate altered states of consciousness, personal empowerment, and spiritual growth through embodied participation. Furthermore, Lycourinos also discusses the role of symbolism, performance, and sensory perception in shaping ritual experiences, emphasising the significance of bodily engagement in accessing deeper layers of meaning and potential transcendence. His study offers incredible insights into the intersection of sexuality, magic, and ritual embodiment, contributing to a broader understanding of contemporary mystical practices and their significance in modern spirituality.

Mayer, G., 2010, 'Modern Magical Practice: Models – Techniques – Schools', *Grenzgebiete der Wissenschaft* **59(2), 99-134.**

This translated article of Mayer, delves deeply into the intricate realm of magic, tracing its historical development and dissecting its modern applications. One of the focal points of this exploration is the intersection of magic with sex magick and esotericism, shedding light on how these practices are interwoven into the fabric of contemporary occult movements. Through an in-depth analysis, the text elucidates Aleister Crowley's seminal definition of magic as the act of causing change in conformity with will and delves into the various techniques employed in magical practices such as invocations, divinations, ceremonial magic, and sigil magic. Drawing inspiration from Hindu tantric teachings, the text also unveils the profound influence of sexual magic on the occult landscape. Furthermore, it scrutinizes the evolution of magical-occult movements like "cybermagic" (see Mayer 2010:12-13) and "chaos magic" (see Mayer 2010:19-21), emphasising the innovative approaches that challenge traditional beliefs and practices in magic. Ultimately, the text underscores the diverse array of techniques and models used in modern magical practice to materialise intentions through altered states of consciousness, heralding a future that builds upon these evolving trends in the mystical realm.

Pearson, J., 2007, *Wicca and the Christian Heritage: Ritual, Sex, and Magick*, **Routledge, New York.**

In her book, Pearson (2007) examines the roles of sex magic and esotericism within the context of Wiccan practices and beliefs. The book explores how Wicca incorporates elements of sex magic, which involves the use of sexual energy and symbolism to achieve spiritual goals and transformation. Pearson discusses how Wiccans view sexuality as a sacred and natural force, often integrated into rituals aimed at fostering personal

empowerment, spiritual connection, and magical potency. Esotericism, in the context of Wicca, encompasses the hidden or mystical aspects of the tradition, including its rituals, symbols, and teachings that are not readily accessible to outsiders. Pearson explores how esoteric knowledge and practices are transmitted within Wiccan circles, emphasizing the importance of initiation, secrecy, and the cultivation of inner wisdom. Esotericism in Wicca also includes the exploration of mystical experiences, connections with deity or spiritual entities, and the pursuit of spiritual evolution through magical practices. Throughout the book, Pearson situates Wicca within a broader historical and cultural context, discussing its roots in ancient pagan traditions, its relationship with Christianity, and its adaptation in modern Western society. By examining the themes of sex magic and esotericism, Pearson offers a deeper understanding of how these elements contribute to the spiritual worldview and practices of contemporary Wicca, highlighting their significance in rituals, beliefs, and the cultivation of personal and collective spiritual experiences.

Urban, H.B., 2004a, 'Magia Sexualis: Sex, Secrecy, and Liberation in Modern Western Esotericism', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* **72(3), 695-731.**

In this article, Urban (2004) explores the complex relationship between sexuality, secrecy, and liberation within the context of modern Western esotericism. Furthermore, Urban investigates how esoteric traditions and movements have utilised sexual practices and symbolism as a means of achieving spiritual enlightenment and personal transformation. He examines various historical and contemporary esoteric groups, revealing how they have incorporated sexual rituals and teachings into their spiritual practices, often in secretive and clandestine ways. Urban's analysis also addresses the controversies and ethical considerations surrounding these practices, highlighting their potential for both liberation and exploitation. By exploring the intersection of sexuality and spirituality through the lens

of esotericism, Urban offers a nuanced perspective on the role of sexual mysticism in the quest for spiritual autonomy and transcendence in modern Western societies.

Urban, H.B., 2004b, 'The Beast with Two Backs: Aleister Crowley, Sex Magic and the Exhaustion of Modernity', *Nova Religio* 7(3), 7-25.

Urban's article 'The Beast with Two Backs: Aleister Crowley, Sex Magic and the Exhaustion of Modernity' provides a detailed exploration of Aleister Crowley's controversial practices and philosophies regarding sex magic, situated within the context of modernity. Crowley, a prominent figure in Western esotericism, advocated for the use of sexual rituals as a means to achieve spiritual enlightenment and personal transformation. Urban (2004b) examines how Crowley's approach challenged traditional norms and taboos surrounding sexuality, positioning sex magic as a pathway to liberation from societal constraints. In addition, Urban explores Crowley's rituals, which often involved intricate symbolism and elaborate ceremonial practices aimed at harnessing sexual energy for mystical purposes. Furthermore, the article also discusses Crowley's philosophical framework, which viewed sexual union as a potent tool for transcending mundane consciousness and accessing higher spiritual realms. In addition to this, Urban addresses the broader implications of Crowley's teachings on modernity, suggesting that his emphasis on individual liberation through sex magic reflects a critique of modern society's limitations and its suppression of primal human instincts.

As such, Urban explores how Crowley's ideas on sex magic intersect with broader trends in spirituality and psychology during the early 20th century. He examines the reception of Crowley's work, both within esoteric circles and in mainstream culture, highlighting its influence on subsequent generations of occultists and spiritual seekers. Ultimately, Urban's

analysis offers a nuanced understanding of Crowley's legacy, illustrating how his provocative teachings on sex magic continue to provoke discussion and controversy in the study of Western esotericism and alternative spirituality.

Urban H. B., 2006, Magia Sexualis: Sex, Magic, and Liberation in Modern Western Esotericism, University of California Press, Los Angeles.

Urban (2006) explores the intricate connections between sexuality, magic, and liberation within the framework of modern Western esoteric traditions. In addition, Urban delves into the historical and cultural contexts in which esoteric movements have integrated sexual practices and beliefs into their spiritual teachings. He examines how these practices are understood as transformative and liberating experiences, emphasising their role in achieving higher states of consciousness and spiritual enlightenment. Moreover, Urban also critically evaluates the ethical implications and controversies surrounding sexual magic within esoteric communities, addressing issues of power dynamics, secrecy, and the boundaries between liberation and exploitation. Through a scholarly analysis that draws on anthropology, history, and religious studies, "Magia Sexualis" offers a comprehensive exploration of the intersection of sexuality and mysticism in contemporary Western spirituality.

Urban, H.B., 2008, 'The yoga of sex: Tantra, orientalism, and sex magic in the Ordo Templi Orientis', in W.J. Hanegraaff and J.J. Kripal (eds.) *Hidden Intercourse: Eros and Sexuality in the History of Western Esotericism*, pp. 401-443, Brill Academic, Boston.

In this chapter, "The Yoga of Sex: Tantra, Orientalism, and Sex Magic in the Ordo Templi Orientis," which appears in the anthology *Hidden Intercourse: Eros and Sexuality in the History of Western Esotericism*, Urban (2008) engages an exploration on how the *Ordo Templi Orientis (OTO)* and other Western esoteric traditions have integrated Tantra and sex magick into their practices. Urban therefore delves extensively into the historical development and cultural appropriations of Tantra within Western occultism, particularly how Orientalist interpretations influenced these traditions. In addition, this chapter thus situates Tantra, not merely as a set of sexual practices, but as a complex spiritual and philosophical system originating in South Asian traditions. In addition, Urban explains how Western esoteric groups, including the OTO, interpreted and adapted Tantra to fit their own mystical and ritualistic frameworks. Further, Urban examines the philosophical underpinnings, ritual practices, and ethical considerations surrounding the incorporation of sexual rites within these esoteric movements. Moreover, Urban also contextualises these practices within the broader debates involving Orientalism, cultural appropriation, and the Western fascination with Eastern spirituality. Through analysing the historical trajectory of Tantra's reception in Western esotericism, Urban's research sheds light on how these traditions have negotiated and transformed spiritual and sexual practices across cultural boundaries. Overall, the chapter contributes to a deeper understanding of the intersections between spirituality, sexuality, and cultural exchanges within the context of Western esoteric movements, offering insights into both the historical development and contemporary implications of these practices.

Urban, H. B., 2016, '36. Sexuality', in Magee, G. (ed.), The Cambridge Handbook of Western Mysticism and Esotericism, pp. 429-440, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

In his contribution titled "Sexuality" in "The Cambridge Handbook of Western Mysticism and Esotericism," Urban (2016) examines the multifaceted roles of sexuality within the context of Western mysticism and esotericism. Urban explores how various esoteric traditions and movements have interpreted and integrated sexual symbolism, practices, and energies as pathways to spiritual realisation and transformation. He discusses historical developments and contemporary perspectives on sexual mysticism, addressing its philosophical foundations, ritualistic expressions, and ethical implications within esoteric communities. Urban's chapter also contributes to a deeper understanding of how sexuality has been perceived and utilised as a means of achieving mystical insights and transcendent experiences throughout Western esoteric history. Although, what remains clear from Urban's contributions is his exclusive focus on Western traditions: thereby excluding the wealth of esoteric discourse in traditions located in non-Western contexts.

Van Raalte, G., 2015, 'Tea, Scones and Socially Responsible Sex Magic: The Egalitarian Occultism of Dion Fortune', PhD Thesis, Department of Religion Studies, Faculty of Humanities, Universiteit van Amsterdam.

Van Raalte (2015) delves deep into the work of 20th century occultist Dion Fortune, and her exploration of sexual magic and sublimation as transformative tools for personal and societal growth. In addition to this, Van Raalte highlights the potency of sexuality as a force for personal development and social change, emphasising the need to channel sexual energy towards higher spiritual aims. Moreover, Fortune's approach to magic focuses on the spiritual and emotional transformation that can be achieved through the sublimation of physical

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desires, advocating for a deeper understanding and acceptance of one's own sexuality before engaging in magical practices. By integrating psychological, spiritual, and ethical dimensions, Van Raalte via Fortune's work, presents a comprehensive perspective on occult practices that encourages individuals to harness the power of sexual energy for personal fulfilment and contribute to the betterment of society as a whole.

1.3 Relevance: A Conversation Between The West, East And Africa About Sexuality And Self-Knowledge As Post-Theistic Spirituality

The above literature review indicates not only how complex the esoteric spiritual discourse is, but also exemplifies the necessity in comparatively understanding the interpolations of these vastly different - yet distinctly similar - paradigms. This review becomes relevant in displaying that there is clearly a distinction to be made between discourses pertaining to the East, West and Africa. However, the challenge lies in distinguishing these various geographical paradigms from one another and highlighting their independence from one another, respectively. From the above literature review, it is also noteworthy that there is an enormous *lacuna* in the study of esotericism, sex magick, and self-knowledge from a non-Western vantage point. All of the above point to the irrevocable vastness and complexity of this study. Not only is defining esotericism disputed, but the entire discourse surrounding geographical markers. Due to the fact that we are invariably dealing with intangible constructs and discourse.

Furthermore, this literature review not only displays the vastness of the literature available when approaching esoteric discourses in the West, East, and Africa respectively, but also reveals an intellectual hegemony from the West. In addition, upon delving deeper (with

specificity) into the discourse on the erotic in conjunction with esotericism: the above literature review showcases the aforementioned remarkable lacuna in recognising the value and contribution of such a fundamental aspect (namely, sexuality) to esoteric spirituality and its interrelatedness to unlocking knowledge about oneself. Thus, this literature review provides an important opportunity, adding to the global diversification of esotericism, as well as how sexuality forms an integral part of a post-theistic spirituality. What remains clear is that there is possibly no single identifiable tradition *per se*. Although, via comparative discourse beyond (exclusively) religionist and perennial lenses unique iterations of esoteric discourses by way of sexuality and spirituality practices can be identified.

Therefore, this thesis' exploration is not only limited to an exclusive religion study, but also touches on fundamental disciplines within the humanities. In order to elucidate a comprehensive trajectory for a systematic study of esoteric discourses, comparatively, within relative socio-cultural frameworks within the West, East, and Africa. However, the discussion does not end there, the unique contribution that this thesis therefore makes is one that redefines current scholarship's understanding of esotericism in and of itself. Not connecting it to either marginalised, hidden, or rejected knowledge, but rather associating it with secret knowledge within the self; to which the key lies within the sacredness of the sexual experience as vehicle for a completely novel esoteric spirituality.

1.4 Conclusion

The objective of this chapter was to offer a comprehensive introduction to the goals and reasoning behind the thesis, along with a succinct overview of the existing literature in the field and the subjects addressed in the following chapters. Moreover, the objective of this research is to guide the reader through an exploration of discussions and perspectives that are typically regarded as socially unacceptable or forbidden. Consequently, we must engage in profound and intimate conversations regarding crucial matters that pertain to our fundamental essence and existence as individuals. There have been extensive debates throughout human history regarding topics such as sex, eroticism, and spirituality, including their interconnections and whether they are mutually exclusive. These debates have encompassed topics that range from indecent to holy, and they have been recorded in diverse scholarly perspectives.

This thesis aims to eradicate the divisions between conventional discussions of "sacred" and "profane" by merging them into the classifications of esotericism and self-knowledge. Moreover, it is imperative to acknowledge that the notion of "the self" (and even sexuality) is often disregarded in conversations about religion and spirituality. Academic discussions on religious currents and dogma often fail to acknowledge the significance of the individual in relation to the expression of the sacred. This is supported by the fact that this topic is given minimal attention in the literature reviewed in this chapter. Moreover, the literature review clearly shows that there are significantly fewer methods that, independently, raise an individual's existence to a divine level (excluding esotericism). Consequently, the enigmatic and spiritual elements of our individual existence are often substituted with a more outward (exoteric) and abstract notion of divinity.

The purpose of this thesis is to reassess traditional religious narratives by considering post-theistic spirituality as an alternative. These narratives restrict individual spirituality to rigid beliefs, hindering the open exploration of mystical and transcendental experiences that are commonly found in ancient religious and spiritual practices. The aim of this thesis is to extensively examine the obscure characteristics of religious frameworks in the Western, Eastern, and African regions, along with their associations with the self and esotericism. The ultimate objective is to acknowledge non-Western esoteric discourses. This thesis aims to enable investigations into the esoteric aspects of spirituality by fearlessly exploring the origins and development of primal spiritual practices, ultimately leading towards post-theism. This thesis proposes that investigations into the physical body and sensuality, akin to the sacred quest for freedom, unveil latent self-awareness that was previously concealed.

Essentially, the objective of this thesis is to eradicate the negative connotations and fears linked to the less prevalent religious and spiritual movements examined in this research. To achieve this, it is necessary to clarify and explain the meaning of alien religious and spiritual terms such as "the occult," "occultism," and "magick," especially in the context of sexuality (referred to as "sex magick"). This will result in a more transparent and knowledgeable dialogue regarding otherwise esoteric contemporary religious and spiritual manifestations.

1.5 Structure Of Study

1.5.1 Chapter 1

Chapter One serves as an illustration of the background, methodology and motivation for the study, along with providing much needed definitions for the approaches taken in formulating this discourse on esotericism. The task here is to begin painting a picture of the origins and historical background of human sexuality in general, and what dominant *zeitgeist* and attitude

exist towards sex and sexuality in geographical contexts like the West, East and Africa. This Chapter will also be dedicated to juxtaposing the notions of spirituality and religion. As well as giving mention to which individual religio-spiritual traditions will be discussed in this study and used as brief examples. The goal here is to set the stage; to provide a framework for how the study will be approached by illustrating along with the necessary definitions, the research problem, an overview of existing literature, the research contribution as well as the methodology.

1.5.2 Chapter 2

Chapter Two initiates with an exploration of esotericism, sexuality, and esoteric spirituality, setting the trajectory for the thesis. The discourse on esotericism identifies it as a contested area within academic scholarship, characterised either as rejected or hidden knowledge accessible only to initiates. This concept encompasses diverse mystical traditions outside mainstream religio-spiritual discourse, reflecting a globalised approach to esoteric scholarship. The chapter then delves into the intersection of esotericism and sexuality through seminal figures like Sigmund Freud and Michel Foucault. Freud's psychoanalytic theories on sexuality and identity formation are foundational, while Foucault's historical-philosophical analysis traces the evolution of sexuality in Western society, revealing its enduring taboo and liberatory dimensions. Furthermore, the chapter distinguishes esoteric spirituality from conspirituality and transcendentalism in the digital age. It explores esoteric discourse through theocentric, anthropocentric, and transcendentalist lenses, referencing key thinkers such as Alan Watts, Mircea Eliade, and Aleister Crowley. The discussion culminates in defining esoteric spirituality as a transformative path toward secret self-knowledge, encompassing both Right-Hand Path and Left-Hand Path philosophies. Overall, this chapter establishes a comprehensive framework for understanding the nuanced

intersections of esotericism, sexuality, and spirituality, laying the groundwork for subsequent explorations in the thesis.

1.5.3 Chapter 3

Chapter Three of this thesis will explore the complex task of defining a uniquely Western 'brand' of esotericism. Initially posited as a theoretical endeavour, this pursuit faces challenges due to the contentious nature of the epistemology itself. Despite this, the chapter proposes an alternative approach by tracing the origins of primordial Western religions, such as Paganism and the Occult, which not only embody distinct spiritual and erotic expressions, but also underpin what could be construed as mystical experiences. Central to this exploration is the concept of spirituality as a conduit between the individual and mystical insights into the self, cosmos, and existence, thereby forming the basis of Western esotericism. The chapter acknowledges that esotericism is not exclusive to the West, with many traditions and knowledge systems borrowed globally from the East and Africa. Despite efforts to identify Western currents, the migratory nature of cultures complicates this distinction. Nonetheless, notable Western discourses on esotericism, such as that of Aleister Crowley, Helena Blavatsky, and Eliphas Levi reveal a synthesis rather than a pure expression of Western heritage. In addition, the origins of the concept of "the self" in the West will be introduced from a philosophical vantage point, as important concept in the study of Esotericism.

1.5.4 Chapter 4

Chapter Four will explore in greater depth the exact nature of Eastern esoteric sexual-spiritual practices and how the body is perceived to be spiritual (or connects us to the spiritual). This chapter explores the East-West divide in esotericism, addressing Orientalism, Occidentalism, and colonialism. It examines how esotericism manifests differently in the East (versus the

West), influenced by modern European thought (Eurocentrism) that marginalised and fetishised Eastern wisdom. Edward Said and other scholars are critiqued for inadvertently polarising discussions on the East, leading to a heated debate over its definition and geographical boundaries. This chapter will argue that Western idealisation of the mystical East perpetuated myths and fetishisation, particularly regarding India, as a cradle of ancient wisdom. It emphasises esotericism as a universal thought system transcending geographical boundaries, highlighting its transmission across migratory cultures. The discussion here also explores ritualistic sexuality as evidenced in diverse cultures from Egypt to Asia, reflecting esoteric practices aimed at discovering hidden self-knowledge and enlightenment. This chapter will also reflect on eastern philosophical constructs of selfhood towards understanding "self-knowledge" from influential thinkers on this subject.

1.5.5 Chapter 5

Chapter Five explores African esotericism within Africana studies, offering a less explored perspective in esoteric scholarship. It argues that Africa, often overlooked due to a Western-centric focus, shares colonial intersections with the East, thus remaining underrepresented in scholarly discourse. The chapter advocates for acknowledging Africa's significant cultural contributions to global esotericism, challenging hegemonic Western categorisations. Central to the chapter is the establishment of Africa within esotericism, highlighting unique manifestations in African religion, sexuality, and spirituality. It examines ritual practices in traditions such as Sufi Islam as unique African construct, African American Conjure, and South African indigenous religions like *iZangoma*, illustrating diverse Africana esoteric traditions. Recognising the impossibility of an exhaustive historiography within this chapter, discussions provide introductory insights rather than definitive narratives. The term 'African' is critiqued for its lack of homogeneity, acknowledging diverse identities and the misuse of

racial classifications under systems like Apartheid in South Africa. Moreover, the chapter engages with themes of slavery in the United States, European colonialism, and the creolisation of the Caribbean, aiming to avoid perpetuating Eurocentric or perennialist interpretations of African religious traditions, identities, and cultures. Overall, Chapter Five enriches esoteric scholarship by integrating *Africana* perspectives as well as including conversations on "the self" from seminal thinkers within African philosophy, thereby broadening the discourse on global esotericism and cultural diversity.

1.5.6 Chapter 6

Chapter 6, the concluding chapter of this PhD thesis titled "Secret Self-Knowledge: Considering Sex Magick as Post-Theistic Spirituality in Eastern, Western, and African Esotericism," will serve as a synthesis for understanding post-theistic spirituality as a construct through the lens of esoteric practices discussed in previous chapters. Chapters Three (Western), Four (Eastern), and Five (African) have explored how traditions conceptualise and practice "sex magick" as a means of attaining hidden self-knowledge and spiritual enlightenment. Furthermore, this chapter aims to establish a trajectory for understanding post-theism, building upon discussions introduced in the preceding chapters. Exploring how esoteric practices, particularly sex magick, transcend traditional theistic frameworks, by emphasising personal gnosis, direct experiential engagement with the divine, and the transformative potential of ritualised sexuality. In addition, this chapter will include concluding remarks, as well as highlighting the limitations of the research and areas for potential future research.

CHAPTER 2

Methodological Frameworks: Esotericism, Sexuality, And Spirituality

2.1 Introduction

The concept of "esotericism" is relatively new to scientific discourse (see Bergunder 2010:9), even though the term has been used by practitioners since the 18th century, mainly referring to ideas which were mainly Christian, or Pagan (interpreted by Christians), in addition to this, Hanegraaff proposes that since the 18th century the traditional artes or scientiae of practices like astrology, natural magick and even alchemy were considered 'secret' or 'occult' sciences and regarded as 'rejected knowledge' (Hanegraaff 2012:156-157 cf. Pasi 2013:203-205). In the 20th century, however, it developed as a scientific field in its own right, following a theological path which was introduced back in the 17th century (Zander 2021:14). Today, Esotericism is nigh inseparable from its Western context, which according to Strube (2021b), has assisted in drawing the borders of the field regarding its emergence and earlier stages, although – despite the fact that the "Western" demarcation is a volatile concept in and of itself. Strube also argues the term has become an impediment to the further establishment of esoteric scholarship (Strube 2021b:45-46). This chapter will therefore endeavour to provide definitions- and explore the origins as well as development of esotericism by defining the paradigms for esoteric sexuality and spirituality.

2.2 Esotericism: Towards A Concise Definition

Within the last 10-15 years, esotericism established itself in the field of religious studies, thanks to the pioneering contributions made by the Universities in Amsterdam and Paris where it played a prominent role (Von Stuckrad 2016:172). French historian, Antoine Faivre as well as being credited with the founding of scholarly discourse pertaining to Western esotericism (Hanegraaff, *et al.* 2005:340 cf. Mahlamäki & Leskelä-Kärki 2018:1-3) has also been accoladed as one of the greatest contributors to the Western esoteric field (Bubello 2020:220). Faivre (2010) offers five meanings for the word esotericism: Firstly, it is "everything that exudes a scent of mystery" which refers to Oriental (Asian) wisdom traditions like yoga, astrology, and other divinatory arts (cf. Ogren 2020:71-77). Secondly, it is being synonymous with the term "initiatic" which refers to the discipline of the arcane: jealously guarded secrets purposefully kept hidden; drawing a distinction between the 'initiated' and 'profane' (see Hanegraaff 2016:161-164).

Thirdly, it is used synonymously with Occult philosophy: the implication of occult signatures in nature – for example, invisible relationships between metals, stars, and plants or human history (see Forshaw 2014:34). (Not that these phenomena are deliberately kept hidden, but merely that they are hidden in the sense that they contain meanings inaccessible to the profane). Fourthly, it is much akin to "Gnosis" as a mode of knowledge focused on the experiential, mythical and symbolic (see Burns 2018:17-21), as opposed to forms and expressions of a discursive or dogmatic order. And finally, fifth, the traditionalist school or perennialism and the quest for a primordial tradition (see Huxley 2012:5-9); the teaching of ways that permit attainment of knowledge or restoration of this tradition (cf. Faivre & Rhone 2010:1-3).

Moreover, Faivre's (1992) consideration (definition) of esotericism as a "form of thought" is best summarised in his "six predicates", four of which he considers acting as essential building blocks for a definition of esotericism (see Faivre 1992:xv-xx). These predicates are: 1) Correspondences, representing the interconnectedness of that which is visible and invisible; 2) Living Nature; 3) Imagination and mediation serving as a lens for intersectional correspondence, with imagination being the catalyst of 4) Transmutation, leading to the capturing of gnosis or 'secret' knowledge; while 5) Concordance and finally, 6) Transmission – the last two of the six – which are extrinsic (exoteric) factors and therefore their presence or absence do not necessarily influence esoteric discourse.

Yet, even though such paradigms are useful in delineating many (albeit not all) esoteric manifestations (cf. Faivre & Voss 1995:49-50), Hanegraaff (2004) in acknowledgement of Faivre's (1992) analytical framework, however criticises this idea of correspondence being an intrinsic (therefore esoteric) criterion, calling it severely compromised under a mechanical and positivistic worldview dependent on instrumental causality (Hanegraaf 2004:508), highlighting Hermetic-origin conceptualisations of "enchantment" and therefore neglecting other modern (19th to 20th century) currents in esoteric scholarship like the secularising responses of not only esotericism, but religion in general and diminishes the importance of these currents in the discourse while restricting the definitive paradigms of esotericism with Hanegraaff suggesting an alternative definition for esotericism being a "form of thought" (see Hanegraaff 1995:106 cf. Finley, *et al.* 2014: 348-351).

Furthermore, even though the field of esotericism has been highly influenced by historical constellations in early modern Europe, since Faivre's demarcations, the esoteric field has even developed beyond Hanegraaff who approached it as "rejected knowledge" or "thought

form" (Hanegraaff 2019:145-146). Even Von Stuckrad who regards it as "special knowledge" (Von Stuckrad 2015:18 cf. Hanegraaff 1995:106-107). As noted elsewhere, Masaeli coincides with Faivre and Hanegraaff in his approach, regarding that esotericism involves "hidden" or "secret knowledge" pertaining to "innermost" or "spiritual consciousness" via mystical, speculative and transpersonal approaches to religious belief (Masaeli 2017:1-2). However, according to Mühlematter and Zander, adding a completely new consideration (or rather, criticism) to the discourse: esotericism ought rather to be considered as an intrinsic part of hegemonic cultures and not, as formerly suggested; a separate, miniscule, secretive or even occult field of certain minority groups (Mühlematter & Zander 2021:1).

2.2.1 History And Development Of Esoteric Discourse

Before Faivrean scholarship, according to Von Stuckrad, the esoteric tradition already began taking form during the Middle Ages in Islam (Von Stuckrad 2010:26). Saif agrees with this; however, she argues that based on principles, epistemological paradigms and social orientations, esotericism in Islam has an earlier demarcation pointing strongly towards at least the 9th century CE (Saif 2021:67-68). Eventually, esotericism was adopted by Christian theologians and philosophers who were of the opinion that this stream of thought would offer ultimate truth to fundamental questions about the structure of creation, the universe, the road to salvation and humanity's place in the cosmos along with the occult (here considered as 'hidden') powers of nature (Von Stuckrad 2010:26-30). In a later publication, Von Stuckrad however adds that construction of a historical timeline (pertaining to the origins of Esotericism) is difficult, due to the fact that scholars like Faivre, Hanegraaff along with von Stuckrad – collectively considered as the 'fathers' of esoteric scholarship (Von Stuckrad 2015:21 cf. Trompf 2019:37-38), individually differ on the point of esotericism being a product of the post-

medieval period. Von Stuckrad counters this by positing that it had already began taking shape before - or during the Medieval 'dark-ages', with many 15th century esoteric discourses in the European Renaissance, owing their origins to said period (see Von Stuckrad 2010:21-23 cf. Von Stuckrad 2015:17). According to Neugebauer-Wölk the term "esotericism" first appeared in a 17th century German text about the ancient Pythagoreans titled Esoterik des Ordens or "Esotericism of the Order" and ever since its mention remained very scarce for an unknown period of time (Neugebauer-Wölk 2013:41).

Von Stuckrad maintains, that these historical timelines could not be the only sources, when chronologically considering the origins of esotericism, because it has a far (older) richer history (Von Stuckrad 2015:17). On the other side of this timeline, are considerations of what we now understand terminologically as "esoteric" and "exoteric" (see Versluis 2007:8-9). Melzer describes the latter as explicit, obvious, and apparent as opposed to esoteric reading which he describes as not being a science, but an art (Melzer 2015:293-296). These ideas were already conceptualised during late antiquity c. 600-1300, with early examples being mysticism (a precursor to rationality), magick (a precursor to science) and astrology (a precursor to astronomy). Moreover, Von Stuckrad, in stark agreement with Neugebauer-Wölk (2013) acknowledges that the pure linguistic construction of "esotericism" recognisably only appeared in scholarship around the 18th century in Jacques Matter's *Histoire Critique Du Gnosticisme Et De Son Influence* which was published in 1828 (Neugebauer-Wölk 2013:38-39 cf. Von Stuckrad 2015:17-19). Furthermore, specifically during the Renaissance (14th-17th century), esoteric discourse manifested in the form of two main branches: *Prisca theologica* "ancient theology" – the first branch – which held that esoteric wisdom and religion had been given to ancient sages like Zoroaster, Moses, or Hermes Trismegistus in antiquity, which had then been subjected to decline or had even been lost for a period of time (Hanegraaff 2012:7).

After the rediscovery of ancient Greek texts, it gave people the impression that they now had the opportunity to revive this knowledge. The second branch, philosophia perennis "perennial philosophy" (see Huxley 2012:5), diverted the focus more to the continuity of valid knowledge throughout all periods of human history (Hanegraaff 2012:7-9). Hanegraaff clarifies that essentially both these branches were founded on powerful principles and narratives which collectively challenged traditional de facto perspectives on the relationship between theology *vis-à-vis* philosophy, and revelation *vis-à-vis* rationality (Hanegraaff 2012:6).

Furthermore, Pasi regards that these perspectives were not necessarily historical, but rather mythical; serving to explain how certain forms of primordial wisdom travelled through time and space – eventually reaching the hands of humanity. Moreover, at that time, it was less important to focus on the details of who, what, when and where (as opposed to the illustration of a persistent easy-to-understand timeline), which if arduously pursued, the origins of this hidden and primordial knowledge can be traced as far back as even "to God himself" (Pasi 2016:146). Therefore, it is clear that he echoes Von Stuckrad (2015:17-19) in saying that to retrace a concise historical timeline regarding the usage of the term "esotericism" is difficult. Pasi thus compliments both Neugebauer-Wölk (2013:38-39) and Von Stuckrad in that since before the 18th century, practitioners (or even perhaps linguistic users) of "esotericism" did not care to define it. At the arrival of the last two decades, starting with the 19th century, we see a resurgence of the noun "occultism" in France, around the middle of the 19th century. Yet, Zander airs that it was used before then, by Eliphas Lévi (1810-1875) and that it had many points in common with the theories of empirical science (Pasi 2016:146-147; Zander 2021:14-16).

Regardless, if we are to pinpoint a timeline, the first steps of esotericism as academic discourse were taken in the 18th century, and it has mainly been preoccupied with self-critical

reflections on how the subject of academic discourse can authentically be clarified (Bergunder 2010:9-11). Hanegraaff promotes this in adding that it should be emphasised that the discourse on esotericism is inextricably linked to how we think and feel about ourselves (Hanegraaff 2012:3). However, it is also no secret that the chronology, approaches and directions of the field remain a topic of ongoing scholarly debate. In terms of theoretical epistemologies, Asprem (2021:127-129) criticises the idea of Hanegraaff (2012:156-157) that perceives the esoteric as something pertaining to the realm of "rejected (Western) knowledge" (see Hanegraaff 2016a:155), and – even though acknowledging his theoretical framework as an important developmental step in the advancement of scholarly research on esotericism – he also declares Hanegraaff's view "old news". Asprem thus supplements this criticism by proposing that the continual emphasis on the construct of esotericism being considered as "rejected knowledge", contributes to the self-marginalisation of the field, when instead it has much to learn from other social sciences (Asprem 2021:9-10 cf. Asprem & Davidsen 2017:6-7).

Asprem and Strube also postulate that there is an inflated version of this theorem, which maintains an "oppositional identity" of both the scholarly field, as well as its subject material. This not only obscures more complex developments but blurs the line between academic and insider perspectives. Furthermore, in more problematic instances, it turns the discourse on esotericism into blatant polemics (Asprem & Strube 2021:11-12). Aside from this conceptualisation, there are also scholars like Von Stuckrad who aver that esotericism – as a subject – does not exist (outside the heads of academics) and "who order topics in a particular way so that they appear to be   meaningful to them in order to analyse processes of European cultural history" (Von Stuckrad 2005:20; Bergunder 2010:9-10). Von Stuckrad builds on this notion by rejecting the idea that (Western) esotericism is an objectively

recognisable and identifiable tradition or coherent doctrinal and religious system, which can be studied as separate esoteric phenomena (Von Stuckrad 2010:xi). Among his theoretical criticisms of esotericism as a scholarly construct, he also hammers on various approaches, including that of Hanegraaff, where he regards that only a discourse-theoretical approach allows for the authentic conceptualisation and characterisation of esoteric scholarship, claiming that "esoteric discourse" is a more appropriate and useful term than "Western esotericism" in addressing structural elements within Europe from a historical perspective (Von Stuckrad 2010:45-54; Otto 2013:233-234). While Von Stuckrad has a valid objection, this chapter wishes to postulate that despite the chronological polemic, it is perhaps indeed possible to identify individual esoteric traditions in religious conjecture.

2.2.2 Esotericism And The Problem Of The 'Western' Demarcation

It comes as no surprise that academic discourse surrounding the 'Western' demarcation of esoteric scholarship is laced with polarisation over its categorisation. Examples such as Oriental esotericism (Eastern) and Africana esotericism (African) (perceivably disingenuous with a 'Western' categorisation) to which, according to scholars such as Von Stuckrad (2010: 45-54), Finley (2014:3-5) and Saif (2021:68-69), *et al*. esotericism owes much of its antiquitous roots, being neglected/marginalised due to their conflation with a Western demarcation (cf. Von Stuckrad 2015:18). This is due to the problematisation regarding regional and cultural demarcations, along with the promotion (hegemony) of certain global perspectives over others (see Saif 2019:1). Saif in a later publication, upholds this notion by arguing that non-Western currents within Esotericism are severely underplayed as a result of European appropriations and reactions to them. Moreover, she maintains that our theoretical demarcations of "West" and "East" (and also, in this case, Africa) are ever-shifting constructs

based on the political, cultural and economic Zeitgeist involving various groups of people; people who along with the migration of their goods, texts, and ideas largely follow the current of their aspirations to assimilate group power (Saif 2021:68-69).

However, Hanegraaff stated that the adjective 'Western" used in conjunction with 'esotericism' is a recent development, as it first appeared in Faivre's (1968) *Accès de l'ésotérisme occidental* foundational monograph in esoteric scholarship and has remained firmly established since 2001 (Hanegraaff 2015:56). In 1985, the French journal *ARIES Association pour la Recherche et l'Information sur l'Esotérisme* was founded by Antoine Faivre, Pierre Deghaye and Roland Edighoffer. And at first, the original series was devoted purely to the study of *l'esotérisme* without a 'Western' demarcation, however, a 'new' series emerged and was titled, *Aries: Journal for the Study of Western Esotericism* and this had much to do with what Hanegraaff referred to as a 'new research agenda' since the 1980s (Hanegraaff 2015:56-58).

This novel research agenda reflected a more general epistemological shift from predominantly "religionist" approaches in Religious Studies – which argues for scholarly rigour, while still allowing the texts and spiritual conceptualisations to speak for themselves (see Versluis 2007:12), towards 1) methodological agnosticism; a convenient approach in comparative religion research, reserving itself from making affirmative ontological statements regarding the truth or falsehood of religious belief (Rakhmanin 2017:160-161); 2) empiricism, the view that experience is the only source of knowledge, or that knowledge can only be obtained via the perception of our five senses (Hossain 2014:225-226) and lastly, 3) critical historiography, which embraces interpretations of the past, in the context of present experiences where the history of religions form the foundation of this discipline (Seiwert

2020:207-209). Therefore, because of this, Hanegraaff claimed that the 'Western' demarcation in context of the *ARIES Journal* was merely to indicate historical specificity, rather than imposing trans-historical universality, as the journal was dedicated to the study of a series of neglected paradigms in Western culture (Hanegraaff 2015:57-58).

Acknowledging that the 'Western' demarcation has sparked a polemic in recent scholarship, Hanegraaff proposes surely, if there is an independent 'Western' paradigm, logic implies that there should also be an Eastern and African esoteric study. Ought esotericism not be considered a global (rather than just 'Western') field? In theory, esotericism has always been considered as global, rather than exclusively 'Western' discourse. Yet is esotericism exclusive to only Western cultural tropes? If not, what would such a demarcation look like? And how would these currents differ from non-esoteric cultural phenomena? How would we then proceed to delineate and define 'the West' from the East and Africa – "the rest"? (Hanegraaff 2015:55-56).

Aside from this, in reference to Asprem who argued that combined evidence within Islam, Judaism and Eastern European religious, as well as cultural traditions in Indian Tantra, Yoga, Zen Buddhism, Taoist Alchemical practices, all provide a strong case for the dismissal of a 'Western' esoteric connotation (Asprem 2014:4-5). Hanegraaff maintains that strong arguments could be made for the dismissal of a Western demarcation, within esoteric discourse based on terminological and historical bases (Hanegraaff 2015:56). Moreover, especially scholars of African American religions even admit there has been some negligence in African esoteric scholarship; this developed into a novel discourse called, "*Africana* Esoteric Studies" which focuses primarily on African esoteric lore, praxis and spirituality of the African diaspora. Finley posits this notion and regards this as due to historical approaches

of privileging Christianity as normative and dominant, which fails to recognise the distinct character of and reference to Africana religion and culture (including esoteric, mystic and gnostic religious groups) as a religious subset, non-normative, derivative and also – according to some – aberrant (Finley 2014:3). These negligent approaches have been detrimental to the study of religion.

2.3 Towards A Framework For Sexuality

2.3.1 Psychology: Freud, Psychoanalysis And The Libido

When endeavouring towards studying sex and sexuality (in general), it is important to note the discursive nuance between these two terms: sex and sexuality are both vital components to the study of human existence, as they both deal with identity, pleasure and procreation. In an esoteric sense, sexuality is but one of the most – if not the most – prominent examples of the many transpersonal pathways used to pursue enlightenment; often largely ignored and denied by scientists (Barratt 2019:2-3). According to Ventriglio and Bhugra, sexual behaviours and orientations owe its complexity to the fact that they have an inextricable connection to mental health (Ventriglio & Bhugra 2019:30-32). Moreover certain (nonbinary/monogamous) sexual orientations and pursuits are often discriminated against or censored by particular religious or political Zeitgeist (Ventriglio & Bhugra 2019:32-33 cf. FRA 2020:23-28). Other sexual deviations such as Zoophilia, Hebephilia and Paedophilia, et alia are considered perverse (Airaksinen 2019:202-203) or pathological, and subsequently require medical attention. Aside from this, it should also be acknowledged that sexuality, as a phenomenon, imputes a multiplicitous and precarious discourse on a continuum of behaviours, thoughts, fantasies, attractions and acts that are not necessarily always procreative endeavours (Ventriglio & Bhugra 2019:30-31). In this section, the author aims to

identify relevant approaches to the concepts of "sex" and "sexuality" by considering the aforementioned terms (used interchangeably) within the parameters of influential psychological, anthropological and sociological perspectives, towards delineating it as an esoteric phenomenon.

According to Sigmund Freud and his 'Psychoanalytic Theory' on sex, aside from it being considered the oldest and most influential theory on sexuality in the field, Freud believed that human behaviour is driven by two factors: sex and death. His theory deems sexual life and instincts as libido (Freud 1920:8) which is a term that is still used to this day, and his *Drei Abhandlungen zur Sexualtheorie* (Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality), is regarded as a founding text of Psychoanalysis in and of itself (Van Haute & Westerink 2020:1). Freud believed that the personality consists of three parts: firstly, with the "id" as our most basic personality trait, containing instincts such as the libido (see Stoléru 2014:4-5) which serves as nomenclature for the sexual impulse/drive. The "id" operates according to the pleasure principle, which means that it seeks gratification and fulfilment of its needs. Second to the "id" is the ego which restrains the "id" to reality in order to avoid self-destruction. Thirdly and finally, is the super-ego, which is also synonymous with our human conscience, whose purpose it is to persuade the ego not to do what is realistic but rather that which is moral (Lehmiller 2018:77-78).

Rather than crediting Freud with the invention of what is considered 'modern sexuality', according to Haute and Westerink, Freud can most definitely be credited with the founding of a novel form of psychological discourse about sex and sexuality in which the ideas pertaining to the inter-polarity of erotic fantasy and behaviour could well be appreciated as a more frank and profound conceptualisation thereof (Haute & Westerink 2020:x). Especially

in considering his predecessor Richard von Krafft-Ebing (1886) who's work *Psychopathia Sexualis: Eine klinisch-forensische Studie* (Sexual Psychopathy: A Clinical-Forensic Study) attracted significant attention at its time of publication in 1886; diluting the discourse on sexuality with his discursive approach being that of disgust. Whereas Freud, most considerably, appreciates the fact that the non-procreative endeavour of sexuality and sex, ought not to be dismissed as inherently abhorrent and perverse pathological indulgences, but rather that all human beings enjoy a healthy (and complex) sexual life, filled with infantile wishes and anxieties (Haute & Westerink 2020:x-xi). Another important factor to recognise in Freud's 'metapsychological' approach to sexuality is his dichotomy of *Eros* (the life instinct) and *Thanatos* (the death instinct) as the two most prominent drives of human behaviour. At the beginning of the 19th century, German philosophy displayed a return to ancient Greek esthetical ideals (cf. Ure 2015:1-17), perceived as the epitome of morality; believing that the concept of puritanism conflicted with human nature, which tends to have a more irrational and obscure side. In ancient Greece, the body of the warrior was perceived to be the ideal physique: a definitive model for the great sculptors of the day (see Brannvall 2020:1-9).

Another important facet of Greek culture was the Dionysian celebrations; orgies showcasing that man had a hidden animalistic side, which had to be permitted to manifest itself on certain occasions. Other Greek gods like *Apollo*, *Demeter*, and *Persephone*, *et alia* were considered to be the epitomes of duality – the troubling conflict between the rational and the irrational, conscious and sub-conscious, light and dark, life and death. It is also indisputable that the Greeks refrained from setting clear boundaries between these dichotomies. Freud appears to have understood these dualities of man; not just as physician, but also as avid connoisseur of ancient (Greek) mythology and philosophy (Dumitrescu 2013:295-296).

2.3.2 *Eros* And *Thanatos*

One of Freud's most notable theories in the psychology of sexuality, is his dichotomy of Eros (the human life-drive) and Thanatos (the human death-drive) which can be understood as two poles forming Freud's metapsychology of that which constitutes a human being: firstly, the internal drive towards fulfilment *vis-à-vis* the external drive towards self-preservation; both these terms can be seen as complimentary and conflicting (Kli 2018:69). Moreover, Freud's Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920) considers that humans seek to avoid unpleasant stimuli towards achieving satisfaction, and in Freud's view, the individual psyche is in constant dissonance between recollection (anamnesis) of the integral satisfaction (embodied by the pleasure principle) and in contrast, the abandonment of this ideal towards the pursuit of reality and self-maintenance (or preservation) (Freud 1920:xx cf. Akhtar & O'Neill 2011:21-22).

Therefore, this conflict often results in the replacement of gratification by the feeling of lack and repression, in which case, this restriction is considered necessary for survival (Kli 2018:69-70). Yet, as Marcuse a prominent and influential critic of Freud's inquired, "Does *Eros*, in spite of all the evidence, in the last analysis work in the service of the death instinct, and is life really only one long "detour to death"?... *Eros* is defined as the great unifying force that preserves all life. The ultimate relation between *Eros* and *Thanatos* remains obscure." (Marcuse 1974:26; cf. Ruiz 2017:124). A different view on this dichotomy is Kearney, who defines the *Eros* life-drive as a (divine) "desire for its other"; using the example that in Genesis, God created humanity because he desired a playmate, "someone to consort with" as seen in Hosea and Song of Songs in the *TaNaKh* and even in the musings of the Jewish philosopher,

Emmanuel Levinas who stated, "*Dieu a créé l'homme car on s'amuse mieux à deux* (God created man because we have more fun together)" and so *eros* is the life drive that drives the self towards the other and even God. (Kearney 2017:32-33). Clemente adds to this discourse in mentioning that – in Freud's case – *Eros* in and of itself, is a drive which opposes otherness, swallowing 'alterity' in its pursuit towards wholeness; *Eros* is thus defined as "the fusion that makes one from two" but which around every turn per se is contested by an obstacle *Thanatos* or "the reduction to dust" (Clemente 2019:4-5).

2.3.3 Psychosexual Development

Another important theorem in Freudian psychoanalysis pertaining to sexuality is the psychosexual development. As mentioned earlier, according to Freud, humanity has two instincts: *Eros* (life instinct) and *Thanatos* (death instinct). Accordingly, Freud believed that the individual's psychological growth is strongly influenced (conditioned) by the 'libido' which can be translated as "sexual pleasure" – the inner-energy that manifests as sexual growth and influences our personality development. Each child's sexual development is summarised into five stages, where focus is directed at various parts of the body – also known as 'erogenous zones' (Janetius 2016:2-3 cf. Lantz & Ray 2022).

These phases are known as: *1)* The Oral Stage; arguably lasting up to 18 months since the birth of the child, where the child derives pleasure from sucking – providing both tactile stimulation as well as stimulation from swallowing (i.e. the sucking of the mother's breast during breastfeeding); later on, when teeth emerge from the child's mouth biting and chewing, this replaces the sucking. Therefore, the so-called 'erotic drive' is localised around the mouth as perceived erogenous zone. *2)* The Anal Stage; this stage is present when the child

becomes around 1.5 to 3 years of age, where the child derives a sense of pleasure from excretion (anal expulsive period), and later pleasure in the 'anal mucosa' from the retention thereof (anal retention period), the child thus learns to postpone the pleasure that derives from expulsion. *3)* The Phallic Stage; this stage emerges when the child is 3 years old, until they reach 5 years of age; it is during this stage that rudiments of sex can be seen in the child. The child plays with the genitals releasing both tension and providing pleasure – in this specific case, the child derives pleasure from activities and sensations associated with urination. In Freud's view, this is also when the Oedipus Complex manifests, when a boy's sexual feeling for his mother rivals with that of his father (Kumar, n.d. 12-13 cf. Benveniste 2015:2-3).

4) The Latency Stage; during this stage, at around 5-6 years old, the child is not yet concerned about matters of a sexual nature, as the term 'latency' suggests, rather in this particular case the 'sexual urges' of the child are projected externally – taking the form of recreational, academic and/or social pursuits. Eroticism is instead more overtly manifested in this stage in the child's attachment to friends and parents. *5)* Genital Stage; finally, last but not least, the genital stage emerges with the start of adolescence (12 years) and lasts until adulthood. In this stage, de facto sexual feelings occur and intensify in a more mature fashion. As a result, the child's self-love and external channelling of self-love manifests in the form of relationships, sexual attraction, group activities; accompanied by desires related to marriage and the raising of a family, as well as vocational idealisations. At the end of adolescence, these desires and concerns expectedly become well-established (Philip 2010:183-187; Kesavelu, *et al.* 2021:76-77). Freud's consideration of sexuality is, without a doubt, one of the most influential works in the development of sexuality due to the fact that – as stated at the beginning of this section – sexuality in the 1900s was approached pathologically. Yet, due

to Freud's impactful research, even the sexual development of a child (including masturbation) was and still is considered part of normal sexual development. However, despite this, Freud's work does not go uncriticised (see Shulman 2021:1093-1113; Kupfersmid 2019:81-97; Żechowski 2017:1181-1189) with critics remarking that Freud's contribution to this discourse is not unique and was already "very much in the air" and not the sudden inspiration of one man. Sauerteig supports this notion in remarking that the alternative works of scholars Moll, Jung, Stern and Bühler have subsequently been largely neglected, due to Freud's work being perceived as the most influential and shaping psychology and behaviourism debates since the start of the 20th century (Sauerteig 2012:157-158). Regardless on which side of the debate one posits oneself, it is unrealistic and restrictive to impose a psychological discourse on sexuality without highlighting the contributions of Freud.

2.4 Foucault, *L'histoire De La Sexualité*: The Historical Map Of Modern Sexuality

Another important figure in the discourse surrounding sexuality is Foucault. Whenever the idea of sexuality (and invariably its connection to religious discourse) arises, Foucault is irreplaceable in the establishment of a trajectory concerning sexuality – both historically and anthropologically. Foucault believed that "…the image of the imperial prude is emblazoned on our restrained, mute and hypocritical sexuality" (Foucault 1978:3). Since the 14th to 16th centuries, sexuality and repression have walked together hand-in-hand in the West divorced from pleasure; approached as a serious (exclusively) marital commitment (Ingram 2017:390). This subsequently led to men in the 17th century, turning to prostitution in order to gratify their sexual urges because the Christian church (at the time), propagated that the purpose of sexuality was only for procreation. The Book of Common Prayer forbade recreational sexual

expressions and restrained it under a 'familio-centric' narrative (Sigush 2004:2-4; Kessler 2014:110 cf. Kapp 2020:6-7).

Based on this, Foucault called the 17th century "the Age of repressed sexuality" (Foucault 1978:17-19). Moreover, Isherwoord and Stuart in the largely influential: *Introduction to Body Theology* (1998), agreed with Foucault in supporting that the modern (20th century) view of sexuality, has not yet 'divorced' itself from such archaic narratives, because – at the pulpit – the incontrovertibly influential Christian church is the most prominent perpetuator of these archaisms (Isherwood & Stuart 1998:17). And even in the 21st century, this approach is still the predominant view on sexuality in most traditionally religious (Christian) contexts that influence our sexual approaches (Kapp 2020:7-8). It is for this reason, that Foucault is continuously relevant in the historical-anthropological discourse surrounding sexuality, due to his comprehensive four-volume work known as The History of Sexuality (1976-2018). This section will provide an overview summary and discussion on each of the four volumes.

2.4.1 Volume I: Victorians, The Repressive Hypothesis And *Scientiae Sexualis* Versus *Ars Erotica*

In this first Volume, Foucault extrapolates on what he refers to as "the repressive hypothesis" in which he critiqued the idea (hypothesis) that from the Victorian-era (17th century) onwards sexuality was repressed but displayed a "veritable discursive explosion" even though it used an "authorised vocabulary", codifying where one could discuss it, when - and with whom (Foucault 1978:15). He further regarded that this was due to the bourgeois society, the rise in capitalism and before the selective liberation of sexuality in the West. Although, Foucault questioned the notion proposing that sexuality was repressed, maintaining that it never was

repressed to begin with. He also noted, however, that said notion provides the premises for an approach that rejects past moral orthodoxies; towards the notion that future sexuality can be uninhibited and liberated, or more precisely, "[become] a garden of earthly delights" (Foucault 1978:1-17).

According to Lynch, in this volume, Foucault connects sexuality to power, and while these phenomena are unarguably intertwined, sexuality is merely a function of the interconnectedness of power and truth, or rather what Foucault describes as "power/knowledge". Thus, in order to reconstrue the conceptualisation of sexuality, Foucault needs to reframe the way we view power, as most believe it to be a top-down structure. However, according to Foucault, it is not; nor is it (in principle) a product of repression, rather that of micro-interactions constitutive of our very identities (Lynch 2013:158 cf. Foucault 1976:127). "Sexuality must not be defined as a stubborn drive, by nature alien and of necessity disobedient to a power which exhausts itself trying to subdue it and often fails to control it entirely. It appears rather as an especially dense transfer point for relations of power…Sexuality is not the most interactable element in power relations, but rather one of those endowed with the greatest instrumentality" (Foucault 1976:103). It is worth noting, though, that Foucault did not deny that repression is indeed a reality. Cook affirms this and posits that he merely tried to insinuate how power could be viewed in a different (perhaps more productive) light, as well. She explains this in saying that "power does not only say 'no,' but it is certainly the case that power also says 'no'". This misunderstanding (or perceivably, contradiction) is largely due to the ambivalence Foucault shows in his discussion of repression, as he seems to (in one instance) refer to the repressive hypothesis as pure fiction and in another, takes issue with those who completely reject the ostensible 'repressive hypothesis' (Cook 2014:157-158).

Renaud clarifies this in arguing that Foucault's "repudiation of the ideology of sexual liberation", is based on the fundamental misunderstanding of Marcuse (1955) and his reference to the myth of Eros and the use of erotic liberation that he posits. Therefore, Renaud maintains that Foucault is unable to make the distinction between necessary power structures that create 'subjectivity' and historically unnecessary power structures that produce 'dominated subjectivity' because of his 'anti-essentialist' position (Renaud 2013:76-78 cf. Foucault 1991:116). Anti-essentialism, according to Leddy is a philosophy that played a strong role in Continental aesthetics (or philosophy), specifically that of post-structuralism (Derrida) and post-modernism (Lyotard), as a reaction against the essentialism of structuralism (Wundt & Titchener), the position that holds that there are stable structures that can serve as explanations for human behavioural tendencies. Furthermore, it later developed into an entire attack on Western metaphysics as 'essentialist': anti-essentialism is thus a complex philosophy, that proceeds far beyond the belief that denies that there is any essence or definition to art, but the denial of any and all essences in totality, of meaning, subjects – even humanity in and of itself (Leddy 2014:15-16).

Despite Foucault's ambiguous approach to sexual repression (see Huffer 2012:21), another discursive element that Foucault held, in regard to sexuality, is his criticism of the scientific approach to sexuality, delineated in what he considers *Scientia Sexualis* which serves to justify his initial position that sexuality is not repressed. However, in this case, he argues that "…the discourse on sex has been multiplied, rather than rarefied; and that if it has carried with it taboos and prohibitions, it has also, in a more fundamental way, ensured the solidification and implantation of an entire sexual mosaic" (Foucault 1976:53). Lima, *et alia* clarify this in adding that *Scientia Sexualis* refers to a discussion and praxis that permeated

in response to sexuality (namely, epistemic turning points surrounding it, as well as the powers- that- be who seek to regulate its expression). In this instance, Foucault considers the capacity in which individuals were able to pay attention to, decipher, recognise, and confess themselves as subjects of desire: developing a relationship between themselves and others; allowing them to discover (via desire) the truth of their being, regardless of whether it is considered natural or not (Lima, *et al.* 2022:4-7).

It is also worth mentioning that *Scientia Sexualis* is not the end of the discussion, as Foucault (1976:57-58) also approached it dichotomously in conjunction with *Ars Erotica* where he states:

"Historically, there have been two great procedures for producing the truth about sex. On the one hand, the societies – and they are numerous: China, Japan, India, Rome, the Arabo-Moslem societies – which endowed themselves with an *ars erotica*. In the erotic art, truth is drawn from pleasure, understood as a practice and accumulated as experience…on the face of it at least, our civilisation possesses no *Ars Erotica*. In return, it is undoubtedly the only civilisation to practice a *Scientia Sexualis* geared to a form of knowledge-power strictly opposed to the art of initiations" (Foucault 1976:57-58 cf. Shusterman 2012:263).

Kremer identifies that an example of *Scientia Sexualis* can be seen in Freud's approach to sex and sexuality, which is directly in contrast to *Ars Erotica*, literally, the recreational expression of or discursive approach to sexuality, as an art per se where beauty and eros become intertwined (Kremer 2021:85-86).

2.4.2 Volume II: Morality Of Pleasure, Dietetics, Economics And Erotics *Vis-à-Vis* True Love

In this volume, Foucault delves into the concept of how "sexual activity was problematised by philosophers and doctors in classical Greek culture of the fourth century B.C." (Foucault 1990:12). In Foucault's view a re-evaluation of ancient Greek sexual praxis was necessary, because whereas the Greeks appeared to favour (or were indifferent to) the erotic sexual endeavour in the form of displaying polygamy, homosexuality and more – the Christian religion renounced and prohibited all of these forms of expression and more, in the name of sexual abstinence, lifelong chastity and virginity (Foucault 1990:14-15). Foucault subsequently perceived this simplistic worldview somewhat problematic. Due to the fact that works emanating from said era showcase a not too dissimilar approach in Greek morality to masturbation, monogamous fidelity, sexual abstinence and even homosexuality; hence this moral problem can be found in both Greek and Christian ethics (Foucault 1990:15-20 cf. Karatekeli 2016:92-93).

Foucault, in a separate interview, propagating the creation of new avenues directed towards pleasure – not just limited to sex, in his perspective – rather through developing a new collective of transformative practices. He believed, in this instance, that these practices are aimed towards 'freedom in praxis' which is considerably "a process of invention" (Foucault 1998:165-170 cf. Trumbull 2018:524). Trumbull proposes thus that Foucault's 2nd (and 3rd) volume is concerned with various classical ascetic practices in which he considers them to be "arts of existence" and equally considerable as inventive processes. Furthermore, Foucault therefore shows acute awareness of the fact that these practices are not adoptable in contemporaneity, as is, towards stepping outside of the regime of sexuality – rather, they

offer a glimpse of an alternative to the predominant "austere monarchy of sex" (Trumbull 2018:524-525).

In this volume, Foucault identifies 'n critical theme in his discourse on Greco-Roman sexuality: Ἀφροδίσια (*aphrodesia*) which in a literal sense refers to the 'works of Aphrodite' or *erga Aphroditēs* – an umbrella term encompassing the sexual drives and desires in antiquity (Foucault 1985:38). He proposes that the classical Greeks were less interested in praising and/or condemning certain acts, but merely their overarching preoccupation was with self-mastery ἐγκράτεια (*ègkráteia*) translating to "in power/authority" and σωφροσύνη (*sōphrosúnē*) "moderation/temperance." Surviving ancient literature on the subject universally addresses the male, occupying a privileged status among Athenians (Rubarth 2014:27-28), as they were encouraged to engage in sexual expression as consistently as required by their needs, in other words moderation or temperance as determined by their stage of life and social status.

Chappell affirms this, in mentioning that we (in the West) are the inheritors of two branches of virtue-ethical traditions: the Christian and the Pagan-Greek. Both traditions are alive and well in our society today, in our individual psyches and daily lives (Chappell 2020:187-188). However, the only difference between these two virtue-ethical philosophies that distinguishes them from another is the idea of "humility" (see Chappell 2020:188-189). "For as much as we like to credit the Greeks with a great liberty of morals, the representation of sexual acts that they suggest in their written works – and even in their erotic literature – seems to have been characterised by a good deal of reserve [*sōphrosúnē*]…" (Foucault 1985:39-40). Mastery of oneself was thus both a source of personal freedom and

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simultaneously a prerequisite for having authority [*ègkráteia*] over oneself and others in ancient Greek culture.

Another noteworthy phenomenon in Foucault's dissection of the Greeks is dietetics – a recurring issue in many Greek writings, where in some, sexual activity forms a part of this all-encompassing regimen of physical activity, food, nutrition, and drink (see Preus 2020:14-15). In this particular case, the phenomenon of dietetics had less to do with food – although, the Greeks were prominent in their orgiastic indulgences at temple feasts and celebrations of the gods Dionysus and Aphrodite commonly referred to as "Orphic Rites" (see Charpenel 2012:5 & Majee 2013:123-124). Majeed extrapolates on this in stating that the Orphics praised the Dionysiac in them and suppressed the Titanic in an attempt to lead good and moral lives (Majeed 2013:123).

In terms of Foucault however, the idea of dietetics – and the regimen in and of itself – had less to do with sexuality per se but more about the health of the individuals. He writes, "…it should be noted that for the most part their [the Greeks'] reflection was not concerned with analysing the different pathological effects of sexual activity; nor did they seek to organise this behaviour…the main objective of this reflection was to define the use of pleasures…in terms of a certain way of caring for one's body" (Foucault 1985:97-98). Foucault also noted that the ancient Greek physicians were – in reality – more concerned about the health of Greeks in relation to sexual activity, stating that the preoccupation was "more dietetic than therapeutic" as Greeks were afraid of illnesses they attributed to the "illicit use of sex" (see O'Callaghan 2013:40-41), hence they developed an entire theory surrounding sexual health and considered it under the broader regimen of 'dietetics'; thus, ensuring the sexual 'appetites'

of Greeks did not negatively impact their overall health and vice versa (Foucault 1985:98 cf. O'Callaghan 2013:58 & Crespo, *et al.* 2016:121).

Aside from health and diets, naturally the discussions of sex and sexuality was also inseparable from economics, as per the original meaning pertaining to "household management" as Foucault acknowledges that there was a distinction between a man's (lawfully married) wife and the various mistresses and concubines. And as was common in the ancient world, the wife oversaw the household as "faithful guardian" under the husband's supervision; expected to be monogamous for the sake of his children being her (his wife's heirs). Furthermore, it is notable that extra-marital relations with concubines and mistresses were exclusively for pleasure (not procreation) and thus these women did not enjoy the procreative pleasures that a Greek wife did (Foucault 1985:143-144).

Rubarth acknowledges that the primary aim of marriage in Athens was aimed towards the management of a household, or more specifically, towards the preservation of the family bloodline (Rubarth 2014:28). As mentioned elsewhere in this section, Greek men were held to a higher standard and because of their status; were expected to practise restraint. However, as Lawler also suggests: according to surviving literature/art on the subject, this was far from the case as men frequently had extra-marital relations which had no repercussions whatsoever, because the de facto narrative of the day (pertaining to women) was construed in such a manner so as to portray them in a highly sexualised manner; as being "thirsty (as in drinking) for sex all the time, therefore they ought to be kept under control because not only were they considered weak, but also irresponsible and ever ready to buckle under the temptation [of sex] as they "lacked the [superior] self-control" which men supposedly possessed (Lawler 2015:97-98). Foucault concludes that marital ethics of the Greeks were

not merely a "first draft" of the sexual prurience that would later be displayed by early Christianity; rather many moralists of ancient Greek society urged men to practice sexual exclusivity (Foucault 1985:148-149). However, the impetus behind such sentiments was much different than the Christian marital ideal of fidelity. In Athens, if a man practised sexual exclusivity with his wife, he showed self-control along with preserving peace in his household; therefore, it is arguable that sexual self-control (monogamy in marital relations) was considered a status symbol of what could easily be considered, in colloquial terms, a "moral superiority/high ground" (Foucault 1985: 151-153 cf. Larson 2012:6-7 & Amaya 2020:5-8).

Unfortunately, as praiseworthy as this may seem, Foucault notes that husbands and wives were not equal. Greek households were structural: the man was expected to train and supervise his wife so that she could successfully maintain the duties expected of her as "second-in-command," moreover, for this reason wives were (in comparison to other women) considered high in stature and distinguished (Foucault 1985:154). Therefore, Greek men would sleep with and have affairs with servant girls in order to undermine this – their wives' privilege and sow discord in the household (Foucault 1985:164-165 cf. Larson 2012:8-9). An interesting contribution on this (what one could call) 'sexual power play' in Greek society made by Larson is that in ancient Greek society, the gender of the sexual partner was unimportant insofar as pertaining to the sex-act itself (Larson 2012:7).

However, the penetrator automatically became associated with the more "dominant" or "powerful" role, in juxtaposition with the passive (penetrated) role, which generally belonged to the "weaker", "submissive", and/or usually the feminine partner. For example, in more vulgar instances, such as the Roman poet (Martial) Marcus Valerius Martialis' advice to a woman named Lesbea, he refers quite explicitly to the fact that she is submissively

penetrated by her partner using the Latin futere; close to the literal derogatory English translation "to fuck" (see Adams 1982:118-122) in which he tells her: "Don't get caught, but do get fucked [futui]" (Larson 2012:7-8).

Foucault elaborated on this in further assessing the Greeks' sexual liberation, where he diverts his focus from the power balance in ancient Greece, to the pursuit of the use of sexuality as a form of art, and a means of achieving aesthetic pleasure. Foucault argues that the Greeks did not view sexuality purely as a means to reproduce, or a biological drive, but rather a complex and a highly nuanced form of expression which could be considered equal to artistic expression (Foucault 1985:177-184 cf. Rempelakos, *et al.* 2013:911-913). This notion is closely connected to the cultural and social context of ancient Greece, which placed a value on beauty, aesthetics, and the cultivation of the self. In this, his consideration of "Erotics" he analyses philosophical works and literary texts showcasing how the Greeks developed a sophisticated understanding of the role that sexuality played and its place within society; sharing a common belief in the importance of cultivating one's pleasure to attain a higher level of pleasure and satisfaction (Foucault 1985:184-189).

Erotics, in Foucault resembles a unique approach to the ways sexuality can be understood (and used) as a form of art and self-expression, highlighting the complex and multifaceted nature of sexuality as well as showing how cultural and social norms shape understanding and experiences thereof. Based on this, Foucault (1985) argues that the modern concept of sexuality has been shaped by a complex interplay of power relations, knowledge, and subjectivity. In addition, he also questions the idea that sexuality is innate, a natural aspect of human beings (Foucault 1985:190-192). Instead, he argues that sexuality is a historically

contingent social construct that has been shaped by various forms of power, such as religion, medicine, and the state.

He contends that these power structures have produced knowledge about sexuality that serves to regulate and control sexual behaviour. Moreover, this regulation of sexuality has been accompanied by a "proliferation of discourses" about sex including medical, psychiatric, legal, and moral discourses which have produced a plethora of sexual identities and practices, which have been subject to regulation and surveillance by various institutions of power (Foucault 1985:190-194). Foucault then diverts his attention to the role of pleasure and the desire in the regulation of sexuality. He proposes that pleasure is not simply a natural, biological response to sexual stimuli, but shaped by social and cultural norms. He also suggests that the regulation of pleasure and desire is a key mechanism through which power operates in relation to sexuality (Foucault 1985:195-196).

Finally, Foucault discusses the relation between sexuality and subjectivity by arguing that the modern concept of the "individual" (with reference to the ancient Greeks) is intimately tied to the regulation of sexuality (see Foucault 1985:169-170). He suggests that the individual is produced through a process of "subjectivation," in which individuals are taught to regulate their own desires and behaviours in accordance with social norms (cf. Foucault 1985:29-32; 202-203). In this way, Foucault suggests that the regulation of sexuality is intimately tied to the production of subjectivity. He thus makes an important contribution by challenging many of the assumptions that underpin discussions of sexuality by providing a sophisticated analysis of the complex ways in which power, knowledge and subjectivity intersect the realm of sexuality.

2.4.3 Volume III: The Care Of The Self

In this volume of Foucault's History of sexuality, Foucault (1986) places an extreme focus on sexuality texts in the first two centuries CE, and which stands out more notably in this text, is where he enforces the notion that attention should be brought on the self; the importance attached to self-care. The anxiety concerning all bodily disturbances should be avoided by means of an 'austere regimen', moreover it is the importance attached to self-respect which is not only restricted to one's status but also pertaining to one's rational nature: a modicum of self-respect exercised, by depriving oneself of physical pleasure and confining one's indulgence to marriage and procreation. Therefore, it was/is not a tightening of a code that prohibited certain acts, but rather an intensification of one's relationship to oneself, when the self is constituted as the subject of all acts (Foucault 1986:39-44).

Foucault subsequently explores the historical development of Western positions towards sexuality by showcasing the different perspectives that the Greeks and Romans had, when perceiving sexuality as a form of self-cultivation and improvement, rather than believing it to be a source of shame and guilt. Foucault begins by examining the dream-interpretation manual Oneirocritica by Artemidorus (or Artemidorus of Ephesus/Daldi), a 2nd century sage and dream interpreter from the West coast of Asia Minor. His work Oneirocritica is viewed as an encyclopaedic approach to the phenomenon of oneiromancy or prophecy via the interpretation of dreams (see Foucault 1986:7-8 cf. Harris-McCoy 2012:vii-viii;1-3). Foucault therefore proposes to use Artemidorus' dream interpretation manual, in order to understand

how different sexual scenarios, as well as behaviours manifest in the context of a dream (Foucault 1986:17-21).

Artemidorus extrapolates on a wide variety of sexual acts in his four chapters dedicated to sexual dreams; he proposes that the meaning of a sexual dream is relative to the status of the parties involved in the dreamer's real-life situation (cf. Kenaan 2016:196-197). This is quite notable, as Sigmund Freud touches on a similar subject in his book The Interpretation of Dreams originally published in 1900, in which he considered psychoanalysis as key hermeneutic in the process of understanding dreams. Freud notes that before the time of Aristotle, the ancients regarded dreams as something introduced by divine agency, and not something derived from the dreaming mind (Freud 1955:37).

Additionally, Freud in acknowledging Artemidorus' authority along with recognising the influence of the *Oneirocritica* on the subject, notes his dichotomous dream theory which distinguishes between two classes of dreams: 1) dreams which are influenced by the present or past, but have no future significance but characterised by ἐνὐπνια (*enupnia*) or insomnia (direct representation of an idea or its opposite, such as "hunger" or the satiation thereof), φάντασματα (*phantasmata*) which adds a fantastical extension to the idea, such as a nightmare, and 2) dreams which are supposed to determine the future, which included firstly, χρηματισμός (*chrematismos*) - direct prophecies, secondly ὄραμα (*orama*) - pre-visions of an event in the future, and thirdly ὄνειρος (*oneiros*) – symbolic dreams which require interpretation (Freud 1955:37-38). Freud places great emphasis on symbolic dreams and how they correspond to sexual themes in particular. For example, according to Freud children in dreams often relate to the genitals. Moreover, many beasts used as symbols for genitalia

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in myth and folklore occurring in dreams can also be interpreted as referential to the genitals, while dreaming of moving up and down stairs as well as being run over by a car, both represent sexual intercourse (Freud 1955:370-372, 375-378).

Furthermore, Foucault highlights a few basic considerations of Artemidorus' approach to sex by mentioning that males in the Greek culture enjoyed immense sexual freedom, even though, as highlighted earlier in this text, the Greeks believed that marriage was the "best possible framework for sexual pleasures" even though a married man may still express his sexual freedom with maids, servants, and prostitutes (Foucault 1985:164-165 cf. 1986:29-30). Foucault maintains that the penetrative or rather, 'masculine' role in sexual contexts was equal to a dominant or leading role in social relationships; therefore, Artemidorus' treatise on sexuality and dreams ought not to be perceived as a moral codex that divides sexuality acts into "permitted/prohibited" and "natural/unnatural". Rather, it connects all to one's social status and household context and thus resembles very closely the overall perspectives of the Greek social and cultural approaches to sexuality in the Golden Age, as is mentioned by Foucault in his 2nd Volume (see Foucault 1985:184-186). Apart from Artemidorus' *Oneirocritica*, Foucault delves into other early sources such as the texts of Suranus and Rufus of Ephesus, along with Plutarch, Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius (Foucault 1986:39). He subsequently discovers evidence of a more stringent and rigorous approach to sexuality in ancient Greek society, where aphrodesia was problematised, and marriage was idolised as the supreme political and economic ideal.

Rufus of Ephesus

Rufus of Ephesus (*c.* 100-200 CE) was a medical practitioner in Ephesus as well as at the medical centre in Rome after his education at the medical school in Alexandria in Egypt

working in several fields, among which were anatomy, cardiology and nephrology (Candar, *et al.* 2022:46-49), Gersh notes that Rufus of Ephesus' treatment for Melancholy involves sexual intercourse, which can alleviate symptoms as he justifies that even wild animals are calmer after mating (Gersh 2012:17). In addition, Rufus links the idea with appetite to sexual desire, noting that the best time for sexual intercourse is when desire is presented. This is due to the fact that men believed women's reproductive organs were unstable, thus frequent sexual activity was encouraged (see Gersh 2012:132-133). Moreover, Foucault believed that these early texts were the sources for early Christian sexual ethics (Foucault 1985:39-40). In addition, Foucault notes the valorisation of semen in ancient Greco-Roman medical thought, regarding Rufus of Ephesus' general remark that sexuality is a natural act and that in and of itself it does not pose harm. However, he adds that in the very taking place of the (sexual) act, it becomes dangerous as it is a wasting of semen, allowing all the life force accumulated by the semen to escape and that the act's very unfolding creates a proneness to disease (Foucault 1985:112-113).

Epictetus

Epictetus was born a slave in Hierapolis in Asia Minor and taken to Rome at a young age. According to Wehus, while growing up in the house of his master Epaphroditus, Epictetus had the opportunity to study philosophy under the famed Roman Stoic, Musonius Rufus. Epictetus was eventually set free and started teaching Stoicism in Rome (Wehus 2019:229-230). Stoicism's central teachings, tracing back to Zeno of Cyprus, spoke of a universal *logos* (reason) which provided structure and order among all opposites: this idea of *logos* was eventually conflated with God – or the creative element – in reality, which was present in all extant phenomena and species, giving Stoicism a fairly monistic outlook. Epictetus' Stoicism, however, revolved around living in accordance with nature and things which are "up to us" or

under our control and things which are "not up to us" or not under our control (Wehus 2019:230-231). Epictetus also influences his philosophy of Stoicism in his conceptualisation of love and eroticism. Stephens noted that one of the most neglected aspects of Stoic love, is that of Epictetus who regards that 1) the wise man loves and is affectionate towards his family and friends. 2) Only the Stoic man is capable of possessing the power to love, and 3) loves (philein) in a robustly rational way. Therefore, he would abstain from passionate erotic and sexual love, or *Eros* (Stephens 1999:194-195).

Moreover, Foucault mentions that Epictetus recognises the importance of marriage as the universal duty of every man who desires to live in harmony with nature and those around him, utilising marriage as a function for the man who seeks to live a life of usefulness to those around him along with humanity in general. Foucault maintains that Epicurus strongly refuted an Epicurean for rejecting marriage. Retorting with three main arguments: 1) the impossibility of a universal renunciation of marriage. 2) the social obligations of a man, of which marriage forms a part, along with duties to political life, family and religion. And finally, 3) Epictetus appeals to nature in concerning the naturality of behaviour prescribed by reason, stating that men ought to restrict pleasure to the principles of reason and in doing such, remaining in keeping with the way of nature (Foucault 1985:154-156).

Plutarch

Stadter notes that Plutarch stands out as a figure that remarkably connected the Greek and Roman cultures. His greatest work, the Parallel Lives, celebrates the dignity and inherent value of both Greek and Roman nations by juxtaposing their heroes and histories. Plutarch's understanding of each culture and its respective impact on his contemporary world and their on-going significance earned him acclaim during his lifetime and established him as a

beloved gateway to the classical era through the ages (Stadter 2014:13-17). Furthermore, in Plutarch's Parallel Lives, two extremes can be found. Firstly, Plutarch portrays various forms of problematic and positive sexual behaviour to illuminate the character of his biographical subjects and other figures. Examples of problematic behaviours included irrational excess, inappropriate sexual desire (such as engaging in relationships when one is too old for marriage) and acts of sexual violence (Beneker 2014:503 cf. Hubbard 2016:249-250).

In addition, Beneker adds one can also identify three categories of positive behaviour. Even though only one, namely, rational self-control can be considered a true behaviour (Beneker 2014:503). The others, namely, harmonious relationships and encouragement of virtue, result from the conscious, disciplined response to sexual impulses. Self-control emerges as a central theme in Plutarch's depiction of sexual conduct: while irrational excess leads to lust and violence. Self-control brings about significant benefits, both to the individual and to those around him. Essentially, the ideal statesman's sexual behaviour is characterised by self-mastery, whereas the tyrannical or violent man's behaviour reflects the exact opposite. Plutarch's subjects, however, exhibit considerable complexity; although their actions may fit into these behavioural archetypes, the men themselves defy simple classification (Stadter 1995:235-236 cf. Beneker 2014:503-504).

Marcus Aurelius

Marcus Aurelius Antoninus was the last of the good Roman emperors, who ruled during the second half of the pax Romana (*c*. 96-180 CE), Aurelius was also a Stoic philosopher, who is famed for his Meditations – a compendium of his philosophical convictions. Van Ackeren however argues that his claim to fame does not solely rest on these two pillars of him being a Roman emperor and Stoic philosopher. Rather it is his conjunction of these two aspects in

the form of combining philosophical intelligence and political power of which Aurelius was said to have been the personification. According to his biographer, Aurelius was not just an eager philosophy student, but wanted to live like one too (Van Ackeren 2012:3-4; Stephens 2012:17-18). Moreover, attempting a discourse on Aurelius without divulging his Stoic philosophy would be like studying Augustine of Hippo without mentioning his Trinitarian theology. Robertson notes that we know more about Aurelius' biography than any other Stoic philosopher, or ancient philosopher overall, for that matter (Robertson 2024:14-15 cf. Stephens 2024 :1-3).

It is also noteworthy that even though Hadrian adopted Aurelius, it was said that he (Hadrian) had a παιδεραστίᾱ (*paiderastia*) relationship with a younger boy, Antoninus. Yet, Robertson maintains that the pederastic relationship was not always sexual, but it was a commonly accepted relationship between an older man and a young boy (passive partner). Moreover, it was acceptable as long as the adolescent boy was not a freeborn subject or Roman citizen, but a slave or "barbarian" (Robertson 2024:36-37). Foucault however places emphasis on Aurelius' pride in his own sexual sobriety, allegedly waiting until the legal age to engage in sexual activity (15 years old), but instead choosing to wait until he was 24. Foucault adds that this does not necessarily indicate a man reserving himself by virtue of sexuality finding appropriate expression within nuptial confines rather it is the epitome of a man who has mastered himself to wait longer than most men do to taste the fruit of the flesh (Foucault 1985:167-168 cf. Robertson 2024:30).

It is also worth noting that same-sex desire expressed by one man towards another served as metaphor for the admirability of the man who is – even just in a metaphorical sense – so desired (Masterson 2016:30-31 cf. Karras 2016:188-189). An excellent example of this is

Julian's portrait of Aurelius, depicting his attractiveness with a same-sex desire transgressive to the norms, making Aurelius both the object and subject of same-sex desire (Masterson 2016:45-49). Despite this there were no laws, or widespread attempts to regulate sexual behaviour with legislative measures in antiquity, due to the fact that sex and sexuality remained a topic exclusively encroached on by early Greek doctors and moralists, rather than legislators as again seen in Volume II (Foucault 1985:97-98). Moreover, Foucault proposes that these calls for restraint were meant to facilitate a "cultivation of the self", or rather, the notion that one ought to take care of oneself mentally, spiritually as well as physically (Foucault 1985:39-41).

These restrictions became more prominent in the imperial era, and regimens of self-cultivation, became even more distinct than in Golden Age Athens and were propagated by the medical and moral authorities of the day. Dona notes that according to Athenian law, legally, men enjoyed more freedom than women and essentially women were kept out of reach of any threat to their sexual purity (Dona 2017:79-80). Moreover, while homosexuality was legal, if a woman operated as a prostitute, it was unlikely that her children would be accepted as Athenian citizens. Even if the case was that she was a citizen herself (Dona 2017:62). Additionally, a male forfeited his citizenship if he was a prostitute. Furthermore, Athenian law placed enormous importance on husbands producing a male heir and demanded that husbands actively try and produce an heir with their wives. Should the husband fail, the woman would then be claimed by her closest kinsman (Dona 2017:30-31).

Foucault's 3rd volume on the History of sexuality thus draws a trajectory for ancient Greek and Roman sexuality, displaying a culture premised on self-mastery and moderation. In ancient Rome and Greece, there was no concept of sin therefore claiming that Christianity

owes its sexual ethics to ancient Greco-Roman society is somewhat anachronistic. As the Christian meta-narrative of sex and sexuality is one premised on self-denial, emphasised obedience, and abstinence (see Kapp 2020:22-25).

Overall, Foucault in The Care of the Self provides a critical evaluation of ancient Greek and Roman attitudes towards sexuality, elaborating on the interplay between sexual ethical practices from various influential philosophical and medical authorities, sexuality as vehicle to self-formation (see Foucault 1985:84-85), and societal norms. Foucault seeks to challenge conventional understandings of sexuality and invites us to reconsider the historical and cultural contexts that shape our modern understanding of sexual identities and practices. Won notes several feminist critiques against Foucault's excessive focus on the self and individuality, critiquing his ethics of power noting that even though Foucault entrenches his narrative of "care of the self" as freedom in practice, his excessive focus on the self is not far from solipsism (Wong 2013:3 cf. Myers 2008:137-138; Allen 2004:246-247).

2.4.4 Volume IV: Confessions Of The Flesh

In 2018, almost 34 years after Foucault's death, his 4th volume on sexuality *Histoire de la sexualité 4: Les aveux de la chair* – which he worked on while he was in hospital, was published. In his final work, Foucault engages in an in-depth discussion on the Christian traditions and how they influenced the hermeneutic of desire, sex, bodiliness, and pleasure. At the hand of the concept aphrodisia regime Foucault argues that the aphrodisia regime, which was characterised by concepts such as marriage, procreation, and the cautious approach to pleasure, along with a deep, respectful bond between spouses, is said to have been originally devised by non-Christian philosophers and educators (Foucault 2018:16-17).

Raffensøe argues that Michel Foucault's volumes two to four of The History of Sexuality challenge the widely accepted belief in a stark historical divide between sexual norms in medieval Christian morality and those in ancient times, particularly regarding sexual pleasure. In this, his 4th volume, Foucault proposes that this supposed shift from a more permissive ancient world to a restrictive Christian era is oversimplified (Foucault 2018:157-161). In addition to this, Raffensøe maintains that Foucault examines how ethical frameworks around sex were problematised differently across classical antiquity, imperial Rome, and early Christianity (Raffensøe 2018:399-400).

And by introducing the concept of ethical substance, which he calls "modes of experiencing sexuality", Foucault in specific discusses how these evolved and were regulated through various techniques and practices (Foucault 2018:200-203). Foucault's analysis therefore highlights both continuities and discontinuities in the ethical treatment of sexuality, showcasing that while moral codes persisted, their interpretations and applications varied significantly over time. Moreover, key to Foucault's analyses are the concepts of ethical substances and modes of ethical subjectivity. He argues that throughout these periods, societies developed distinct ways of understanding and regulating sexual behaviour, often through techniques of self-discipline and governance (see Harcourt 2021:58-60). For instance, in classical antiquity, the ethical substance of sexuality (ta aphrodisia) was associated with pleasure but also required self-control and moderation to avoid excesses that could threaten individual health and societal order. Foucault emphasises that while there were continuities in the moral codices governing sexual conduct (such as the emphasis on marriage and procreation) there were also significant discontinuities in how these codes were interpreted and applied. These differences reflect broader shifts in cultural norms, political

dynamics, and philosophical frameworks across historical epochs. (Raffensøe 2018:400-402 cf. Foucault 2018:16-17).

The Formation of a New Experience

In "pagan" societies as seen in Foucault's previous work, ethics and moral codes pertaining to sex were deemed an appropriate code of conduct for all, even though it wasn't universally adhered to. However, this exact same framework, largely unchanged, according to Foucault, can remarkably be found in the teachings of second-century Church Fathers (see Foucault 2018:17-21).

According to most historians, these theologians likely didn't derive their foundational ideas from early Christian communities or apostolic texts, except for Paul's letters, which show notable Hellenistic influences. Foucault maintains thus that these principles seem to have transferred into Christian thought and practice from pagan contexts, which Christians sought to reconcile by demonstrating behaviours already esteemed by pagans. Moreover, apologists like Justin and Athenagoras assured the emperors they addressed those Christian practices concerning marriage, procreation, and the aphrodisia were rooted in principles which were similar to those upheld by philosophers. To underscore this continuity, they employed the same concise teachings, whose origins are clearly identifiable in both wording and form (Foucault 2018:21-25). Harcourt notes that while Christian thinkers deployed the frameworks for lust, sin, and flesh towards curbing and regulating sexual activity, the Christian patristic tradition ineffably echoed early Greek "pagan" ascetics which were merely formulated by early Stoic and pagan ethics. Therefore, the Christian church was not the primary inventor of the suspicion of pleasure, but rather shows a historical continuity with an already extant non-Christian moral codex aimed at regulating sex called aphrodisia which was a philosophical stance that underscored the idea of ethical self-mastery and assisted in advising an individual

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to avoid getting consumed by pleasures of the flesh and sexual relations (Harcourt 2021:56-57).

Foucault notes that examples of continuities are found in the extensive third book of the Stromata by church father, Clement of Alexandria (*c.*150-215 CE) who primarily engages in a polemic against various gnostic ideas (Foucault 2018:17-18). Itter notes that the Stromateis is a substantive collective of literature for initiates to hone their skills as theologians, metaphysicians, and gnostic teachers and which contains a method for the initiation of elect souls. Moreover, Itter continues that the concept of achieving gnostic perfection is attainable by only a select few, therefore making Clement's work esoteric by nature (Itter 2009:218-219). Clement of Alexandria subsequently pursues a dual objective with his Stromata: firstly, he counters those who disregard "worldly" laws, due to beliefs that deem the material world evil and ensure salvation only for a chosen few; secondly, he distances himself from Encratite movements influenced by figures like Valentinus or Basilides (see Os 2007:138-139 Cf. Edwards 2014:369-370). Both were early church heretics who advocated for denying marriage and sexual relations to all, or select groups of believers, in an attempt to pursue saintliness.

Moreover, according to Foucault, these texts are crucial for grasping Clement's theology, particularly his views on matter, evil, sin, and the significance of marriage and self-restraint. In contrast, the Paedagogus serves a more distinct purpose. It addresses Christians post-conversion and baptism, offering them a practical, detailed guide for daily conduct. Yet, contrary to some interpretations, it is not aimed at guiding pagans toward Christianity, but rather towards instructing newly converted Christians. Additionally, in discussing Clement,

Foucault maintains that Clement condemned unnatural relations in lieu of prioritising sexuality for the goal of marriage, which is procreation (Foucault 2018:23-24).

Plátová echoes Foucault noting that Clement argued love as a virtue by way of which Christians maintain closeness with God, in addition, Clement regards self-control as an incremental virtue which is characterised by its deliverance from passions. He further includes this treatise on marriage as something which has to do with desire and pleasure. This he attempts to prove is not how it should be, instead, stressing that marriage is a bond between a man and woman, joined together by rational and free choice. Moreover, the greatness of this relationship lies in the fact that it creates the opportunity for the bearing of children, which assimilates humanity to God (Plátová 2016:247-248). However, Foucault notes that this was not the first attempt by which a regimen is developed to dictate the sexual conduct of spouses. Rather, it was the first austere set of rules not premised on health or wisdom, but purely from rules intrinsic to marriage as exemplified in the creation narrative of Genesis (Foucault 2018:25-30).

In essence, Foucault argues that the transformation in Christian practices, such as penance, monastic asceticism, and confession, is not merely about stricter regulations within the codex. Instead, it involves the gradual formation of a new type of personal experience. This experience centres on combating internal evils through self-examination, penance, and confession, which he terms "technologies of the self" (Foucault 2018:51,203, 214-216). These practices lead to a unique form of subjectivity characterised by the struggle against wrongdoing and the imperative of truth-telling about oneself (Foucault 2018:35-36).

Foucault's concept of "flesh" encapsulates this mode of experience, describing it as a way of knowing and transforming oneself through internal moral battles. Christianity, according to Foucault, introduces a fundamentally different type of subjectivity, shaped by the dynamic between committing wrongs and revealing truths about oneself. This concept of "flesh" plays a crucial role in his broader thesis on the history of sexuality, contrasting sharply with earlier cultural constructs like the ancient aphrodisia, ultimately culminating in the modern understanding of sexuality emerging in the 18th century (Foucault 2018:36-37). Foucault also engages on the various approaches to baptism and how it correlates to notions of cleansing and new birth, sometimes represented as a second birth.

In addition, he discusses the act of baptism in relation to the concept of sin, referencing the Apostolic fathers who regarded sin as something intrinsically linked to baptism and the soul, to which Foucault (2018:54-55) rhetorically asks: Is it also an "unreflected" link—I mean, is it a link such that forgiveness of sins and knowledge of the truth are produced in the soul without the soul having to know the truth about the sins it has committed and for which it asks forgiveness? Are remission of sins and access to the truth linked in one way or another to knowledge of the sins themselves and by the subject himself? Foucault answers this juxtaposition by acknowledging the concept metanoia, synonymous with the Latin *paenitere* which subsequently if adhered to, gives one access to knowledge and understanding, as repentance or penitence is considered by the Apostolic fathers the ultimate act of understanding (Foucault 2018:55-56).

Foucault relies on Tertullian's *De Paenitentia*. Furthermore, his analysis of Tertullian's *De Paenitentia*, revolves around Tertullian's interpretation of baptism as a complex ritual involving purification and forgiveness. Tertullian argues that purification is not merely a

consequence of forgiveness, but a necessary precondition for it. He shifts the traditional understanding where forgiveness precedes purification, suggesting instead that purification through moral exercises is essential before one can approach forgiveness (see Foucault 2018:57). He also subsequently proposes that this shift implies a reordering of the ritual's temporal and spiritual dynamics: purification precedes pardon, and human effort in purifying oneself plays a crucial role (see Foucault 2018:57-60). In addition to this, Asue highlights Augustine of Hippo's perspective that original sin was transmitted prenatally via the parental libido because of lust or "concupiscence" and as such it weakens the human will and condemns humanity as a collective (*massa damnata*). According to Augustine, all of humanity derives from Adam's seed and therefore we are all inherently guilty of the first sin, hence according to Augustine we are all sinners by birth through no fault of our own (Asue 2013:43-44).

Foucault consequently covers the period between the 2nd to 5th centuries CE and begins with his detailed exposition of Clement of Alexandria (*c.* 150-215 CE), concluding with a detailed analysis of the work by Augustine of Hippo (*c.* 354-430 CE) whom Foucault notes that Augustine's doctrine on sexuality was retained and the theology of the Western church (Foucault 2018:28 cf. Schubert 2021:2-3). Furthermore, in his analyses Foucault remarks on several complex conflicts pertaining to penance, confession, marriage, sex, virginity and abstinence. In most of these discourses, the flesh features as central theme within early Christianity and Stoicism where it is problematised in relation to other important themes (Schubert 2021:3).

Foucault also extensively engages with the material to elucidate the concepts and issues of the Church Fathers for contemporary readers, given the considerable gap between the

thinking of the Church Fathers and modern perspectives. Nevertheless, Foucault presents their rationalities in a comprehensible fashion. He remains largely restrained in his own commentary, interpretations, and theoretical insights. Notably, themes such as power and freedom are rarely explicitly addressed. In only a fraction of the 400-page work does he articulate his central thesis: early Christian discussions on sexuality gave rise to a novel experience of subjectivity (see Foucault 2018:111-112), prominently featuring practices of speaking truth about oneself (veridiction) and the legal framing of thoughts and actions, described as jurisdiction (Foucault 2018:222-286,300 cf. Schubert 2021:3-4).

Being Virgin

In the second chapter, *Being Virgin*, Foucault explores the evolution of virginity during the third and fourth centuries into a lifestyle that extends beyond mere abstinence and strict sexual regulation. Foucault emphasises that understanding this development requires looking beyond the increasingly stringent rules of conduct. Instead, as mentioned earlier, the Church Fathers interpret individual sexuality within the context of humanity's fall and redemption, elevating virginity to a pivotal concern (Foucault 2018:145–54). Additionally, this perspective illuminates Christianity's transformative impact on sexuality, endowing it with unprecedented significance (Foucault 2018:155–157).

Subsequently, a sophisticated self-disciplinary framework emerges, intertwining self-knowledge and the battle against the "flesh"—the foreign and malevolent aspect within oneself—with complex interpersonal dynamics. Within this framework, individuals submit to the power and guidance of others to navigate this inner struggle effectively (Foucault 2018:167–191). Adding to this concept, Harcourt notes that the unique practice of virginity in Christianity differed from the pagan praxis, insofar as that it has a productive dimension in

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characterising a special relationship between the individual, their body, soul, thought, and themselves. In contrast to ancient Greek notions, the idea of virginity in Christianity elevates the soul and body dichotomy (Harcourt 2021:63-64. Foucault notes that virginity is not a law but a choice as it is not regulated as a law and explores the significance of virginity extensively (Foucault 2018:154-155).

Thus, its role as a bodily relationship that entails immense effort which is a concept central to understanding these practices is highlighted. Additionally, these efforts underscore the profound cultural importance of sexuality in Western society. Foucault further examines the productive nature of virginity, discussing the surveillance it engenders and its impact on modes of subjectivity (Foucault 2018:188-189). He argues that virginity opens up a new realm rather than simply repressing desires, emphasising that this phenomenon operates outside the realm of legal frameworks (see Harcourt 2021:63).

Being Married

In the third chapter, *Being Married*, Foucault shifts his focus to marriage and examines how it underwent increasingly complex regulation in the 4th century CE, particularly through Augustine's writings. Foucault argues that Augustine initiated a process of "juridification" in Christianity that persisted into the 20th century (Foucault 2018:279). This aspect was to be further explored in Foucault's planned fifth volume of the History of Sexuality. Unlike virginity, asceticism, and penance, which emphasise the earlier mentioned veridiction — truth-telling about oneself — married life, according to Foucault, conceptualises spouses as legal entities bound by reciprocal obligations and debts (Foucault 2018:214–222).

Foucault traces the theological developments that gave rise to the notion of the legal

subject: the concept of free will, which emerged following the Fall of Man and became

internally divided due to the inclusion of libido and desire (Foucault 2018:270–278). The

idea that following one's desires constitutes an exercise of free will and as such forms the

basis for the juridical principle of guilt and the legal framework of marriage. The autonomy

of the will thus defines the legal subject (Foucault 2018:280–286). In *Confessions of the*

Flesh, Foucault introduces the intricate dynamics of power and freedom, challenging

deterministic views of subjectivity while offering a nuanced historical-philosophical critique.

He explores in depth how Christian practices and ethical frameworks (which were shaped

by ancient and medieval thought about sexuality), produced complex subjectivities about

eroticism; intricately intertwined with systems of power. Foucault's analysis also reveals a

shift from early concerns with truth-telling and moral regulations along with an ethical phase

emphasising a technology of virginity, care of the self, and resistance through *parrhesia*.

By highlighting these transformations, Foucault urges us to reconsider the interplay between

personal agency and societal structures, illustrating that within systems of power are

possibilities for ethical engagement and individual autonomy amidst historical contingencies.

Moreover, Foucault's analysis also underscores that within the historical contingencies of

sexual discourse, individuals negotiate their agency and autonomy, offering a complex

framework to reconsider the intersections of personal identity, societal constraints, and ethical

engagement in the realm of sex and sexuality.

2.5 Algorithmic Conspirituality And Esotericism: Navigating Spirituality In The Digital Age

One of the biggest challenges faced by esotericism today is the tendency for folk religion and alternative spirituality to be the epicentre for what Ward and Voas refer to as "Conspirituality" on the internet (Ward & Voas 2011:108 cf. Cotter, *et al.* 2022:7-8). This is a "hybrid worldview" or "politico-spiritual philosophy" in which (especially Western) esoteric spiritualities are appropriated to perpetuate pseudoscience and conspiracy theories. This is due to the fact that esotericism and conspiracy theories share a similar distrust in mainstream religious and political authorities. In addition, Ward and Voas remark three principles which collectively can be found in almost all conspiracy theories: **1)** nothing happens accidentally, **2)** nothing appears as it seems, **3)** everything is interconnected. Similarly, they argue that these characteristics can also be found in the fundamentals of New Age thought along with popular currents within alternative spirituality (Ward & Voas 2011:103-104). This is supported by Asprem and Dyrendal who note such hybridity as unified by the notions "secret groups control everything" and "humanity is undergoing (or waking up to) a significant conscious awareness".

Moreover, alternative and New Age spirituality subsequently serve as the soteriological solutions to the allegations made in contemporary conspiracy theories (see Cotter, *et al*. 2022. This requires acknowledging and acting in accordance with this global awakening where individuals who do not conform to this meta-narrative are often labelled "sheep" or "sheeple" (Asprem & Dyrendal 2015:367-369 cf. Cotter, *et al*. 2022:7-9). Cotter, *et alia* also notes: "the next time you hear someone talking about algorithms, replace the term with 'God' and ask yourself if the meaning changes" (Cotter, *et al*. 2022:6).

Several individuals are identifiably proponents to this phenomenon of "conspirituality", namely David Icke, David Wilcock, Stephen Greer as well as the Project Camelot (Asprem & Dyrendal 2015:368). I would add a few others to this list, particularly Rebecca Brown, Robert Sepehr, Matthew LaCroix, Billy Carson (*4BiddenKnowledgeInc*), and social media personality Morgue are collectively examples of individuals who have dangerously conflated misinformation and conspiracy theories with esotericism and spirituality, for other examples see Cotter, et alia (2022:10-13). It is therefore incremental to engage in a discussion about these prominent examples of "conspirituality" in order to establish a proper premise for esoteric spirituality, which will serve as the author's departure point for this thesis.

2.5.1 What Esoteric Spirituality Is Not

Earlier in this chapter, we established a definitive trajectory for esotericism and the polemics associated with a proper definition. And while the internet and social media can contribute significantly to the discourse on esotericism, as can be seen with digital creators such as Prof. Justin Sledge of *ESOTERICA*, Dr. Angela Puca from *Angela's Symposium*, Filip Holm of *Let's Talk Religion*, Dennis Poisson from *Foolish Fish*, and Dr. Andrew Henry from *Religion for Breakfast*, *et alia*. However, while these platforms contribute invaluable knowledge to the current scholarly discourse surrounding esotericism and its affiliated topics, increasing public accessibility, they are less mainstream compared to the aforementioned pseudo-experts, who rake in millions from capitalising on misinformation. In this section, the author will elaborate with two examples of his, based on the model by Barkun (2014) of Occultist-Conspiracist relationships to exemplify what esoteric spirituality is not, followed by an own model, extrapolating on what it is or rather ought to be.

2.5.2 Type I, Conspirituality And The Construction Of An Occult Menace: Conspiracy Theorists' Portrayal Of Occultism As Existential Threat

Rebecca Brown is representative of the first category delineated by Barkun (2014:702) in which believers of the conspiracy theory regard that the evil they ought to expose lies in an external occult hierarchy. Hence the "evil cabal" may take the form of a circle of witches, magicians, or other members of the "Occulture" demarcation (see Partridge 2016:315-316) who supposedly are actively out to use their esoteric knowledge towards malicious ends. Moreover, Barkun adds that a more moderate version of this conspirituality, where said cabal actively seeks to gain influence and power (Barkun 2014:702 cf. Waterhouse 2014:16-19). Brown is the author of the infamous literary works, *He Came To Set The Captives Free* (1986), *Prepare For War* (1987), *Becoming A Vessel Of Honor: In The Master's Service* (1990) and Brown and Yoder (1995) *Unbroken Curses: Hidden Source of Trouble in the Christian's Life.*

Rebecca Brown (not to be confused with the Australian LGBTQIA+ author of the same name), was born Ruth Irene Bailey on 21 May 1948 and grew up in Shelbyville, Indianapolis. She earned her *A.A.* nursing degree at *Indiana University (IUPUI)* in 1968. Following this, she worked as a nurse for seven years and entered Indiana University at Purdue in 1976. Soon after, Brown transferred to *Indianapolis School of Medicine* at Indiana University, receiving her *Doctor of Medicine* degree in 1979 (Hanna 2017:40 cf. Fish, *et al*. 2011:4). Afterwards, she moved to Muncie, Indianapolis, where she began her internship and eventually residency at Ball Memorial Hospital with good recommendations. However, it appears that it was during her internship at Ball Memorial Hospital, that she began developing an obsession with demons and deliverance. Spokesperson for the hospital and the director of medical education, Dr. John Cullison, spoke to Indianapolis News on 21 September 1984 that "Dr. Bailey provided very good care for a couple of years after she joined the residency staff in 1976",

although Cullison noted receiving reports from individuals that Dr. Bailey had been performing demon exorcisms in the *Intensive Care Unit (ICU)*, after which he asked her to leave (Hanna 2017:40; Fisher, *et al*. 2011:4 cf. Brown 1986:13-19).

Moreover, Fisher, *et alia* further mention that despite the claims of persecution by Brown about supposed "pressure" to cease their "ministry" of "exposing satanists and witches at the hospital and surrounding communities" (Fisher, *et al*. 2011:6). Rebecca alleged, "I knew that the mayor of that town and the chief of police, as well as many of the policemen were satanists so I couldn't go to the police for help" (see Browm 1986:70-71). However, the real story is that staff and officials at the Ball Memorial Hospital had enough of her bizarre actions in hospitals involving exorcisms and candles, accompanied by grandiose claims, that she was "chosen by God as the only physician able to diagnose certain ailments and conditions". After her dismissal, her license was revoked and she opened a private practice in Lapel, made possible with financial support from a nearby Catholic institution in Anderson (Lapel Review 1982 cf. Fisher and Goedelman 1996:5; Fisher, *et al*. 2011:6-7).

He Came to Set the Captives Free (1986)

In this book, Brown meets Elaine, who was born Edna Elaine Knost in New Castle, Indianapolis. She claims to have been born in a poverty-stricken and dysfunctional household; a disabled child without a nose and with a cleft palate (a severe harelip) and received a lot of bullying and harassment at school because of it. According to Elaine, her mother went to a hospital to meet with a nurse named Helen who was no ordinary nurse, but also a very powerful witch belonging to a little known, but allegedly one of the most powerful cults in the United States, a Satan-worshipping cult who called themselves The Brotherhood. Elaine alleges that her mother approached Helen (a contact person for said cult) who proposed a

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solution to cure her of her disabilities. Helen requested a blood sample from Elaine, which would enable Helen to amass the necessary funds to assist Elaine with the best medical care available for her condition (Brown 1986:24-25 cf. Hanna 2017:40-41).

Brown maintains that after this "sale" the blood was given to another cult member by the name of Grace, a high priestess, who allegedly drank the blood during a ritual in order to obtain more power and status within the cult. In addition, this gave Grace and Satan possession of her (Elaine) and opening her up to demonic infestation which would allegedly shape her life and future (Brown 1986:25-26). From inexplicable powers, like unusual strength and keen sense, Elaine met a rich girl named Sandy, who would lead her down the path of Satan, and eventually into The Brotherhood cult which ranged from covens of varying sizes (from 5 people to 1000s) across the U.S. infesting all levels, poor and rich, within society (Brown 1986:26-30 cf. Fish, *et al.* 2011:5). These alleged cloaked and hooded individuals actively commit human and infant sacrifices, sign contracts in blood, and belong to highly influential and organised groups consisting of powerful and influential figures from across the United States, who are direct descendants from the Druids, all collectively associated with The Illuminati (Brown 1986:30-41).

Brown maintains that Elaine ended up summoning demons named Mann-Chan and Ri-Chann, became a high priestess of Satan, and eventually regional bride of Satan (Brown 52-58). Elaine supposedly had access to copious amounts of sex, riches, power, and influence beyond imagination. Even well-known musicians reportedly signed contracts with Satan, in return for fame and fortune. Human sacrifices, sex with children, orgies, and gruesome discipline, along with indestructible werewolves, vampires, and zombies kept cult members in line (Brown 1968:59-74). Eventually, Brown depicts herself as the heroic protagonist,

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coincidentally meeting a critically ill Moses as a patient in Ball Memorial hospital, where she worked; eventually asking the demonically possessed and vulnerable fugitive from Satan, Elaine, to move in with her. Subsequently succeeding in converting her to Christianity and together they became "experts in the Occult", embarking on a nationwide crusade to purge America from Satanic cults, Satan, and rock music (Hanna 2017:40-41 cf. Fish, *et al*. 2011:5-6).

Fish, *et alia* have noted that interviews with Elaine's relatives have disclosed that her tales in Brown's books were highly exaggerated and at times embarrassing fabrications. Said family members expressed very little surprise at Elaine's attempts at seeking attention, noting that she would frequently fake seizures at public events. Furthermore, Fish, *et al.* add that according to medical records, she was diagnosed with a "mixed personality disorder" and that "[she] is of questionable reliability". Therefore, between the interviews and Brown's book, Elaine's tales contain many discrepancies, fabrications, and occasionally even blatant lies (Fish, *et al*. 2011:4-6). Thus, all of this makes it apparent that this grandiose "conspiritualist" tale of Brown and Elaine ought confidently to be categorised in the realm of esoteric *vis-à-vis* occult conspiracy theories, perpetuating out-dated alarmist myths implicating esoteric currents, which are not supported by any credible data and evidence (see Lanning 1989:62-83; Howenstein, *et al.* 1989:57-59 cf. Waterhouse 2014:38-42)

Hanna notes that Rebecca Brown depicts a more sensationalist narrative compared to some of her earlier contemporaries, Smith and Padzer (1980) as well as Warnke (1972) who assert a criminological position (Hanna 2017:36). Brown (1986) asserts that the rhetoric that formed the Satanic panic, persisted and adapted well into the late 80's up until early 90's (Hughes 2015:185-188 cf. Waterhouse 2014:77-80). Furthermore, Hanna maintains that the

aforementioned works were used as propaganda tools to exploit the anxieties of religious parents and community leaders, playing a key role in creating and spreading alarmist narratives about existential Satanic threats (Hanna 2017:36-37).

Moreover, Brown's works collectively along with that of her contemporaries, manipulated horrific narratives about broken families, sexual abuse, drug addiction and forced cannibalism to exploit social anxieties about gender roles, the 60's sexual revolution and drug use (Hughes 2015:25). In addition to this, despite the fact that these books and their related literature have proven to be fabrications, perpetuating falsehoods, they still tapped into conservative anxieties perceiving the end of whiteness, the ideal nuclear family, and the perceived rise of immorality throughout the United States (and the world). And in doing so, these books created a discourse targeted against the "new Left" and affiliated liberal movements like feminism, racial equality and inclusion, cannabis use, and "free sex" with Satanism (Hanna 2017:55-56 cf. Hughes 2015:25-28).

2.5.3 Type II, Occultists' Integration Into Conspirituality: How Occult Beliefs Shape Conspiracy Theories From Within

A more contemporary example, Billy Carson, the CEO of *4BiddenKnowledge Inc.* is the author of several books, including the alleged Amazon best-selling work, *Compendium of the Emerald Tablets: A Beginners Guide* (2019), *Woke Doesn't Mean Broke* (2020), as well as *The Epic of Humanity* (2023) which he authored along with self-proclaimed "writer and ancient history researcher", Matthew LaCroix (La Croix 2024). Carson is also the host of his own streaming network *4BiddenKnowledgeTV*, where he produces videos and podcast content on a wide variety of grandiose pseudo-esoteric themes and subjects. Including

discursive collaborations on social media, with notable individuals such as David Icke; exploring concepts such as "Exit The Matrix with David Icke and Billy Carson" (see Carson & Icke 2023).

According to Carson (2019:ix) in his most popular book, *Compendium of the Emerald Tablets: A Beginners Guide*, the Emerald Tablets of Thoth the Atlantean are attributed to Egyptian sage Hermes Trismegistus, a legendary figure in Hermeticism and Western esotericism, who is said to have imparted profound spiritual and alchemical teachings (Carson 2019:1-6 cf. Hanegraaff 2018:1-9). Carson also remarks that these Emerald Tablets have been authored by an ancient extra-terrestrial being, known as Thoth the Atlantean. Maintaining that to-date there have been only two manifestations of these infamous Emerald Tablets: 1) thousands of years ago, by Thoth, who developed multiple tablets of texts and proceeded to conceal the exact location of said tablets, and 2) Thoth in choosing to incarnate as Hermes the Thrice Great, alleging that Hermes was one of the only individuals who carried a single Emerald Tablet (Carson 2019:ix-x).

Furthermore, in addition Carson notes that in the first two chapters of his book, he extrapolates on the role of extra-terrestrials in human history, as well as including evidence for how Thoth the Atlantean played a key role in human development (Carson 2019:1-6, 33 cf. Carson 2024). Overall, Carson aims to make these supposed ancient teachings accessible to readers interested in esoteric wisdom, spiritual growth, and the mysteries of the universe as conveyed through the enigmatic Emerald Tablets. However, this conspiracy theory is unfortunately not a novel contribution to esoteric conspirituality (see Card 2019:26-27).

The notion of "Thoth the Atlantean" has both originated and been introduced by Doréal (1930) in his book *The Emerald Tablets of Thoth the Atlantean.*

Similar to Doréal, Carson (2019) reflects a common mythos described by Card (2019) as "ancient extraterrestrial civilizations, superscience hidden as occult lore, global prophecies of destruction encoded in inhumanly old monuments and artifacts…and contact with uncanny immaterial entities in realms of altered perception [which] could all describe television 'archaeological' documentaries as well as conspiracy screeds on streaming video" (Card 2019:22) Additionally, Card notes that such tropes resemble quite closely the infamous literary science fiction works by Howard Phillips Lovecraft (1890-1937). As it was indeed Lovecraft's Cthulhu mythology accompanied by the tales of weird fiction in the Necronomicon (2008) which saw Egypt featuring quite prominently as context (Card 2019:22-23).

Therefore, the latter invariably inspired other science fiction narratives, such as that of Doréal (1930), later to be passed off as – pseudo-historical and conspiracist – fact (Doréal 1930 cf. Lovecraft 2008:122-128). Moreover, Barkun (2014) adds to the aforementioned conspirituality theorem developed by Ward and Voas (2011), by discussing two types of Occultist-Conspiracist interactions. In each case, they differ insofar as the one dominates the other. Furthermore, Barkun maintains that in the first case (Type I), conspiracy beliefs are the presiding meta-narratives in which Occultism is construed as the external world that ought to be feared. In the latter case (Type II), Occultism is the presiding narrative in which they are the individuals who have integrated the realm of conspiracism with occult leitmotifs (Barkun 2014:702). The latter construct is most applicable in this instance, where those who hold the conspiracy beliefs are occultists (esotericists) themselves. As we have established earlier in

this chapter, occultism is often used synonymously with esotericism. Therefore, in a pure sense, the enemy of the Occultist would logically be the non-Occultist – alternatively, in a less pure sense, both the enemy and the occultist themselves, collectively share occult attributes. Occultism thus dominates in this instance; as such, it defines the premise and nature of the de facto conspiracy theory (Barkun 2014:702 cf. Ward and Voas 2011:103-104). Similar to Asprem and Dyrendal, David Icke is identified by Barkun as a mainstream example indicative of this archetype, as his views have metamorphosed to an extent where his ideologies represent the second archetype discussed earlier (Asprem & Dyrendal 2015:368-369 cf. Barkun 2014:702-708).

Similar to Carlson, Icke's work *The Biggest Secret* (1999) claimed to change the world with material alleging that a reptilian-human crossbred species, that shapeshifts, and masquerades as human beings have been controlling the planet for centuries (see Icke 1999:29 cf. Barkun 2014:704-705). Furthermore, this narrative did not assimilate into a de facto Occult conspirituality, until Icke's *Tales from the Time Loop* (2003) introduced a myth of origins for these said reptilian-human species. In addition, Icke argued that the origins of this species lie with the information of *The Emerald Tablets* which is allegedly authored by Thoth, a priest-king from the sunken city of Atlantis (see Icke 2003:304-305 cf. Barkun 2014:705-706), which had supposedly been translated and interpreted by Claude Doggins (1898-1963) known by his *nom de guerre* "Maurice Doréal", and who alleged to have received the tablets from the Great Pyramid of Egypt in 1925.

Doréal also recounted meeting two Atlanteans in Los Angeles who, in 1931, took him to a cavern located 12 miles (approximately 19-20 kilometres) below Mount Shasta, the potentially active volcano in California (Barkun 2003:115-120 cf. Barkun 2014:705-706).

Furthermore, this myth of supposed reptilian-esque hybrids were indeed not just premised on science fiction lore by authors such as H.P. Lovecraft (see Card 2019:22-27), but also an obscure hermeneutic of Genesis 6:4 in the Hebrew Bible, which the author will present by means of an own translation and short exegesis of, based on Prinsloo and Botha (2016:33-37), from the original Hebrew Bible, and Greek Septuagint:

בְּרֵאשִׁית 6

4הַנְּפִלִים הָיוּ בָאָרֶץ בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם וְגַם אַחֲרֵי-כֵן אֲשֶׁר יָבֹאוּ בְּנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים אֶל-בְּנוֹת
הָאָדָם וְיָלְדוּ לָהֶם: הֵמָּה הַגִּבֹּרִים אֲשֶׁר מֵעוֹלָם אַנְשֵׁי הַשֵּׁם.

"And the giants came to be upon the earth in those days as well as thereafter. Moreover, they entered into, the sons of the lord, towards the daughters of man and they gave offspring to them. Consequently, they were the warrior men of old, men of renown."

LXX (Septuagint) Γένεσις 6

4οἱ δὲ γίγαντες ἦσαν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις ἐκείναις καὶ μετ᾽ ἐκεῖνο ὡς ἂν εἰσεπορεύοντο οἱ υἱοὶ τοῦ θεοῦ πρὸς τὰς θυγατέρας τῶν ἀνθρώπων καὶ ἐγεννῶσαν ἑαυτοῖς ἐκεῖνοι ἦσαν οἱ γίγαντες οἱ ἀπ᾽ αἰῶνος οἱ ἄνθρωποι οἱ ὀνομαστοί

"And giants were on the earth in those days and also thereafter, in that place. Thus, the sons of God entered the daughters of man and begat they in that way giants, and from the eternal as well as humanity they were renowned."

This particular line (notwithstanding the entire pericope) in the Hebrew Bible and *LXX* has been the subject of both enormous contemporary scholarly and non-scholarly debate, as it has been the nexus of several occult "conspiritual" arguments (see Lindsay 2018 cf. Barkun 2014:705) posited by conspiracy theorists and laymen alike. Who each believe that

translations of הָאֱלֹהִים בְּנֵי (bəney ha'elohiym) "sons of the lord" in conjunction with הַנְּפִלִים (ha'nəphiliym) "giants/mighty men/angels", or οἱ γίγαντες (gigantes) "giants/large men". Alternatively, οἱ δυνατοί (hoi dunatoi) "the mighty ones" and οἱ ἐπιπίπτοντες (hoi epipontes) "the fallen ones", are collectively referencing either literal extra-terrestrial beings called "Annunaki" (Sitchin 1978 cf. Noya, et al. 2016:54-55), or supernatural entities (angels), who copulated with humanity (daughters of Cain), giving birth to giants (offspring of Seth), respectively (see Ayatunde & Kolawole 2019:4-5 cf. Batten, et al. 2019:139-147).

Doedens, however, argues that the interpretation of this word is not quite that simple, and has been quite contentious at that. As the only other usage of the word נְפִלִים (nəphiliym) in the Hebrew Bible and LXX, is found in Numbers 13:33 (see Doedens 2019:60-62). In addition, Doedens maintains, supported by Routlege and McClellan, that despite the lack of information from its syntactical context, the term likely derives from the root נָפַל (nāpal); a verb which translates as "to fall/ cast down" (Doedens 2019:57-58 cf. Prinsloo & Botha 2016:243; McClellan 2013:111). Moreover, another iteration of the root also manifests in Psalm 58:9 נֵפֶל (neipēl), Job 3:16 כְּנֵפֶל (kəneipēl), and Ecclesiastes 6:3 הַנָּפֶל (haňāpēl), yet contextually refers to "still-" or "untimely births", as in "miscarriages", because "to fall" could also metaphorically refer to being born, as seen in Isaiah 26:18 יִפְּלוּ (yipəlō). Although, in Ezekiel 32:27 נֹפְלִים (nopəliym), a different picture is provided when a leitmotif of fallen warriors from Sheol (the realm of the dead) are introduced as "fallen ones" from the time before the flood (see Routledge 2015:24-27).

As proposed by Doedens, this might have been inspired by contemporary legend from pseudo-epigraphic literature such as the apocryphal Book of Enoch, about angels who fell from heaven and their children who fell in battle (Doedens 2019:56-59). Alternatively, other

interpretations include references to angels who sinned in choosing to follow Satan, often used in connection with Luke 10:18, as well as via the interpretation of the book Jubilee which speaks about illicit relations between lustful angels and the daughters of man (see Noya, 2016, *et al*. 2016:55). However, given the plethora of interpretations ranging from the gigantic, the extra-terrestrial, to the supernatural: it is worth noting that none of these interpretations ought to be taken literally. Instead, they ought to be recognised as figurative interpretations via analyses, of a purely literary creation, from an orally transmitted and ancient myth. There is no data that indicates the existence of any of the aforementioned beings, and therefore showcase that the Nephilim are naught but a purely literary creation (see McClellan 2013:111-112).

2.5.4 What Esoteric Sprituality Is: Theocentrism, Anthropocentrism, And Trancendentalism?

Spirituality can find expression in many forms, including esoterically. However, when embarking on such a discussion, how would such spirituality manifest? Alan Watts (1966:14-15) considered one of the most influential thinkers on philosophy and spirituality notes:

"We do not need a new religion, or a new Bible. We need a new experience – a new feeling of what it is to be "I." The lowdown (which is, of course, the secret and profound view) on life is that our normal sensation of self is a hoax or, at best, a temporary role that we are playing or have been conned into playing – with our own tacit consent, just as every hypnotized person is basically willing to be hypnotized. The most strongly enforced of all known taboos is the taboo against knowing who or what you really are behind the mask of your apparently separate, independent, and isolated ego" (Watts 1966:14-15).

Watts' standpoint reflects a phenomenal departure point, which in and of itself underpins the entire purpose of this thesis and invariably the nature of esoteric spirituality. In the author's Master of Divinity dissertation titled, Spiritual Sexuality: Towards a holistic and a-ecclesial sexual ethic (2020), he explored rather apprehensively a dichotomous replacement for traditional understandings of sexuality and spirituality, by distinguishing between a theocentric and anthropocentric spirituality in an attempt to remove possession of spirituality from the clutches of traditional (Christian) religious institutions, such as the church (Kapp 2020:8-10). Moreover, while maintaining his initial premise, would like to include the third premise which is most applicable to this study, transcendentalist spirituality.

Theocentric Spirituality

When it comes to theocentric spirituality, the idea is directly related to its linguistic etymology deriving from the Greek: θεός (*Theos*) which refers to "god" or "a god", generally. Nagel engages in an in-depth discussion on this term, arguing that the Greek term with its equivalents to the German "Gott", English, Afrikaans "God" as well as isiXhosa, "*uThixo*" are not helpful, but instead contribute to the term's obscurity (Nagel 2019:560). In addition, Nagel continues that the term θεός, despite its common usage, has been widely applied in a variety of contexts: **1)** in referring to divine beings (male or female), **2)** as an adjective θεώτερος "more divine" when a deity is regarded to be the sole and true divinity worthy of veneration, or **3)** something which is evil. Furthermore, throughout ancient Greek literature, **4)** the word θεός/οί is used interchangeably to refer to "the incalculable element in non-human phenomena" (Nagel 2019:560-561 cf. Van der Horst 1999:365-366); **5)** as well as things which occurred out of the ordinary. Nagel adds that the term was also **6)** originally often used evocatively and predicatively accompanied by the experience of something overwhelmingly

powerful during which the Greeks would exclaim, "θεός!" Therefore, indicating the term's multiplicitous usage over the centuries (Nagel 2019:561-562). As a working definition for this thesis, the concept of θεός as descriptive of the incalculable in non-human phenomena would be ascribed, as well as in referring to a deity (male or female).

Theocentric spirituality, therefore, refers to a spirituality which is centred on a deity, divinity (male or female), or incalculable – esoteric – non-human phenomena. An example of such spirituality can be found in what is commonly defined as the "Right Hand Path" or "RHP" explained by Flowers in his book, *The Lords of the Left Hand Path* (2012), as teaching that individuals ought to align their subjective experiences with the objective laws of the universe, whether conceived as God or Nature. Such a path emphasises seeking knowledge of these laws and then conforming to them in order to achieve ultimate unity with the objective universe, whether it be with God or the natural order. The goal is complete union with this universal reality, where the individual self is dissolved or annihilated. This dissolution of the ego leads to a state often described as entering heaven in religious contexts or achieving a nirvana-like existence in spiritual traditions. This goal is central to orthodox Judaic, Christian, Islamic, and Buddhist sects (Flowers 2012:22-23).

In addition to this model, Friedrich Nietzsche (1954:7) in his book *Also Spracht Zarathustra*, introduces the camel as archetype and metaphor for the "spirit" obediently bearing societal and moral burdens obediently:

"What is difficult? asks the spirit that would bear much and kneels down like a camel wanting to be well loaded. What is most difficult, you heroes, asks the spirit that would bear much that I may take it upon myself and exult in my strength? Is it not humbling oneself to wound one's haughtiness? Letting one's folly shine to mock one's wisdom? ... All these most

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difficult things the spirit that would bear much takes upon itself: like the camel that, burdened, speeds into the desert, thus the spirit speeds into its desert …"

Here, the camel is representative of a spirituality forcibly confined to what Wessel Stoker exemplifies in his "pre-configuration" (Stoker 2006:126-128) relating to imposed burdens and conventional religion, morality, customs, and traditions of our culture and society, submitting without question to our habitual religiosity (Itao 2018:268).

Anthropocentric Spirituality

This spiritual manifestation differs from its predecessor in solidifying it in the human rational experience. In this instance, the archetype discussed here is etymologically derived from the Greek word ἄνθρωπος (anthrópos) which refers to "man", "humankind", or "a human being" both interpreted as referential to gender and humanness as a neuter linguistic construct (Gouws, *et al.* 2021:1-3). However, aside from etymological qualifiers, the term is deeply connected to the material(-istic) as starting point, the carnal, the experiential (see Harvey, *et al.* 2019:13-15). In this context, Mircea Eliade becomes relevant in his exploration of the contrast between what he considers "sacred space" and "profane space", highlighting how each type of experience shapes human perception and existence:

1. Sacred Space: Eliade argues that encountering sacred space provides individuals with profound (esoteric) revelation, which offers a fixed point that allows for orientation within a chaotic, homogeneous world. Eliade proposes that "revelation founds the world", giving life and the perception of reality, a deeper sense of meaning. Sacred space therefore provides the spiritual human being with unique ontological status, enduring beyond temporal needs. Thus, it is characterised by a non-homogeneity and offers a distinct quality that transcends the mundane and ordinary milieu (Eliade 1987:22-23).

2. Profane Space: In contrast, Eliade notes that "profane space" is characterised by homogeneity and relativity as it lacks a fixed, sacred point of orientation, and thus fails to provide true grounding or existential meaning. Moreover, he argues that profane space reflects the industrialised society where places are commonly neutral and lack the sacred significance found in, for example, sacred spaces. Despite this, Eliade continues that even to the non-religious individual and context, there still remain places which hold exceptional or

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unique qualities for said individuals—such as a birthplace, or the location of a first love. These sentimental places retain a modicum of "holiness" in one's personal universe, closely akin to sacred spots where religious individuals feel they have experienced a reality beyond their ordinary existence (Eliade 1987:23-24).

In sum, Eliade therefore observes what he calls a "crypto-religious behaviour" in people's attachment to these exceptional places within profane space. Despite the overall perceived de-sacralisation of their environment. Therefore, Eliade's thoughts serve as exemplary model of how a self-centric spirituality can still offer sacred spaces providing profound esoteric meaning and orientation, in contrast with the relative and fragmented nature of profane space in our modern, industrialised societies (Eliade 1987:24).

Furthermore, this model for anthropocentric spirituality closely resembles the second phase, the Lion, in the Metamorphoses of Nietzsche (1954:7), where the lion embodies rebellion against these externally imposed norms, manifesting the assertion of personal freedom: Here he [the Lion] seeks out his last master: he wants to fight him and his last god; for ultimate victory he wants to fight with the great dragon. Who is the great dragon whom the spirit will no longer call lord and God? "Thou shalt" is the name of the Great Dragon. But the spirit of the lion says, "I will." "Thou shalt" lies in his way, sparkling like gold, an animal covered with scales; and on every scale shines a golden "thou shalt." Values, thousands of years old, shine on these scales; and thus speaks the mightiest of all dragons: "All value of all things shines on me. All value has long been created, and I am all created value. Verily, there shall be no more 'I will.'" Thus speaks the dragon. In this passage, Nietzsche urges the individual to assume the character of the lion, which challenges and rejects traditional values and moralities, asserting its own will to power. The Lion thus symbolises rebellion, that is to say,

when we oppose all that which resembles the external imposed religiosity, customs, and norms (Itao 2018:268).

Transcendental Spirituality

The core substance of esoteric spirituality is its convergence of the θεός (Theos) and ἄνθρωπος (anthrópos), including Eliade's sacred space and profane space. Furthermore, the transcendental element in this spirituality lies in the conflation of these above archetypes in what Flowers describes as the "Left-hand Path" or "LHP" as contrasting with the (traditional) Right-Hand Path:

1. Independence and Empowerment: Flowers argues that the Left-Hand Path acknowledges and embraces humanity's inherent desire for freedom, empowerment, and independence. Moreover, it views these qualities as essential to achieving the highest, most noble destiny possible, similar to the divine level of independent existence (Flowers 2012:22-23 cf. Granholm 2010:103).

2. Rejecting Conformity: the Left-Hand Path rejects the taboos of the Right-Hand Path, which Granholm calls the "anti-nomian stance", abolishing conformity to spiritual norms (Granholm 2010:103-104; see Watts 1966:9-12), and submission of the ego to external authorities such as God. Instead, it advocates for the attainment of self-awareness as well as self-determination. Believing that human consciousness should assert itself, rather than conform (Flowers 2012:23).

3. Subjective Universe: additionally, the Left-Hand Path is characterised by "non-union with the objective universe". It isolates consciousness within the subjective universe of the individual psyche. Flowers maintains that through self-imposed psychic solitude, practitioners refine their souls (or psyches) towards achieving higher levels of awareness (Flowers 2012:23).

4. Psyche-centric Approach: Flowers continues that unlike the Right-Hand Path, which is theocentric or other-centred, the Left-Hand Path is psyche-centric or soul/self-centred (anthropocentric). It places the individual psyche at the centre, seeking to harmonise the objective universe with the will of the individual, rather than vice versa (Flowers 2012:23).

5. Eternal Separation and Immortality: moreover, Flowers continues that the Left-Hand Path seeks an eternal separation of individual intelligence from the objective universe. It aims for the immortality of independent self-consciousness, allowing it to interact with the objective universe on its own terms and at will (Flowers 2012:23-24).

Overall, Flowers portrays the Left-Hand Path as a path of personal sovereignty, where individuals assert their independence, refine their inner selves, and seek personal enlightenment through a consciousness-centred approach, rather than conforming to external spiritual or moral authorities (see Granholm 2010:104 cf. Flowers 2012:22-24). Granholm notes that discussion on the LHP *vis-à-vis* the RHP has received very little scholarly attention, aside from Harvey (1997) in *Listening People, Speaking Earth: Contemporary Paganism*, Sutcliffe (1996) in *Paganism Today: Wiccans, Druids, the Goddess and Ancient Earth Traditions for the Twenty-first Century* and Evans (2007) *The History of British Magick after Crowley: Kenneth Grant, Amado Crowley, Chaos Magic, Satanism, Lovecraft, the Left-Hand Path, Blasphemy and Magical Morality* (see Sutcliffe 1996:109-134; Harvey 1997:97-99; Evans 2007:208-228 cf. Granholm 2014:509-513).

Conclusively, while the author supports Flowers's extrapolation on the Left-Hand Path, he believes that a transcendental esoteric spirituality assumes the third metamorphosis of Nietzsche (1954:7), namely, that of the child: "…But say, my brothers, what can the child do that even the lion could not do? Why must the preying lion still become a child? The child is

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innocence and forgetting, a new beginning, a game, a self-propelled wheel, a first movement, a sacred "Yes." For the game of creation, my brothers, a sacred "Yes" is needed: the spirit now wills his own will, and he who had been lost to the world now conquers his own world. Of three metamorphoses of the spirit, I have told you: how the spirit became a camel; and the camel, a lion; and the lion, finally, a child. Thus spoke Zarathustra…"

Finally, Nietzsche presents here the child as a symbol of innocence, creativity, and the ability to create new values beyond good and evil. He portrays the child as embodying a state of innocence and spontaneity, free from the constraints of societal norms and ready to affirm life on its own terms. This progression encapsulates Nietzsche's ideas on the evolution of the individual towards higher states of consciousness and self-mastery (Itao 2018:268). This embracing of the sacred and the profane spaces, towards a "crypto-religious behaviour" (see Eliade 1987:24) transcends the threshold separating the θεός and the ἄνθρωπος, towards a sacralisation of the profane in accordance with one's will. Therefore, constituting what Aleister Crowley refers to as "magick", or bringing about the change in situations or events in accordance with one's will (see LaVey 1969:82-83 cf. Crowley 1976:xii). In other words, it is mastery of the self via the hedonistic pursuit of secret (esoteric) self-knowledge as the pinnacle of a transcendental esoteric spirituality (Crowley 1976:xii-xiii cf. Kapp 2020:5-6; Martin-Merino 2021:19, 24-25).

2.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, a discourse on esotericism, sexuality, and esoteric spirituality was undertaken to delineate the trajectory of this thesis. Through the analysis of scholarship pertaining to esotericism as a discursive framework, it was established that academic scholarship remains

divided on the interpretation of said demarcation. There is, however, a main tendency to define it either as rejected knowledge or hidden (self) knowledge, accessible only to initiates within a prescribed tradition. Esoteric can thus be applied to refer to a diverse range of exotic and mystical traditions, beliefs, and experiences that do not form part of mainstream religio-spiritual discourse. In addition to this, introductory statements probing the "Western" demarcation in contemporary academic discourse, in lieu of a more globalised approach to esoteric scholarship was made. However, this concept will be explored in greater depth in the following third and fourth chapters.

Furthermore, the manifestation of the self as esoteric is remarkably embodied in Sigmund Freud's epistemological engagement with sexuality as a psychoanalytic phenomenon. Via his immutably influential theorems on psychosexual development and the interpretation of dreams (with reference to eroticism), sexuality manifests itself as both a cognitive and biopsychosocial phenomenon, fundamental to our very identity formation and sense of self. Therefore, Freud's approaches to sexuality are irreplaceable to any study endeavouring to provide epistemological frameworks on the self, *vis-à-vis* eroticism and provide a foundational departure point from which to define and conceptualise sexuality and the self. In addition to Freud, Michel Foucault's groundbreaking, four volume historical-philosophical treatise on sexuality and its evolution in Western society was explored in relative detail. In highlighting key discourses in his voluminous and complex rationale of sexuality, since the Greco-Roman period to the Victorian age and beyond, we can quite confidently assert that sexuality (at least in some parts of our contemporary society) is still met with suspicion and taboo. However, as Foucault evidently proved, this is not a new phenomenon and thus sexuality has enjoyed a contentious relationship with religion and ethics since the dawn of the golden age. Most notably, however the Christian church was not solely to blame for this. However, throughout

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Foucault's discourse, it is evident that sexuality and pleasure serve as liberatory phenomena and are incremental to self-care. Finally, this chapter endeavoured towards discerning esoteric spirituality from conspirituality and transcendentalism by extrapolating on how esoteric discourse has manifested in the digital age and its relationship to conspiracism and misinformation, highlighting several examples (both known and unknown) to contemporary scholarship. In sum, this section explored esoteric spirituality via theocentric, anthropocentric, and transcendentalist lenses, as well as in relation to the Right-Hand Path (RHP) and Left-Hand Path (LHP) philosophy – engaging several discursive frameworks provided by Alan Watts, Mircea Eliade, Wessel Stoker, Stephen Flowers, Aleister Crowley, and Friedrich Nietzsche. Thus, it established esoteric spirituality as Thelemic transcendental metamorphosis towards attaining secret self-knowledge.

CHAPTER 3

Not-So-Secret Self-Knowledge? Tracing Esoteric Spirituality In The West

3.1 Introduction

It has become evident throughout academic scholarship, that esoteric knowledge (as a whole) has been laced with polemics (see Hanegraaff 2005:227-234; Hammer & von Stuckrad 2007:vii-xxii; Strube 2020:45-66; Asprem 2014:4-18; 2021:127-143). It commonly deals with unique non-mainstream practices, systematic beliefs and textual corpi, that are not organised around – or regulated by – a centralised authority, institution, or charismatic figure. And it is therefore also, more often than not, considered unorthodox and heretical to de facto orthodox religious authorities (Lorea 2018:2). When engaging in a discourse about esotericism, it is impossible not to also acknowledge a participation in ta mysteria (mysticism) deriving from the Greek mysterion (see Stein 2016:3-12); leading to the acquirement of Gnosis (knowledge/enlightenment), the involvement of deep reflections on mystical perception and experience in order to obtain the ultimate truth of what is and how it relates to a transcendent source of all being (Magee 2016:xvi-xvii). Dabbling in the mystical elements of religion is also often approached in divergent and oft times 'transgressive' forms of lived religion (in lieu of the normative).

In this chapter, a variety of esoteric practices will be explored discursively, in no particular order, from a religionist and historical-critical perspective. The aim of such a discussion is to showcase these relative paradigms as unique forms of de facto esoteric spirituality. Therefore, these particular methods are chosen to allow said traditions to speak for themselves

(religionist), while also illustrating the social and historical backdrop that gave birth to these traditions (historical-critical). Faivre & Rhone (2010) describe the religionist perspective as validly studying a religion, tradition, or spiritual trend, as well as (in this particular case) esotericism (Faivre & Rhone 2010:8-10). Consequently proposing that in assuming this position, one needs to be a member of said religion/tradition in order to refrain from not understanding it properly.

Such a method may resemble phenomenology, but how said methodology differs from the religionist perspective, lies in the fact that it focuses on religion as experiential phenomenon without psychological and/or sociological perspectives (Gscwandtner 2019:2-4 cf. Ekeke & Ekeopara 2010:266). The religionist perspective takes a religion sympathetic lens to understand religion as a valid perspective or current in and of itself. The latter approach: historical criticism, according to Faivre and Rhone, is one aimed towards postulating a "universal esotericism". This approach essentialises esotericism as a matter of discovering or explaining its "true" nature, and that therefore, this method is mostly used synonymously with terms like "sacred" where religion is understood sub specie aeternitatis or viewed in relation to the eternal; in a universal perspective (Faivre & Rhone 2010:8-9 cf. Pricop 2014:359).

This chapter will thus attempt to identify the origins and development; differences and similarities between prominent practices or currents in Western esotericism, as a means to distinguish various forms of esoteric praxis from other geographical constructs, such as the East and Africa (Chapter Four); how they can (and arguably ought not) be separated from the overarching Western demarcation, by understanding what is referred to, when we speak about "Western" esotericism. As mentioned earlier in this thesis, scholars of esotericism can

agree that tracing a concise history of esotericism as a discourse in and of itself, its origins, as well as identifying a singular source from which all esoteric conjecture originated, is difficult. This is therefore also not the goal of this chapter, but rather to diachronically approach, understand and identify religio-spiritual roots of esotericism in each of the aforementioned geographical paradigms. As well as how they understood sexuality *vis-à-vis* spirituality, along with how they applied it to the body as a medium towards self-knowledge.

3.2 Esotericism, Spirituality Or Just Mysticism: Is There A Difference?

When it comes to a discourse about esotericism, clarification is necessary in terms of its relation (or non-relation) to spirituality and mysticism. To start off with, definitions of spirituality are often riddled with religious presuppositions: something referring to an external divinity or supernatural phenomenon (see Pretorius 2008:148-151 cf. Kapp 2020:9), rather than an intrinsic human experience. For the purposes of this study, an alternative (as opposed to mainstream religion) hermeneutic of spirituality will be taken (see Kapusta & Kostićová 2020:188-192). As such, it is important to distinguish between theocentric spirituality and anthropocentric spirituality, as this study aims to take the position of anthropocentrism as discursive departure point. Anthropocentric spirituality, instead of approaching humanity's sacral relationship to God/Gods, considers humanity's relation to – and experiences within nature and the self, as indicative of anthropocentric spirituality (Hoffman & Sandelands 2005:147-151; Chitrakar 2021:466-469). Jaworski identifies that spiritual discourses have been approached with reductionist perspectives, considering them as mere mental experiences, or biological expressions, as seen in the works of especially Jung and Freud – Jung, for example, approached this phenomenon of spirituality within the analytical psychology lens (Jaworski 2015:136-137).

3.2.1 Spiritual Vocabulary: Spirituality As Academic Discipline

According to Roesler & Reefschläger, Jung refrained from using spiritual vocabulary, to explain his idea of integrated psychotherapy, where the unconscious (or transcendent function) plays the important role of embodying "a supportive force". This moves a person's personality to potential wholeness (Roesler & Reefschläger 2022:340-341). Jung referred to this process as "Individuation", or the autonomous transformation of one's personality developing over the course of life, and eventually leads to wholeness of the individual and ascribing to meaning to existence (Roesler & Reefschläger 2022:340). This is what he considers a "transcendent function", and it has the capability to overcome inner conflicts. As when one embarks on this journey towards wholeness and meaning in life, this in and of itself, is a spiritual journey to discover the self or what Jung understood as "God within us" (Roesler & Reefschläger 2022:340-341). Furthermore, it is also worth mentioning, that Jung also believed that it is difficult to discern between the self and the image of God (or imago Dei) and therefore it is better for these two not to be conflated. Yet, he believed that "the self" is the psychological bearer of the imago Dei in an individual person, the guiding aspect of one's personality and something that reflects the potential integrity in a person (Bushueva & Korkunova 2021:298).

Spirituality as an academic discipline remains a subjective and therefore somewhat elusive subject, comprising of individual practice which is connected to one's own individual sense of meaning and purpose. Therefore, no uniform definition of spirituality exists (see Senaji & Anyanje 2020:192-207 cf. Engelbrecht-Aldworth & Wort 2021:117-124). To use but a few examples, Viktor Frankl (1946) proposed that spirituality is finding meaning in one's life as the essence of existence, achieved through self-transcendence and connection with other individuals. However, in reference to the word 'spirit': Frankl purposely aimed to avoid

religious connotations, but instead attempted to convey that spirit is a human dimension. Spirit is therefore not a substance, but a dynamic essence within all human beings (Frankl 1946:122-123 cf. Okan & Ekşi 2017:155).

Kees Waaijman defines spirituality as that which exists in our everyday existence, as such Waaijman proposes spirituality typically exists in a dormant state, acting as a "quiet force in the background, providing inspiration and orientation" (Waaijman 2023:1-2). Occasionally, though, it intrudes upon our awareness as an unavoidable Presence, one that requires deliberate contemplation and careful consideration (Waaijman 2023:1). Finally, Engelbrecht-Aldworth and Wort (2021) argue that spirituality is the result of psycho-behavioural consequences – a heightened consciousness that transcends selfish interest and therefore necessitating effort and sacrifice. Spirituality is also the manifestation of love in all aspects of one's life and subsequently the absence thereof may cause great sorrow, it promotes prosperity because it is rooted in meaning (Aldworth & Wort 2021:104-110). Each of these definitions vary significantly, as they represent individualistic experiences in what Eliade aptly described as the sacred manifesting itself as a reality wholly different from the order of natural "profane" realities. And that therefore man becomes aware of the sacred due to the fact that it manifests itself as something wholly different from the profane (Eliade 1963:10-11).

Despite the variety of approaches to spirituality, it is self-explanatory that it remains a wholly subjective and intrinsic interplay of the sacred and the profane (see Eliade 1963:167-168). It is for this reason, that this study regards spirituality as (in and of itself) an esoteric phenomenon: a form of thought, if we approach it from a Faivrean point of view (cf. Faivre 1994:10-13); for a more in-depth discussion on this topic, confer Chapter 2 of this thesis. Spirituality alone is as we have seen, also a demarcation individualistically – without explicit esoteric connotations. However, it is in the missing link that is mysticism, where we identify

the connection between esotericism and spirituality. According to Parsons, definitions and meanings regarding mysticism have been subject to intense debate within academia (Parsons 2019). Even though, in a colloquial sense, the term is quite apparent – academics are seemingly unable to wrap their heads around the complex, multiplicitous and diverse phenomena considered mystical (Parsons 2019 cf. Parsons 2011:3-8).

3.2.2 Mysticism As Heterogenous Lived Religion

Mysticism remains one of the most integral parts of religio-spiritual experience approached here as "lived religion" which investigates religion as it manifests in sacred and profane environments (i.e. private, official, informal, secular, etc.) as well as how it is experienced and comes into play in these various environments (Knibbe & Kupari 2020:157-160). That if traced back, can be found at the basis of all religions and perennial philosophies, as it is rooted in religious experience; beyond institutionally prescribed beliefs and practices (Taves 2020:25-34; Knibbe & Kupari 2020:161 cf. Fuller & Parsons 2018:15-20). Jones discerns that while perennialism focuses on metaphysical doctrines in lieu of the experiential. Mystical experience is necessary to obtain the knowledge for these doctrines (Jones 2022:660). Perennialists and mystics both almost never speak of their experiences as mystical; the former ascribes the primordial wisdom to the reception of de facto eternal, and unaltered truth (Jones 2022:660-661). Whereas in the latter case, classical mystics rarely spoke of mystical experiences but rather of reality as experienced. Therefore, in both cases, knowledge, and reality (rather than the individualistic experience thereof) lie at the bottom of the mystical experience (see Jones 2022:661-666).

Furthermore, Ceriello (2018) approaches mysticism by stating that the pinnacle thereof, is mainly the enhancement of ordinary existence. Thereby contrasting commonly accepted mystical narratives, which take the form of what she identifies as a developmental progression where "smaller" previous experiences, culminate to one grand "higher" realisation/state (Ceriello 2018:207-209). And so, the validation of experience through ordinary lived reality (as opposed to transcendent reality) can also be validated as mysticism (cf. Marchinowski 2022:4-5). She maintains that mysticism and its narratives are about drawing lines and erasing boundaries, cognisance of liminality and the experience of multiple identities while being aware of the ordinary state. Said experiences are therefore kept alive by faith and doubt, while being located between existence and non-existence (Ceriello 2018:210-211).

With the aforementioned in mind, when one is confronted with the concept of mysticism, it is impossible to ignore spirituality and esotericism. The only difference between these concepts, in reality, are mere historical trajectories (see Parsons 2011:3-5).

Mysticism is not a religion or philosophy, but grounded in heterogenous spiritual lived experiences and rituals that are nonlinear, specific, and often nondiscursive (see Taves 2020:34-37). The mystical experience is therefore generally unpredictable and irreproducible within scientific parameters (Brammer 1992:28-29 cf. Marchinowski 2022:4). Moreover, even though mysticism and esotericism are what Hammer calls "notoriously elusive concepts" defying any simple characterisation (Hammer 2020:5) as is the case with spirituality. Moreover, it is arguable that mysticism represents the intrinsic spiritual experientiality that comprises esoteric doctrines and knowledge (see Jones 2022:667-668). Therefore, even though they are each different taxonomical categories, mysticism and esotericism are

connected by the experiential insight into the divine manifested within the self and the cosmos that is collectively embodied by spirituality (Hammer 2020:21-22).

3.3 Western Esotericism: A Grand Polemic & Diffusion

The demarcation of the "West" in Western esotericism, has been helpful in establishing a historical trajectory for the establishment of discourse surrounding esotericism. However, this has now become an obstacle in the road towards the expansion of esotericism discourse: Strube argues that the West as a demarcation for esotericism in general, does not only problematise its further establishment, but is also a volatile concept geographically and ideologically speaking (Strube 2020:45-46). However, this does not mean that there is a denial or ignorance relating to the West's place in the discourse pertaining to esotericism. Or that such a demarcation is, in and of itself, "good" or "bad". Rather, it promotes the broadening of scholarship on esotericism, towards distinguishing European (from non-European) ideas. And in so doing, furthers the exploration of non-hegemonic esoteric cultures and discourses, respectively. It also recognises that there is a need for a more comprehensive (global) understanding, of the unique historical contexts in which esotericism played a role, thus acknowledging and giving credit to non-European sources of esotericism (Strube 2020:46).

3.3.1 Esotericism As "Rejected Knowledge"?

Asprem identifies a similar trend in his discussion of this polemic, in which esotericism is equated with forbidden (rejected) knowledge. The inflation of this polemic regards that, in certain cases, there is a more implicit rejection of certain traditions or sources such as, for example, the works of Protestant heresiologists and Enlightenment historiographers. He adds, however, that these supposed "rejections" are at best considered more of a structural, rather than an epistemic phenomenon. Therefore, Asprem continues that this structural explanation

regards that certain esoteric discourses often implicitly are in conflict with, discriminated against, or repressed by the "dominant culture" (Asprem 2021:130). This is considered the "Grand Polemical Narrative"; owing to Hanegraaff proposing in his article, Forbidden Knowledge: Anti-Esoteric Polemics and Esoteric Research, that esotericism is the product of a "grand polemical narrative…the dynamics of which, can be traced all the way back to the beginnings of monotheism" (Hanegraaff 2005:226 cf. Bogdan 2014:278-279). Which can clearly be seen with specific juxtapositions: monotheism versus idolatry; Christianity versus Gnosticism, magic, and demon-worship; Protestantism versus Roman Catholicism and finally, the Enlightenment versus the irrational (Asprem 2021:130).

The aforementioned examples are tantamount to Hanegraaff's "grand polemical narrative", which lies at the heart of "Western" culture; whose structures gave birth to practices of exclusion, repression, vilifying, and also the extermination of deviant religio-spiritual voices. Hence, this notion illustrates the injustices that form the foundations of the "Western" heritage, as an ideological and geographical marker. With that being said, Hanegraaff argues that the study of Western esotericism is exactly tasked with the mission, to counter and repair the remnants of these structural injustices (Hanegraaff 2005:248). Although, it is this thesis' position that this polemic, the notion of such a deep, sometimes hidden structural injustice (from the West), remains an ever-present proverbial sword of Damocles, looming over esoteric discourse.

For example, Hanegraaff argues that the approaches to currents of esotericism, when perceived as "rejected knowledge" – originally described as such by his predecessor, Antoine Faivre; now shelved under esotericism, are considered explicitly resemblant of "the traditional exclusion and marginalisation of women, black people and other people of colour, various

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alternative and non-dominant genders and sexualities as, and the victims of Western colonisation worldwide" (Hanegraaff 2019:149-150 cf. Asprem 2021:130-131). Nonetheless, theoretical disputes and models of consideration aside, it is apparent that the dispute, in this particular case, is not so much the Western demarcation per se. It is the idea that esotericism contains – or is considered at least, as a collective of rejected knowledge. Therefore, indicating the marginalisation of esoteric discourse as a whole, as the main focus, rather than insisting that the "Western" demarcation proves to be problematic.

What ought to be highlighted, however, is that there is a growing discontentment in esoteric scholarship pertaining to the usage of the word "West", serving as the overarching demarcation for esotericism as a whole (see Saif 2021:67-68 cf. Strube 2021:45-46; Asprem & Strube 2021:2-6). This view postulates that, from a historical-critical point of view, there is an increasingly great need to explore esotericism with a more explicit dedication toward (arguably non-Western) cultural contexts, in which esotericism also played a significant role (Strube 2020:46-47). As explained in more depth in Chapter 2 of this thesis, esotericism (along with its "Western" demarcation), and the pioneering of this idea as an academic discourse, is inarguably credited to Antoine Faivre and his Acces de l'esoterisme occidental (1994). In which, Faivre explained Western esotericism is a collective of old historical currents, among which the Jewish Kabbalah, Hellenic Platonism, and the Corpus Hermeticum appeared connected for the first time during the Renaissance. And eventually developed until the start of the 19th century; forming the discourse of esotericism as we know it (Faivre 1994:6-9).

3.3.2 Esotericism As Form Of Thought

Moreover, Faivre did not only establish a historical trajectory of Western esotericism, but also clarified terms such as "Hermeticism" and "Theosophy". In his research, as explored more in depth in the previous Chapter: Faivre (1994) also identified key elements, or forme de pensée (forms of thought), which he considered to be intrinsic and uniquely identifiable in Western esotericism (Baier 2021:234). These concepts are: firstly, the idea that correspondences exist between all parts of the cosmos (i.e., the famous hermetic idea of "as above, so below"). Secondly, that nature as a whole is alive and often in all of its aspects inhabited by a divine light or hidden flame circulating through it. Thirdly, the important function played by imagination when it comes to the utilisation of intermediaries (i.e., spirits, rituals, and images) towards gaining insight about the universe and its secrets. Faivre (also considered imagination as a power of cognition that exists superior to the rational mind. And finally, last but not least, the fourth intrinsic element to Western esotericism, is the concept of transmutation. Faivre believed that esoteric practitioners have always believed themselves to be on a sacred pilgrimage, towards achieving a higher plane of existence and illuminated knowledge. Which can only be obtained by a person's own individual transformation (Faivre 1994:10-13 cf. Baier 2021:234-235).

Furthermore, Faivre & Needleman in their article Ancient and Medieval Sources of Modern Esoteric Movements, was one of the first works to identify Western esotericism as a separate domain. And also, as a strictly modern phenomenon, emerging from Christian intellectual contexts; owing to developments in late-medieval theology and philosophy (see Faivre & Needleman 1995:18-24). Subsequently, Jewish, and Islamic traditions were merely perceived and approached as, mere influences or backgrounds rather than integral elements that

comprise Western esotericism as a whole (Faivre & Needleman 1995:25-26 cf. Saif 2021:68-69; Hanegraaff, Brach & Pasi 2022:187-188).

3.3.3 The "West" As Eurocentric Position

In addition, Saif proposed that Islam has, for the most part, always been viewed through a West-centric and orientalist lens. This is due to the reductionism of "esoteric Islam" being primarily equated with Sufism, which primarily is a product of the traditionalist term *l'ésotérisme Islamique*, with its perennialist focus on Sufism. This perspective, according to Saif, was largely due to the influence of the scholarship by Henry Corbin (1903-1978), and the positions of philosophers *Ibn Sīnā*, as well as *al-Suhrawardī*, who were collectively considered "Muslim favourites" within Western esoteric scholarship. And as a result of Corbin's positions, bridging Islamic mystical thought with that of Eurocentric explorations of esotericism, caused his biases to be transferred into his research, especially when calling for the inclusion of Islam in European (Western) esoteric discourse (Saif 2021:74-75).

Hanegraaff however, proposed that radical theorists who wish to deconstruct "Western culture", ought to conduct research on esotericism as a corrective (Hanegraaff 2019:151). According to Strube , this means that such research (unlike post-modern approaches) is done by keeping theoretical baggage to a minimum, at the outset. The ideal objective of the research requires listening to what sources say, instead of imposing presuppositional metanarratives on them (Strube 2021:45-46; cf. Hanegraaff 2019:151-152). Moreover, Strube argues further; instead of attempting to divorce postmodern radical theorists, and those who focus on empirical history – thereby "listening to the sources", he rather encourages that positions (such as that held by Saif, in this case), represent what he calls a "diffusionist reaction" and an attempt to pry open dialogue, a dialogue which encourages a plurality of

approaches, transcending the confines of Western esotericism as an exclusive epistemological framework. This changes the conversation of esotericism, to something that initiates a fruitful dialogue with other fields, along with exploring esotericism inclusively, instead of stagnating on the archaic notion that esotericism is/was a mere "European export to the rest of the world" (Strube 2021:45-47).

Zander echoes a similar critique but takes it a step further; querying to which extent the globally applied esotericism demarcation (i.e. the "West"), might continue the tradition of European imperialism, by using a "European matrix" for categorising non-European cultures. Additionally, Zander warns against the danger of essentialist positions where esoteric discourses are not credited in accordance with their unique regional, or cultural contexts" (Zander 2021:28). Furthermore, Strube adds that it is also misleading to think that esotericism and religion were (or are exclusively) European concepts, readily exportable to a passively influenceable world. Rather, these concepts (such as religion and esotericism) were in and of themselves, hotly contested subjects in European contexts (Srube 2023:4-6).

Notwithstanding that they still also remain incontrovertibly shaped by global (ergo non-European) exchanges. In the light of these strong arguments, it is therefore proving necessary that more concise parameters for esoteric discourses, based on their cultural/regional contexts (geographical origins) ought to be established. In doing so, it sheds a unique light on non-hegemonic esoteric currents, respectively instead of maintaining the de facto Eurocentric ideological hegemony. This not only opens an inter-disciplinary dialogue, but also increases the availability of scholarship on unique non-European (i.e. Eastern and so-called "Africana") esoteric currents.

3.4 Towards A "Western" Margin: Demarcations And Approaches

As has already been highlighted in this chapter, the "Western" demarcation has been at the forefront of polemics in esoteric scholarship. However, this does not discount that it remains a formative, and indispensable role player to any discourse on esotericism. It is for this reason that the "West", as a unique cultural identity marker and geographical paradigm, should be properly defined. Faivre (1994:7-8) considered the West as referring to, "the vast Greco-Roman ensemble, both medieval and modern in which the Jewish and Christian religions have cohabited with Islam for several centuries" (cf. Granholm 2013:18). Faivre directed his particular focus on emergent traditions starting with the Middle Ages (Medieval) *prisca theologia* in the Latin West, which later evolved into *philosophia occulta / perennis*, following the end of the 15th century and the beginning of the Renaissance; proposing that it was then, when we started seeing a homogeneity of ancient esoteric works. Some of these works originating in 4th century Hellenistic religiosity (i.e. Stoicism, Gnosticism, Hermeticism and Neo Pythagoreanism); later influencing the three Abrahamic religions (Faivre 1994:7-8).

3.4.1 Proto-Esotericism As Western Diffusion

On the other hand, Hanegraaff approaches Western esotericism, respectively, as a collective of traditions in the West that have been rejected by rationalist and scientific thinkers since the 18th century (Enlightenment Era), along with Protestant Christianity since the 16th century (the Reformation Era). Hanegraaff describes these European currents as belonging to a single great spiritual tradition, collectively ending up in "a reservoir of rejected knowledge", tantamount to a kind of traditionalist Western counterculture (Hanegraaff 2016:155 cf. Hanegraaff 2012:120-127). These went through three stages: firstly, Esotericism 1.0 which occurred during 1970-1992 as experimentations finding its roots in youth rebellion against,

and providing alternatives to the American and European, post-World War II technocratic societies (see Hanegraaff 2016:155).

Western esotericism discourse in this context, was largely dominated by religionist approaches pioneered by Antoine Faivre. The second stage: Esotericism 2.0, was marked by the divergence from religionism in the West, towards a new and increased focus on more empirical, historical as well as discursive epistemologies. It was at this time, that Western esotericism became an established academic discourse, followed by the third stage Esotericism 3.0; characterised by the increasing inter-disciplinary approaches and debates, beyond the fields of the humanities and social sciences begging new questions integral to the diffusion of Western esotericism as a unique framework (Hanegraaff 2016:167-168 cf. Hanegraaff 2015:55 & 2013:253-256).

Hanegraaff (2015:60-62) notes that the concept of a "Western" esotericism is a new development in the study of esotericism (see Chapter Two for more on this) and acknowledges arguments that definitions of the adjective "West" have been accused of being too narrow, remarking that critics have noted an exclusionary tendency in contemporary Western esoteric scholarship. Where the focus has been too strongly on English, German, French, Italian and North American cultures; neglecting the important currents of large European contexts, such as Scandinavia. This argument could be extrapolated further, featuring even the former Soviet countries as well as Greece, Israel, Spain, and also Portugal (Hanegraaff 2015:56, 60). It is for this reason that Hanegraaff avers that even though these arguments are valid, the conceptualisation of "West" should be specified. In other words, we need to "make up our minds" about esotericism as either a geographical space (in such a case, where do we draw the boundaries and why?), or a cultural domain (how can this be

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defined? And why?). He admits there are no easy answers to this (Hanegraaff 2015:60-62). Additionally, Granholm supports this notion and avers that the definition of "Western" as an identity marker in esotericism, has not been subjected to enough scrutiny. This is due to the fact that the term may seem simple, but unfortunately, it is rather "tricky" if one wants it to be analytically useful. Granholm further argues that this is unfortunately, the problem with identity in general, due to "the West" semantically referring to geography. Whereas "Western" is a quality and "Westerner" an identity marker (Granholm 2013:17).

This is further complicated in that any discussion surrounding the West, must also include a discussion on "Europe". The ancient Greeks, despite being neither European, nor Asian (but a conglomeration of both cultures), divided the world into three sections: Asia, Europe, and Africa with the river *Tanais* as the border between Asia and Europe (Granholm 2013:17-18). Pasi in raising the same questions as Granholm, in lieu of providing substantial solutions to this issue, highlights Faivre's approaches of Western esotericism, dealing with mainly Christian and post-Christian esoteric currents. In doing so, Pasi suggests that the "Western" denominator should perhaps be replaced with "Christian" (see Pasi 2010:164 cf. Granholm 2013:18-19). Another perspective, offered by Hanegraaff resembles the Faivrean idea of (Western) esotericism merely being a "form of thought" and speculates that the concept of "Western" esotericism might purely be just a theory, or concept, extant in the minds of scholars. He, however, raises an important notion: "We are ordering the world by naming it, but our signifiers have no intrinsic connection to what they signify: they are no more than useful and necessary but ultimately arbitrary human conventions" (Hanegraaff 2013:258-259).

In addition to this, Frisk clarifies at the hand of esoteric scholarship, that there are identifiable tendencies that appear consistently, when attempts are made at defining the idea of Western

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esotericism: firstly, the "Western" demarcation in esotericism, is used twofold: historically and geographically (Frisk 2013:6-7). A tendency as identified by Hammer, which promotes Western esotericism as a collective of historical currents in the West (Hammer 2007:445-446). Coinciding with Faivre's definition of Western esotericism as a "form of thought", distinguished by six (two of which are non-fundamental) intrinsic components (Faivre 1994:10-15). However, Faivre has been criticised by, among others, Von Stuckrad who argued that Faivre included currents that fall outside his proposed scope of interest and that he ostracised Muslim, Jewish, and Pagan spiritualities which have all contributed to influencing European esotericism (see Von Stuckrad 2006:83 cf. Frisk 2013:2-3). Von Stuckrad presents a powerful point in identifying the limitations of Faivre's scope, and this is the position that this thesis also maintains; in that certain spiritualities (which will be discussed at a later stage) – more specifically, Oriental (eastern) and Africana (African) esoteric spiritualities are perceivably ostracised from esoteric discourse due to a predominant focus on a Western demarcation within esotericism scholarship.

Frisk maintains that the historical definition, as promoted by Hanegraaff holds that there is a historical continuity between Western esotericism and related currents, for example, New Age (Frisk 2013:4). Hanegraaff highlights that there exists a continuous process of reinterpretation, and that therefore, ideas evolve relative to the cultural contexts they are located in (Hanegraaff 2005:26 cf. Strausberg 2014:219). Aside from the fact that Western esotericism in the historical sense (as discussed earlier), is claimed to have been rooted in pre-Enlightenment cosmologies (see Faivre 1994:7-8), Hanegraaff, in contrast, considers the New Age Movement to be a prime example of a post-Enlightenment phenomenon which simultaneously rejects, and yet, allows itself to be influenced by, the norms and values seen in Enlightenment cosmologies. This is seen in what he considers, "the secularisation of

Western esotericism" where the New Age borrowed from traditional esoteric concepts, and then proceeded to reinterpret them from a 20th century, secularised perspective (Hanegraaff 2005:42-48 cf. Frisk 2013:4-5).

3.4.2 Esotericism As Typological Demarcation

Another position utilised to denote and analyse currents within Western esotericism, is a typological one. This approach categorises Western esoteric currents in accordance with their perceived structural similarities and approaches the Western construct a-historically and cross-culturally (Asprem 2009:7-8). Frisk adds to this, in mentioning that this perspective is usually rooted in etymology, where the word "*eso*" (inner) is contrasted with "*exo*" (outer). Therefore, indicating that Western esotericism as such, is defined by conjecture/currents that are only accessible or obtained by a specific/chosen few, like initiates or disciples. Although, in contrast to this, the currents usually listed under the former historical perspective, do not coincide with the typological position's idea of concealment (Frisk 2013:4-5 cf. Kapp 2020:4-5).

Even though other typologies exist, they are less prominent. One identified by Hanegraaff, originally introduced by Dutch theologian Gilles Quispel, exists as an analytical typology (see Quispel 1998:69-77 cf. Hanegraaff 2008:138-139), which distinguishes between concepts like reason (typified by the rational inquiry of Greek philosophy), faith, and gnosis (typified by the value attached to private experience of the divine in relation to the self). This method is uncommon but may serve as an effective analytical tool to identify Western esoteric (and even non-esoteric) knowledge streams (Hanegraaff 2008:138-141). Von Stuckrad also notes that the typological method, has been indispensable to the discourse on Western esotericism

in being developed from concrete historical materials (Von Stuckrad 2008:225). Thus, it is for this reason that it has been extremely helpful in identifying the connections between certain (perceivably) diverse traditions, such as the philosophy of nature, mysticism, Hermeticism, magic, gnosis, alchemy, and astrology (Von Stuckrad 2008:225-226).

A third approach to the demarcation of Western esotericism, classified by Asprem is a discursive approach, where esotericism in this view becomes an umbrella for (mostly) all phenomena or knowledge currents which have been considered problematic (in other words, evil, heretical, irrational, ephemeral, superstition, et cetera) in light of established scientific and religious perspectives. Therefore, this approach perceives Western esotericism not as a tangible concept, but rather comprising of a broad variety of perceivable "negative others" which are all shelved as role players in Western culture (Asprem 2009:13-16 cf. Frisk 2013:5-6). Another approach in this category has been pioneered by Koku Von Stuckrad, who introduced a discourse analytical model for studying, recognising, and analysing esoteric discourses as a collective. Rather than strictly focusing on individual or specific historical esoteric currents, Von Stuckrad developed this model in order to use the esoteric concept, in and of itself, as a lens to gain insight into Western history (Von Stuckrad 2006:80; cf. Frisk 2013:6).

Moreover, when studying the elements of European history of religion, Von Stuckrad regards that such research usually errs along the lines of *Problemgeschichte* (history of problems). These problems, Von Stuckrad adds, encroached on by esotericism research extrapolates on the fundamental conceptualisation of Western self-understanding: how do we understand ideas of rationality, science, progress, enlightenment and truth in the absolute sense, and their relation to religious claims? How do we clarify the contradicting plurality of religious

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cosmologies, identities, and knowledge currents that lie at the heart of Western culture? The answer to these questions, he proposes, will perhaps supplant esotericism. If the dynamics within esotericism are seen as integral components of European culture, we might as well discard the term altogether, and exclusively instead start discussing the constructions and identities of Europe and "the West" (Von Stuckrad 2008:232-233).

3.5 Western Esoteric Currents: Paganism, The Occult And Satanism

As indicated earlier, the margins of a purely Western esoteric discourse in and of itself, remains a contested subject within esoteric scholarship. This is due to the fact that we are dealing with theoretical concepts, and their relation to tangible religio-spiritual currents. Therefore, this section will endeavour to explore prominent examples of religious esoteric currents in the West, based on their geographical origins, namely Paganism, Occultism, and Satanism. And subsequently, exploring their respective histories and development, via a historical-critical lens. This is not to say that these currents exist as unique and original to the West, or even European thought (for example). Rather, they serve as markers in what can be considered prominent Western religio-spiritual currents. Each of the chosen currents represent ideologies, central to the history of religion and spirituality in the West.

3.5.1 Occulture Renaissance: Antiquity, The Modern Occult Revival And Post-Modern Paradigm

Hanegraaff proposes that the grand Renaissance ideal of recovering ancient sources from classical antiquity and their philosophical ideas, forced dominant religions like Christianity to reconsider many of its theological presuppositions, pertaining to divine revelation and human rationality (Hanegraaff 2012:4-5). This forced them to trace the historical origins and chronological development of both these concepts. Although, at this time, the idea of critical neutrality was not yet a historiographical ideal, and therefore, any and all history had to have a theological and metaphysical premise; assuming a shape of a history of "truth". This was not so much a discussion on a variety of opinions, but rather a requirement to demonstrate the sources of early wisdom and knowledge, by tracing the paths they had followed to obtain it and ensure that it harmonised with the unquestionable truth of Christianity (Hanegraaff 2012:5-6).

However, in contrast, Beyers proposes that society is becoming ever more pluralistic with a strong movement towards the secular or what he calls "the postmodern paradigm" (Beyers 2014:2-4), with the study of theology and religion being brought to new heights, in terms of its diverse approaches; sometimes challenging the message and/or mission of the Christian Church. This has sparked a continuous intrareligious debate (between Christians) on how to understand and engage with opposing views on the theology of religion (Beyers 2017:1-3). With this in mind, it is also worth noting that there is a decline in global Christian populations in the West (geographic and generational). Ipsos has identified in a 2023 survey between 26 countries, showcased that 37% of people in Sweden identify as Christian, as opposed to 57% in the United States and 75% in Poland. Other European countries such as Germany, France, Australia, and Canada have less than 50% of people identifying as Christian, while the

Netherlands, the United Kingdom and Sweden, all have less than 40% (Ipsos 2023:5). Compared to a study done by Hackett, *et alia* which showcased comparatively that compared to 1910, two-thirds of the global Christian population resided in Europe totalling 66%. In the same study, Hackett identified that, in 2010, this population has plummeted to a mere 25.9% (Hackett, *et al.* 2011:9-10).

In light of this, it is worth mentioning the period known as the "Modern Occult revival" in the 1900's (Holt & Petersen 2016:441 cf. Kapp 2022a:16-17), which will be discussed more in depth later in this chapter, has speculatively contributed to this decline. This has permeated into contemporaneity, where there appears to be a growing interest in, or rather, resonance with Occulture when it comes to popular culture and spirituality – also known as 'spiritualism' or 'New Age' interchangeably – in contemporary post-Christian youth and popular culture (see Partridge 2015:116 cf. De Jonge 2012:3-4). Occulture is a sociological term, introduced by Partridge which refers to the environment in which ideas, such as esotericism (among others) emerge, are disseminated, and become influential in the lives of individuals and societies. Thereby these ideas inspire novel approaches, and spores of "occultural thought". Central to these processes is the influence of popular culture (i.e., film and television series), where filmmakers in Hollywood have mined the esoteric for the past few decades promoting engagement with themes like Paganism, Wicca, Satanism, Spiritualism, and a variety of other esoteric-related currents. Therefore, Western culture is not becoming less religious, in light of the decline in Christianity. Rather it would appear that it is becoming more spiritual, but in a different sense and therefore, subsequently adopting (and popularising) esoteric currents; collectively known as "Occulture" (Partridge 2015:116-117 cf. Kapp 2022b:7-11).

3.5.2 Primordial Religion: Primordial Faiths And Pagan Roots In The West

One of the earliest traceable forms of religious and spiritual expression, can be found in what is collectively known as pre-Christian, or pre-Roman Europe. Before the Roman Empire embarked on its grand quest to conquer the known world, it is indisputable to note that medieval or dark age territories were bustling with tribal peoples, who practiced the earliest forms of known religion. David Hume in his work *The Natural History of Religion* (1757), was the first to pioneer this idea of early religions being polytheistic, or "idolatry" used synonymously. Hume's stance was, however, that these religions did not only emerge as contemplations on the works of nature (ecology), but also as realistic and practical concerns regarding the events of life (Hume 1757:17-19 cf. Bittarello 2010:70-71).

Moreover, when a discussion is probed on these earliest (primordial) forms of religio-spiritual expressions or "native faiths" as they are less-commonly referred to, by for example, scholars Rountree (2015:1-5), Ferlat (2019:1-3) and Saunders (2019:127-155) et alia: it is necessary to engage in a discussion on the ontology and evolution of early religious expression. The evolution of religious expression, or forms of primitive religion, can be characterised by five main individual developmental stages: animism, totemism, polytheism, and monotheism (Kapp & Cronjé 2022:2-3; Uysal 2021:80-81, 85-86). These specific categories not only showcase the evolution of religion as a phenomenon, but how paganism (and therefore esotericism) forms the very basis of religion and its evolution as spiritual construct in the West. Therefore, by invoking a discussion on pre-Christian religion (i.e. Paganism), these elements are critical to understand primordial religion and how religious expression evolved.

3.5.3 Animism: The Natural, Supernatural And The Divine

Sigmund Freud argued that religion, in and of itself, emerged as an evolutionary by-product of human cognition. In this general overview, religions comprise forms of knowledge, intervention in and interaction with the natural world, which later gave birth to forms of moral regulation. He also proposed that the most basic hierarchal position in the evolution of religion, as a product of human thought, would be animism. He defended this in proposing that in animism, certain actions are performed to intervene in real phenomena, towards the favouring or avoiding of certain events via conflating a "magical act" with a "natural act". A clear example of this is a rain dance, which could be exercised by the throwing of water into the air, and in its descent, resembling the natural falling of rain, would favour or influence (thus intervene in) the favour of rain occurring (Marques & Fulgencio 2023:6-7).

The term "animism" was introduced in the work *Primitive Culture* (1871) by anthropologist Edward Burnett Tylor and is derivative of the Latin *animus* (soul). Tylor's etymological consideration of this concept, however, was negative as the term itself referred to "savage" prehistoric peoples belonging to primitive cultures and who (mistakenly) believed in souls or spirits (Swim 2022:58-59). In addition, according to Knechtel, Tylor's consideration is referential to "old animism" and a more novel conceptualisation of animism, is where animists are heralded as celebrators of plurality, multiplicity, the human collective, as well as their passionate entanglements with the divine (Knechtel 2010:260).

Furthermore, from a religious scientific perspective, animism displays that religious belief is strongly connected to and influenced by ecological factors: natural catastrophes, weather cycles, physical environment, resource abundance/availability, existential threats, annual cycles and so forth (Botero, *et al.* 2014:1-6). Mircea Eliade understood this human

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relationship with nature as "hierophany" in which humans experienced sacrality in the profane, implying that by manifesting the sacred any object becomes the *ganz andere* (something different) while still remaining itself as it participates in its surrounding cosmic mileu (Eliade 1963:11-13).

Moreover, Doss explains that the term animism, considers a religious and spiritual identity where the natural, supernatural and the divine are placed into three respective, yet interrelated categories or "zones" (Doss 2015:105). Firstly, inanimate objects, plants, humans, and animals all share a collective place in the "lower zone". The lower zone exists in relation to the "middle zone". Secondly, according to Doss, the middle zone is the main focus of religious life, as it is believed to be more accessible than the upper. It is primarily occupied by impersonal spirits, ancestors, lesser deities, as well as other supernatural entities which are able to interact with all three zones, interchangeably. However, it more frequently interacts with the aforementioned lower zone (for good and evil), but links with and mediates between, the lower zone and the "upper zone". It is also frequently seen and/or experienced by humans. Third and finally, both the aforementioned (lower and middle) zones are subservient to the authority of the "upper zone". The upper zone is home to the high(er) gods/goddesses, who are perceived to be interactive and theoretically imminent, but unseen by humans and actually aloof (Doss 2015:105-108).

The interconnectedness of these three zones is not just identified from a religion scientific point of view. Rather, they also manifest ecologically in their resemblance to nature, where they take the identities of natural elements: for example, water (bathing/cleansing, hydration, rain), fire (warmth, cooking, light), earth (soil, rock, clay), and wind (air, breath, sailing) and so on (see Grassie 2019:100-102). These elements and their respective associations which

were not only representative of essential tools to the survival of early hunter-gatherer groups but were also acknowledged as being divine as it was superior in strength, and autonomous to the human willpower (Peoples, *et al.* 2018:274-277, Sayem 2018:198-201).

Eventually, the gods of animism became more than just impersonal ecological constructs. Later, they evolved and multiplied into various anthropomorphic deities, with unique divine identities, traits, and occupations based on these assemblages. Humanity began to develop oral traditions about said deities and formulated mythologies about the creation of the universe, the relationship between humanity *vis-à-vis* the divine, and its relationship to the aforementioned natural elements vital to human existence. Moreover, as humans evolved, these narratives became more sophisticated, before they eventually were replaced by the emergence of monotheism, replacing the "old gods" with a single superior demiurge who created everything ex nihilo and reigns omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient over all the aforementioned "zones" (Elliott & June 2018:159-163 cf. Kapp & Cronjé 2022:2).

Armstrong however noted that this singular (monotheistic) religiosity, can arguably be considered the earliest form of religious expression through which humans understood the mystery and tragedy of existence – eventually replaced by a pantheon of Pagan gods, as this original "One God" [sic.] became too distant and exalted that he had been replaced by lesser spirits (Armstrong 1994:17-19), as we will see with religions like Zoroastrianism, discussed later in this section. An example of Pagan animism can be seen in the fundamental concept of Paganism's kinship with nature. As Rountree notes, most pagans are in some way animistic and to whom all of the earth's visible inhabitants, namely rocks, trees, rivers, mountains, caves, animals, humans, and insects, as well as particular traces of land and

even veritably the entire earth it or herself, share a collective consciousness (Rountree 2015:307-308).

There are, however, varieties of emphasis and beliefs among the pagans owing to the diversity of their respective origins: the Celtic Druids, for example, may deify or even reify the land as the most significant entity. Whereas Heathens and Shamans may concentrate on relationships with other-than-human forms of sentience such as rocks, trees, animals, and spirits. Wiccans, on the other hand, generally focus their attention more on a specific god and/or goddess (or an entire pantheon of both). All of the above and more, may include ancestors and ghosts in their practice; some of whom, had a relationship with a particular place on the earth and revive a form of connection from it (Rountree 2015:308-309). An example of this can be seen in Feuerbach's consideration of the divinity of nature. Feuerbach asserts that the finite spirit externalises or objectifies itself through the concept of God (Harvey 1995:27 cf. Feuerbach 2008:127-129). Religion therefore does not reveal the infinite within the finite, but rather enables the finite to discover its own infinite nature. As such God represents the embodiment through which the human spirit uncovers its fundamental essence (Beyers 2022:4-5).

3.5.4 Totemism: Protectors, Spiritual Guides And Sacred Totems

Even though there is no conclusive hypothesis concerning the chronology, origins, or evolution of primordial religion (in general), Halapsis attempts to position a framework in noting that there is a belief that religious conceptualisation came into existence with the Middle-Paleolithic Neanderthals. Regardless, it is incontrovertible that human history is to a large degree written by religious inks (Halapsis 2015:53-54). Another marker of tribal, or

native faiths in primordial history is totemism. Just like animism, totemism is an indispensable characteristic of early tribal religion (Palmer, *et al.* 2015:286).

The word "totem" originates from the word *ototeman* from the *Ojibwa* (Chippewa) North American native peoples, translated as meaning "his brother-sister kin". It was first introduced to the English language by English traveller and merchant, John Long in his work, *Voyages and Travels of Indian Interpreter and Trader* (1792). Among the Chippewa people, a part of their religious expression involved each having his or her own totem or "favourite spirit" which they believed watched over them. They conceived that this totem assumes the shape of a particular animal and vowed to never kill the animal the respective totem represents (Long 1792:86 cf. Kigen 2018:14). Moreover, this phenomenon was also noticed in Western Australia under a different name, *kobong* and later other research on the topic followed in Europe, and eventually, Asia and Africa (see Kigen 2018:13-15).

When it comes to totemism, it resembles animism quite closely in its interconnectedness to nature. However, in contrast with animism, focus is directed at natural objects, a totem, which is a sacred object, emblem, or symbol usually resembling or said to contain, the spirit of an animal or plant with sacred significance to a group of people (i.e., a clan, family, tribe, or lineage) as a link to their ancestry or mythic past (Amirthalingam 2014:22-23). There are, however, several ways to view the totem and it can also be regarded as a protector, companion, spiritual guide or helper. Furthermore, it can also be perceived as an object inspiring awe and fear, while occasionally, special names and emblems are utilised to refer to the totem and even specific bans on the killing and consuming of certain animals it represents (Amirthalingam 2014:23).

To each respective tribe, a totem is considered exceptionally sacred, as it holds religious significance to the tribal life. Many tribes inscribed or adorned the sigil of their totem on their persons or decorated their homes and prayer rooms with the symbol, shape, or figure. Jackson defines a sigil as a glyph created by direct analogy, such as converting numbers using a magic square, from a name, word, or magic formula. A sigil might be either conventional or developed. Sigils classified as traditional, have been in use for hundreds of years if not longer. It is unclear how they were made or found, even though they mostly occur in sacred texts (Jackson 2013:81-84). And they are always kept and developed at their most sacred places (Goswami 2018:2-3).

Nevertheless, whichever shape it takes, it is believed that the totem brings blessings and protects the tribe in times of difficulty – it also warns tribal members of any and all danger and can also help predict the future (Goswami 2018:1-4 cf. Palmer, *et al.* 2015:291-292). An example of a totemic representation in paganism is that of Frey (translatable as 'Lord') brother deity to Freyja of the Nordic Vanir pantheon, and often associated with fertility. Frey (also called Fróði or Fricka), has a totemic symbol of a boar, and helmets of the early Norse have been found carrying this symbol as a crest. He has also been depicted with an oversized and often erect phallus (Jennings 2018:51-52).

3.5.5 Polytheism: Heathens, Pagans, And Idolaters

Native (pagan) faiths, also collectively comprise a nature of polytheism (or pantheism), though it has the possibility to manifest itself in other forms (Levitin 2018:52). According to Bittarello, polytheism is an abstract category, created by scholars of religion to describe religions that do not recognise one singular transcendent god (Bittarello 2010:69-70 cf.

Tugendhaft 2012:301-302). However, there are positions such as that from early Christian church fathers such as Clement of Alexandria in his Exhortation to the Heathen (Protrepticus) and Stromata (Miscellanies), Origen in Contra Celsum (Against Celsus), and Augustine, who regarded that pagan polytheism indeed resembled a form of monarchic monism (see Levitin 2018:54-55). For example, in De civitate Dei contra paganos (Concerning the City of God contrary to the Pagans), Augustine assumed a broad consensus pertaining to the singularity of God, and perceived the multiplicity of gods worshipped by Platonists, as subservient to the highest God. In Augustine's view, what did not matter was the term used to describe the divine, but rather the underlying theological concept (Fürst 2010:85-86).

This was even espoused by some educated Greeks in the 5th century BCE such as the neo-platonic philosopher Julian (Naiweld 2018:5), through studying the prophesies of Hystaspes and the Sybelline Oracles (now known to scholarship as forgeries) which they served as evidence for their consideration of the entire pantheon of pagan gods to be symbolic of, and in a way subservient to, a singular cosmic intellect and therefore compatible with monotheism. Nevertheless, these positions are considered unconvincing and improbable, due to pagan approaches to 'the divine' being dissimilar to that of, for example, Christianity (Levitin 2018:55-57).

Furthermore, according to Simpson and Filip, there are a plethora of terms in the world today, referring to what can be considered native faiths in Europe: in English, the most prominent word is "pagan", and its etymological origins and social history, has been well documented in academic scholarship (see Chapter 1). The term being Latin in origin, just like *christianus*, was pejorative in its usage, and derived from the term *paganus* which referred to a "peasant", "country dweller" or "civilian" (cf. Cameron 2011:14). Basically, alluding to a person who is

provincial and generally out of touch and unfashionable. It was also mainly used by Christians to describe non-Christian practices of newly discovered native territories. Moreover, this term can be found in nearly every European language to this day: French *païen*, German *Paganist*, Hungarian *pogány*, Estonian *pagan*, Lithuanian *pagonys*, Czech *pohan*, and Russian поган (*pogan*). However, even though these terms share the same heritage, some of them carry more baggage than the aforementioned English (Simpson & Filip 2022:53-54).

The earliest documented usage of the term paganus dates back to the 4th century CE According to *The Oxford Classical Dictionary* it refers to someone who inhabits pagus which refers to a law, subdividing territory (rural areas), where there had not been a focal settlement along with the extended territories of those that did (Purcell 2012:236 & Cameron 2011:14). Later on, according to Rousseau (2012:236) during imperial times, the term was used to refer to someone who stayed at home or had lived a civilian life. During the Christian era, the term in and of itself became more prominent in sermons rather than treatises and used (as indicated earlier) in a pejorative sense, denoting one who was not a *miles Christi*, but *milites Christi* which is the plural form of "soldier of Christ", which placed emphasis on the nature of the individual as a civilian, as Christians served in the Roman army (Cameron 2011:15-16). Furthermore, its transferral to English, forming the Latin-derivative "pagan", dates back to the 14th century and in more modern times, it was used to refer to non-European peoples suggestively assuming that they all had a "natural[istic] religion" and were not Christian (Rousseau 2012:236). Paganism in its synonymous usage with polytheism also later became associated with idolatry or the worship of false idols (Naiweld 2018:7).

However, when it comes to polytheism as an abstract concept, it becomes difficult to substantively define it (theoretically), due to the fact that polytheistic styles of devotion tend to relativise the orthodox concept of polytheism (Butler 2016:35). In for example, identifying

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one god with another, or fuse two gods together to form a third or focusing devotion on a single god (whilst still recognising others). Therefore, scholars have come up with terms such as henotheism to distinguish between a "hard" and "soft" polytheism-dichotomy, referring to the idea that one god has several incarnations, or worshipping one deity and not denying the existence of others (Dwivedi 2019:1-2). The latter, resembles the Neoplatonic and the early Christian Patristic idea that all gods interconnect to one singular divinity. The former, espouses the commonly understood idea of polytheism: gods possess individualistic will, agency and consciousness. Characteristics that achieve their zenith through encompassing the world and not excluding it (Butler 2016:35-36).

Palmqvist (2022) proposes that the Romans became famous for identifying gods from other regions and cultures with their own: they identified, for example, Jupiter with Zeus and regarded Odin as similar to Mercury. Another example is the syncretic nature of the Hellenistic religion in late antiquity where the cult of Cybele, the Magna Mater, showcased an inheritance of various traits from numerous other mother-goddesses (Palmqvist 2022:6). This implies – if anything – that the polytheistic nature of paganism shows an inclusivism towards foreign gods, rather than a rejection of them. Therefore, instead of taking these pagan pantheons literally, we should rather understand them as culturally specific approaches in relating to the divine. There is thus no distinctive one-size-fits-all approach when it comes to identifying and exploring native faiths such as paganism.

3.6 Evolution Of Religion: Polytheism, Monotheism, To Post-Theism?

Monotheism asserts the notion that one supreme being above all others exists, and this idea can be traced back to *c.* 1800-1200 BCE in Persia (modern Iran), with the emergence of Zoroastrianism (Ambalu, Cogan & Feinstein, *et al.* 2013a:54). It is both the oldest traceable

monotheistic faith, as well as the oldest surviving religion and was developed by the prophet Zoroaster also known as Zarathustra who incorporated the old Indo-Iranian (pagan) god, Ahura Mazda, also known as Ohrmazd "god of wisdom", elevating him as the one supreme god, a wise creator and who represents order and truth, as opposed to chaos and evil. He is assisted by six spirits (his creations) called Amesha Spenta (bounteous immortals) and a seventh, less-definable spirit Spenta Mainyu, acts as his own bounteous spirit and agent of his will. Finally, he is locked in eternal battle with personified evil, an entity named Ahriman or Angra Mainyu "destructive spirit", ever since time began. Ahura and Angra are considered to be twin spirits, while Angra or Ahriman is a fallen, lesser-being, and cannot be considered equal. Their struggle of evil attempting to vanquish good forms the basis of Zoroastrian mythology (Ambalu, Cogan & Feinstein, *et al.* 2013b:62-63).

This section aims to further examine the development of religion, with a focus on the evolution of relevant Western religious beliefs from monotheism to post-theism and eventually esotericism. Through emphasising significant developments, movements and individuals that paved the way for our understanding of a history of religion in the West, this chapter will therefore attempt to initiate a discussion on post-theistic spirituality and its relationship to esotericism. How did we get here? Is there one? And if so, what is it?

3.6.1 Yahweh And Paganism: Monotheism, Monarchic Monism, Or Henotheism?

Costello argues that the origin of monotheism lies in the nature of polytheism, where monotheism, is the product of the syncretism of a single religious tradition with another (Costello 2016:26). As mentioned earlier in this section, in polytheism, foreign gods are often worshipped alongside the native pantheon, indicating no competition towards obtaining

adherents (see Van Nuffelen 2012:457-458; Granholm 2022:6). However, monotheism in contrast, does not showcase a tendency to allow such parallelism in religious epistemologies and tends to subsume the gods and the holy sites of their polytheistic "competition". Karen Armstrong asserts that the inclination towards intolerance has become commonplace within monotheism (Armstrong 1994:29). Nevertheless, she adds that this hostility towards other gods represented a novel religious mentality as Paganism exhibited inclusivity, by embracing new deities, provided that their introduction did not undermine the existing cults or the pantheon (Armstrong 1994:29-30).

Such a tendency is notable in the Christian Church's interpretatio Christiana in 700 CE, which was the practice in which the church converted pagan sites, culture, practices, and religious iconography towards utilising them for Christian purposes (Costello 2016:26-27). This ideal is something characteristic of monotheistic religion in its pursuit of expansion: its eradication of 'competition' via prohibiting pagan idolatry. Jan Assmann, an influential historian identified this in his groundbreaking work Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism (1997) in explaining that idolatry is more than just mere iconism. Instead, it is a term that carries a lot of anxiety-inducing baggage and is approached with a strong religious/cultural sense of abomination towards anything that does not accord with de facto monotheistic doctrine. And thus, it serves as an umbrella term for all that must be avoided and warded off by any means necessary, and it is this attitude that Assmann considered to be an intrinsic characteristic of monotheism (Naiweld 2018:2-3).

Tugendhaft criticised Assmann's theory and its approach to the 2nd commandment of the Judeo-Christian Decalogue: "you shall have no other gods before me" (Exodus 20:3 ESV), stating that instead of presupposing that Yahweh denied the existence of other deities, he is simply prohibiting the worship of other deities, as this would qualify as apostasy and an act

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of disloyalty. Furthermore, he adds that this command is not about prohibiting the worship of other deities, it is forbidding the deities of others (Tugendhaft 2012:304). In short, Tugendhaft is proposing that the text represents a political sentiment, rather than a religious one, as the Decalogue formed part of a world filled with tribes who each had their own deity: i.e., the Edomites, Qos; the Moabites, Chemosh and the Israelites had Yahweh or El. Therefore, the Decalogue's focus on the ban of images, is not particularly a rejection of gods as "false", but rather a critique on the images or cult statues of the different tribes and thus a prohibition on the worshipping of other people's gods (Tugendhaft 2012:304-306). Naiweld, however, notes that this text, occurring in both Exodus and Deuteronomy, represents the epitome of Judeo-Christian biblical monotheism. This phenomenon has caused both conservative and modern religious readers of the text, to follow suit by replacing the name of the Israelite god, with the title Lord (Naiweld 2018:3). Writing "God" with a capital "G" (both traditions already established in antiquity) suggests that the subject matter of the text indicates the monotheistic belief in one supreme and true God. Such a reading of the text has been practised by Jews and Christians alike, since antiquity up until today (Naiweld 2018:3-4).

Alternatively, Ehrman argued that even though the ancient Jews were considered monotheists; knowing that the pagans had many gods and regarding Yahweh as their only god who created the world and everything in it. Ehrman also notes that ancient Judaism, also recognised a "divine pyramid" – similar to the pagans who believed that divine beings temporarily became human and vice versa. Furthermore, Erhman holds the same view as Tugendhaft in acknowledging the 2nd commandment does not deny the existence of other gods, but rather prohibits the worshipping of others (Erhman 2014:50 cf. Tugendhaft 2012:304), therefore, according to Ehrman, showing a leniency towards henotheism, as opposed to strict monotheism. Leitane instead argues that early Israelite monotheism

emerged during the first six centuries of their history, only coming to full fruition as a response to the socio-religious crisis of the exile. Leitane thus proposes that this evolutionary model is favoured in biblical scholarship, when discussing the emergence of monotheism. However, this is not to be viewed as a singular phenomenon, but rather a chain of events following each other in rapid succession, which eventually contributed to what can now be understood as monotheism (Leitane 2013:1357-1358).

Moreover, Ehrman maintains that even though Judaism does not inherently recognise the divinity of other creatures (such as humans or other gods), it does recognise superhuman beings that lived in the divine realm, or divine beings who became human and humans that became divine beings (i.e. angels). These creatures were not gods, but lower-level divinities/spirits whose godlike powers were not equal to that of Yahweh, but who worshipped and attended to him along with being facilitators of his will (Ehrman 2014:50-51). In the Hebrew Bible, they go by many names: cherubim, seraphim and/or angels. Jewish texts speak of great angels Michael, Raphael, Ariel and Gabriel, and some Jews even thought it was appropriate to worship them alongside or after Yahweh. This does not fit the classic typology of monotheism, but rather resemble religious approaches more akin to paganism (Ehrman 2014:50-54). Frevel also notes that approaching ancient Judaism in a strict monotheistic sense is problematic, because in its exclusivism, it denies the early polytheistic influences and traits of the religion influenced by its contemporaries. Simultaneously, Frevel continues that monotheism as a demarcation is not just problematic but should not be discarded and rather just be used as a heuristic and relational idea (Frevel 2013:1-4).

3.6.2 Greco-Roman Monotheism: Paganism Versus Christianity?

Towards the end of antiquity, philosophical discourse in the 4-5th centuries CE, Greco-Roman society became more religious and subsequently more organised under a monotheistic culture (see Cameron 2011:33-34). However, this shift was not Christianity (at first) because it was pagan monotheism that, according to Van Nuffelen, played an integral role in the conversion of the Roman empire to Christianity. Van Nuffelen argues (as has been indicated earlier in this thesis) that this idea of pagan monotheism was merely a philosophical construct, deriving from the works of Plato which served as the discursive basis, and therefore it ought to be considered an intellectual development, rather than having any real impact on lived religion (Van Nuffelen 2012:452-453).

According to Gassman (2020), traditional approaches to religion between Christianity and Paganism in Roman culture developed alongside one another in dialogue (even though not identical). Moreover, even though these perceived divisions among one another, often considered to be an exclusively Christian invention, was also present in non-Christian thought (Gassman 2020:6). However, with that being said, the latter did not divide individual worshippers socially into categories of "monotheists" versus "polytheists" (as the Christians and Jews did), but rather polytheist philosophers long affirmed the idea of a single deity beyond, or a singular divinity uniting all lesser gods. This socio-cultural tendency became the reality of 4th century Greco-Roman society, long before Constantine the Great's rise to power (Gassman 2020:6-10).

A complete historiography of Rome's Pagan-Christian relations, and the nuance of collective events, leading to the 'victory' of Christianity in Rome (over paganism), is too multiplicitous to encapsulate in mere paragraphs (see Cameron 2011:3-13 cf. Van Nuffelen 2012:451-453).

However, identifying important key elements, the ascendance of a new state religion was heralded by the Edict of Milan which in 313 CE made it possible for Christians, a growing number by then and no longer a minority, to freely profess their religious devotions. Moreover, Constantine's victory over Licinius c. 324 that saw him declare his pro-Christian ideas at the Council of Nicaea in 325 (Popović & Borić-Brešković 2013:138). It was during this period, that Constantine also founded Constantinople (326), during which he produced a series of coinage Divus Constantinus, depicting his divine establishment as emperor, complete with liturgical iconography, representing the emperor's veiled head ascending in Sol's chariot, and displaying manus Dei, or "the hand of God", reaching down to touch Constantine's raised right hand (Popović & Borić-Brešković 2013:228-230).

This has an ambiguous interpretation, depending on whether the viewer perceived the symbolism in a Christian sense (the metaphor of a solar link with the Christian God and their intimate connection which had already been established by then). Or, in a Solar sense, due to the ascension of the sun chariot, which was a traditional iconographic feature in consecration, and would not have had religious meaning to the pagan observer (Popović & Borić-Brešković 2013:230-231). Pagan roots are identifiable in almost every major religious paradigm discussed so far, as it not only contributed exponentially in just being one of the oldest traceable forms of religious expression in the West, but also played an important role in esotericism. There is an inextricable convergence between Paganism and esotericism, due to the fact that the development of both fields has a lot in common even though their histories might differ. Consequently, the question that comes to mind is: how have we gone from profound belief in god and gods to complete and utter post-theistic non-belief?

3.6.3 Constructing Post-Theism: From *Aufklärung* To New Atheism And Contemporary Secularism Or Nontheism

Of all the perceived taboo subjects in religious studies one can encroach the mere notions of secularism and atheism remain the most volatile, especially in addition to sex and occultism/esotericism (see Kripal & Hanegraaff 2008:ix-xv), as they appear to exist as the very antitheses to religion and spirituality. This section aims to prove that such notions are not quite that simple. As since the Copernican revolution, humanity has increasingly been woken up to scientific conjecture; begging the age-old philosophical question: "does god exist"? Usually followed by the critical evaluation and de-construction of deeply held beliefs and religious dogma (cf. Tyler 1996:2-9). This epistemological shift is best described by the words of Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, as *scientia cognitionis sensitivae* or "science of sensate cognition" (Adler & Campe 2020:160). Although, it is more appropriately understood by its common German demarcation, *Aufklärung* or "Enlightenment" which Adler and Campe explain as the "logic", "reason" and "rationalism" emerging during the late 17th-18th and early 19th centuries, eventually followed by the 20th and 21st centuries (Adler & Campe 2020:157-160). This is supported by Beyers, who acknowledges the gradual contemporary decline in the expression of – traditional – religious belief in the past century, following the challenges posed by a post-modern paradigm and rationalisation (Beyers 2014:1-2 cf. Beyers 2013:6-7).

1. The Enlightenment (Aufklärung)

As such, it is worth noting the prominent contributions to the aforementioned "science of sensate cognition" by Voltaire (François-Marie Arouet) as seminal Western post-modernist thinker and vociferous critic of religion in his works (see Sudartini 2024:6-9), of which the most prominent is his Catéchisme de l' honnête homme (Catechism of the honest man),

which is styled in a Socratic dialogue format, yet presents a "viscious attack on religion" (Venter 2018:3-4) and in which one participant in the dialogue, the "Honest Man", is dealt the winning card in a game against a Greek Orthodox "Venerable" (Venter 2018:4-6). Additionally, in his work Dieu et les Hommes (God and Human Beings), Voltaire opined that "every priest, I have no doubt, would be if he could, a tyrant of the human race" (Marshall 2018:167-168). Moreover, known for his erudite critiques, Marshall maintains that Voltaire did not only criticise Christianity, but also presented stark criticism against Judaism and Islam (Marshall 2018:170-177). Who were all examples of what he, Voltaire, considered "priestcraft" and "imposture" (Marshall 2018:177-178).

Another example of Beyers' post-modern paradigm can be identified in prominent Western philosophical Enlightenment thought such as Die Fröhliche Wißenchaft (The Joyful Wisdom/Gay Science), where Friedrich Nietzsche serves as a seminal example of post-modern thought and rationalisation in the West, lamenting in his infamous "Parable of the Madman" the death of God (Nietzsche 1974:181-182). Thereby heralding "the age of atheism" (see Hyman 2010:15-16). Yet, Thiessen notes that even though Nietzsche is credited with the infamous dictum "God is dead", it was initially Hegel – a firmly "Christian philosopher"– who claimed it as both the aim and presupposition of his philosophy of self-knowledge (Thiessen 2024:2 cf. Hegel 1977:476) which will be discussed in more depth, later in this chapter. Though, in Nietzsche's view, this dictum not only infers that God has been killed, but also sacrificed. Thus, God as died in the historic movement, which Nietzsche describes as the "will to truth" governed by a logic of sacrifice (Thiessen 2024:2-4).

Finally, another prominent figure contributing to the advent of post-theism was Karl Marx, who is not only famous for the maxim: "religion is the opiate of the people" (Razavi 2023:1), but also cites in the foreword of his doctoral thesis titled, The Difference Between the Democritean and Epicurean Philosophy of Nature (1902), Epicurus' Letter to Menoecus: "Not the man who denies the gods worshipped by the multitude, but he who affirms of the gods what the multitude believes about them is truly impious", followed by The Confession of Prometheus: "In simple words, I hate the pack of gods" (Marx 1902:3-4 cf. Achcar 2020:320-321). Moreover, Marx believed that religion had been utilised as a power entity to maintain class structures in society (Hyman 2010:42-45). As such, he believed that religion manifests as the fundamental issue with these said structures and dynamics, which subsequently contributes to alienation and hostility between individuals (Razavi 2023:1-2).

Alternatively, Sigmund Freud had a more critical regard for the human quest to experience a numinous transpersonal meaning in life. According to Kenny, Freud did not believe in God – or immortality, but had a keen fascination with the question of religion and its relation to cultural issues. He valued science as well as reason, above religious superstition. In his work New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis, Freud viewed religion and science to be incompatible – referring to "obsessive religious practices and actions" as a departure point for his consideration of the transcendental (Kenny 2015:4-7).

Later, he published Totem and Taboo: Resemblances Between the Psychic Lives of Savages and Neurotics (1913) in which he ascribes religion to be a product of the Oedipus complex (Freud 1913:149-151), and collective neurosis (Idris & Idris 2017:61-67 cf. Freud 1913:85-86) along with several other works on the issue (see Kenny 2015:202-203). Yet, the most notable example of Freud's consideration of religion (*vis-à-vis* spirituality), is that "the events of human history, the interactions between human nature, cultural development, and the

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precipitates of primal experiences are no more than a reflection of the dynamic conflicts between the "ego", the "id", and the "superego" (Freud 1935:72 cf. Kenny 2015:65-68). As well as that, according to Freud, the best hope mankind has, is intellect in lieu of religion's prohibition against thought (Freud 1927:29-32).

As mentioned earlier, Idris and Idris note that Freud approached religion as a collective neurosis that cripples people filled with inauthentic evidence (i.e. the use of revelation as proof of doctrine), a variety of contradictions, requiring corrections while being wrong very often. Maintaining that Freud also believed that religion was a tool, invented to make people believe in the existence of God/Gods, and that said divinity/ies act as a medium through which to overcome the threats of nature. Making people endure the cruelty of their fates by simultaneously promising rewards for submitting to suffering and frustration (Idris & Idris 2017:57-58). Freud was thus a seminal Enlightenment-era critic of religion.

To ensure discursive clarity, it should be noted that the preceding examples do not necessarily aim to provide a comprehensive discussion of the formative influences on rationalisation that collectively gave rise to the Aufklärung in the West. Rather, their purposes are to retrospectively represent significant figures in the Western intellectual oeuvre of the 17th and 19th centuries; paving the way for contemporary post-theistic discourse, by presenting criticism against orthodox religious belief in order to promote the secular. Similarly, by promoting esoteric sexuality as a post-theistic current, rather than overt criticism of orthodox belief systems, this thesis serves a similar purpose in promoting secular self-spirituality via esotericism. Nevertheless, the discussion does not end here, as it ought to be enquired as to how the notion of secularism, links to post-theism and inevitably esotericism? While the aforementioned prominent figures paved the way for 20th-century "new atheism," commonly

known as "secular fundamentalism" (LeDrew 2018:143-144). This thesis argues, as is displayed by Mircea Eliade, as seminal thinker in the development of Western esotericism despite being considered the most heavily criticised scholar of religion (see Brown 1981:429-431; Laitila 2007:99-101; Mirdamadi 2015:398-401; Fiamrillah, *et al.* 2023:69-74), that even profane space (and inevitably "new atheism") despite doing away with traditional religion, still maintain a sort of non-homogeneity similar to the religious experience of space (see Eliade 1963:24). As such, post-theism retains its capacity to experience a secular (alternative) form of spirituality.

2. The New Atheist Movement

The contemporary position of "new atheism" or "new atheist movement" emerged between 2004 and 2007 (Dawkins 2019:13-14), while being pioneered and established by influential atheistic academics, writers, philosophers, and scientists of whom the most notable are Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, Christopher Hitchens and Daniel Dennet, who are also referred to as "The Four Horsemen" or "Four Musketeers of the Mind" (see Fry 2019:6-12). New Atheism can thus, following the above discussed Aufklärung, be interpreted as the second advent in the discursive culmination of post-theistic discourse, emerging as a response to religious fundamentalism (LeDrew 2018:152-154). Atheism and its related currents have been somewhat underrepresented in scholarship (Loren & Rambo 2018:3-4 cf. Cragun 2016:302-303); as such, scholars such as Loren & Rambo believe this might be due to the severe stigma from fundamentalist meta-narratives, ranging from ubiquitous definitions ascribing it (atheism) to the pure "denial of God", misconstruing it as an undesirable and irrational belief system (Alexander 2020:253-256, 262; see Loren & Rambo 2018:6), to fundamentalist as well as far-right religious movements and groups accusing atheism of cannibalism, promiscuity, and devil worship (Loren & Rambo 2018:6-9).

When in contrast, the obvious etymological meaning of atheism is rooted in the Greek a denoting "without/not" and theos translating to "god" (Cragun 2016:303). However, Alexander remarks that the delineation of this ideology cannot be restricted to mere semantics (Alexander 2020:254-255). For this reason, LeDrew introduces atheism at the hand of "scientism", which he argues is the view that science is the only legitimate form of knowledge (LeDrew 2018:145) and that the natural sciences *vis-à-vis* the human body, behaviour, institutions, and nature are the only appropriate paradigms through which to study society and culture (LeDrew 2018:145-146). In addition, Cragun proposes a dichotomous manifestation for how individuals can be without belief in god(s): 1) Positive atheism: they can be aware of the claimed existence of god (e.g. Thor) and deny the existence of said deity (Cragun 2016:303). 2) Negative atheism: being unaware of the claimed existence of a deity, without prior knowledge (Cragun 2016:303-304).

3. Secularism and Nonreligion

The various manifestations of atheism mentioned thus far, are synonymous with "secular," a term derived from Latin and used by liberal Christian theologians to describe anything that is not related to religion, or the act of making something worldly (Beyers 2014:3). Beyers elaborates on this interpretation by alluding to Eliade's distinction between the "religious" realm, which is sacred and spiritual, and the "secular" realm, which is profane and temporal (Eliade 1963:20-24; Beyers 2014:3). However, Beyers views these constructs in opposition to one another (Beyers 2014:3). Whereas, in contrast, Eliade seeks to incorporate the nonreligious individual, referred to as the "profane" into his own distinct sacred categorisation (Eliade 1963:51-52). Nevertheless, Beyers' initial definition of secularism is corroborated by Smith and Cragun, who further expound on the concept as denoting something entirely

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disconnected from religion. Additionally, they also highlight the inherent a-religious implication associated with secularism, as observed in self-identified secular groups (Smith & Cragun 2021:5-6 cf. Bullivant 2020:9-10).

Furthermore, Smith and Cragun suggest that a more modern term for the latter concept is "nonreligion" (Smith & Cragun 2021:6). While Bullivant asserts that this term is a newly coined academic concept that, in a comprehensive manner, encompasses everything that is in opposition to religion, including the act of rejecting it (Bullivant 2020:2-3). Eliade notes what he calls the "nonreligious man" who has developed fully in the West, maintaining that the nonreligious human assumes a novel existential viewpoint: one in which he/she is the sole agent and subject of history refusing to appeal to transcendence (Eliade 1963:203). Therefore, (similar to scientism), Eliade notes that he/she – the nonreligious human – accepts no model for humanity outside of the human condition: "…man makes himself and he only makes himself completely in proportion as he desacralizes himself and the world. The sacred is the prime obstacle to his freedom. He will become himself only when he is totally demysticized. He will not be truly free until he has killed the last god…" (Eliade 1963:203-205).

4. Post-theism

As a result, nontheism undeniably functions as the definitive preceding framework for understanding the subsequent term, post-theism. Because of its limited research, the concept of post-theism is complex, which means tracing its exact origins is nigh impossible (Beyers 2022:6). In his treatise on the American approach to liberal Christianity, Dorrien identifies a possible source in philosophical theology, by extrapolating on the early 20th century Unitarian/Unitarian Universalist theologian and philosopher Henry Nelson Wieman, who

veered close to a "posttheistic" position in his development of liberal theology (Dorrien 2006:7 cf. McKanan 2013:2-7). Playing down the question of divine reality in pursuit of naturalism and "temporalist empiricism" (see Dorrien 2006:81 cf. Beyers 2022:5), therefore in Dorrien's view, Wieman represented a common "posttheistic"/"post-Christian" tendency (2006:7), commonly found within the empiricist stream from liberal theologians of the University of Chicago (Dorrien 2006:28, 60-67).

John Shelby Spong, in his work A New Christianity for a New World, echoes Wieman's perspective of naturalism and temporalist empiricism, in delineating a less-literal understanding of the concept of post-theism similar to Nietzsche's lamentation of "God is Dead". As such, Spong not only identifies as a "post-theistic Christian" (2000:192) but defines the post-theistic world as one that rejects the "modern-day remnant of the theistic system" of our forebears in the commonly held idea that "God is at the helm" of everything (Spong 2000:192-193 cf. Van Aarde 2009:1). He further proposes that traditional theistic beliefs were created to address existential anxiety but are becoming less relevant and therefore, suggesting that theism's promises of security fail to deliver, encourages its inevitable demise (see Spong 2000:204-205).

Van Aarde associates post-theism with Charles Taylor's postmodern spiritual inclination of 'enchantment' in A Secular Age (2007:507-508) which argues that the secular without the spiritual is destined for failure (cf. Van Aarde 2009a:3-4), in addition to Peter Berger's critique of 'civil religion' in his work The Heretical Imperative (1961), discussing the increasing demand for Christianity to be secularised (see Berger 1961:116 cf. Van Aarde 2009a:1-2). Van Aarde established his own view on post-theism, advocating for the doing away with traditional metaphysical (theistic) language, replacing it with more contemporaneous spiritual

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language (Van Aarde 2009a:2-3). As such, affecting the status quo of static institutionalised religion and returning to communal expressions recognising the self as a spiritual being (Van Aarde 2009a:5-6 cf. Van Aarde 2009b:6-7).

Additionally, Van der Ven and Beauregard's After God? provides a detailed exposition of 1960s discussions about Anglican Bishop J.A.T. Robinson's work, "Honest to God." Initiated by Robinson, Van der Ven and Beauregard engage in a discussion on the relationship between religious belief in God and atheism in the 1960s. They specifically analyse the relationship between autonomy and belief in God, espousing the former as a product of the Enlightenment (Van der Ven & Beauregard 2001:1–30).

More recent conversations on the matter have been encroached by Tristram Engelhardt in his work, After God: Morality Bioethics in a Secular Age where he diagnoses a post-theistic world as a world de facto devoid of God (Jenkins 2017:184-185 cf. Engelhardt 2017:45), devoid of a basis for morality, human rights, medical ethics where the world is essentially left with a brute of a human equal to Francis Fukuyama's dog, lying in the sun and content to do so as long as it is fed (Fukuyama 1992:311 cf. Engelhardt 2017:426). He maintains that god will be replaced by the state, giving the dog treats and scratching its back while training it to accept that this is all it needs, ergo, no higher purpose, no love of beauty, transcendent affections or thoughts without an ideology (Engelhardt 2017:61 cf. Jenkins 2017:187-188; Cherry 2018:617-619).

Conclusively, Beyers balances a variety of perspectives pertaining to the definition post-theism, bringing into discussion the ideas of Ludwig Andreas Feuerbach, and Hendrik Johan Adriaanse who each provide a unique contribution to the understanding of post-theism

(Beyers 2022:3-6). Feuerbach regards that there is a difference between theism and nature: theism causes the separation between nature and humans, isolating them from nature and creating the impression that humans are set apart above nature (Beyers 2022:5 cf. Feuerbach 1908:26). Moreover, Feuerbach emphasises a concept of unity with nature; guided by the human senses as epistemology for the experience of reality, where the essence of human nature is rooted in consciousness, materialism, and sensory intuition classified as "sensuousness" (Yang 2024:2-3 cf. Hu 2023:2-5).

In addition to this, Adriaanse, similar to Spong (2000:204-205), introduces post-theism as a replacement for theism which has lost its credibility and situates post-theism within the broader historical and cultural movement away from traditional Judeo-Christian theism (Adriaanse 2000:33-35). Furthermore, Adriaanse defines post-theism not merely as extension of atheism or secularism, but rather as unique reconstruction of religious belief and experience, which transcends conventional theistic approaches (Adriaanse 2000:36-39). Adriaanse also identifies the influence of prominent western philosophical thought including, but not limited to, existentialism, phenomenology, and postmodern philosophy noting the influence of Derrida, Foucault, Sartre and Heidegger, including Voltaire, Marx, Freud, Feuerbach, and Nietzsche as prominent influences on post-theism (Adriaanse 2000:39-45). In light of the aforementioned, Beyers concludes that post-theism constitutes a movement with arguments contra theism's belief in a personal god of a spiritual nature, who is both omnipotent and omniscient as well as the creator and sustainer of the cosmos (Beyers 2022:6). In sum, Beyers maintains that post-theism can subsequently be understood as the expression of dissatisfaction with theism.

However, it is Dingemans who describes it most aptly:

"Bij sommige posttheïstische denkers heb ik de indruk, dat ze een nieuwe vorm van religie (al of niet binnen de christelijke traditie) willen ontwerpen die nauwelijks aansluit bij de ontwikkelingen in de huidige theologische bezinning en bij de religieuze beleving van christenen. Daarbij is het uitgangspunt vaak het eigen bewustzijn: dat wat ikzelf belangrijk vind en kan bevatten. Dat heet soms 'relationele filosofie', maar het is een 'religie zonder godsleer'" (Dingemans 2017:6-7).

3.6.4 Post-Theism And Esotericism: A New Age Spiritual Revolution

Since a trajectory between the development of religion and post-theism has been established, it is now equally important to include a discussion on the connection between post-theism and esotericism. As a result, this section will argue New Age, a term originating around the 1970's-90's in certain segments of the U.S. (Chryssides 2007:6 cf. Levin 2022:1), as nexus for esotericism and post-theism. Hanegraaff identifies this proposition in his identification of New Age as a Western esoteric current represented by popular patterns of culture criticism (Hanegraaff 2007:29-31 cf. Podolecka 2017:160-161), where one can expect to encounter a variety of convictions and ideas, that each either explicitly or implicitly, resemble a dissatisfaction with the contemporary cultural status quo (Hanegraaff 2000:291). Moreover, the New Age subculture, aside from being praised by Hanegraaff as "a major phenomenon in popular religion, with a considerable cultural and religious significance" (Hanegraaff 1996:1) has been categorised as a "religion" by Olav Hammer (1997:514) and a movement by Paul Heelas (1996:19-20), while other scholars such as Frisk and Nynäs note that it has also been described as "smorgasbord" where each individual is free to fill his own plate with whatever they choose (Frisk & Nynäs 2012:2).

However, such a definition pertaining to what New Age is and what it is not, remains problematic due to scholars differing on positions ranging from that New Age consists of a coherent set of beliefs and structure, to legitimising a label for the usage of said currents such as Hanegraaff and Faivre who defined it as Naturphilosophie (Hanegraaff 1996:64-67; Faivre 1989:24-29 cf. Frisk & Nynäs 2012:2). On the other hand, Heelas in his seminal work The New Age Movement and the celebration of the Self, characterises the New Age as a radicalised iteration of "humanistic expressivism" (Heelas 1996:115) in which individuals are purposed towards self-development; concentrating on what it means to be an individual as opposed to arduously dwell on the external reality of life (Heelas 1996:115-116). Heelas maintains this idea, adding that New Age is but a form of self-spirituality moving from self-development to self-actualisation in its incorporation of a wide spectra of currents (Heelas 1996:116-117). Amersfoort supports Heelas' viewpoint by notably adding that the New Age worldview is not characterised by collectivism, but rather by individualism (Amersfoort 2009:28).Thus New Age, Amersfoort maintains, places a strong emphasis on the individual and the self, where it advocates for a personal (anthropocentric) spirituality that does not necessarily rely on organised institutions (Amersfoort 2009:28-29 cf. Chapter 2 of this thesis).

Furthermore, Chryssides identifies a few examples of practices classified under the New Age: homeopathy, Tarot cards, channelling, Christian occultism and Neuro-Linguistic Programming, et cetera (Chryssides 2007:-7). In addition to this, Chryssides credits this to the contributions of Rudolf Steiner, Alice Bailey, Jiddu Krishnamurti, Dion Fortune, and even Helena Blavatsky inter alia as essential developers of the eclectic ideas within the New Age phenomenon (Chryssides 2007:7-10 cf. Levin 2022:4). However, more recent discussion on this subject extrapolates on other areas of New Age, such as holistic health and New Age rhetoric which draws heavily on mystical, occult, and esoteric concepts, each segment within

New Age (e.g. healing, channelling, Tarot, etc.) each represent an even more diverse collection of New Age currents (Levin 2022:1-2).

Additionally, Levin notes that what is missing from New Age, is an exact critical exposition on what exactly this ostensibly singular religious/spiritual notion stands for (Levin 2022:2-3). However, it ought to be recognised that possible unifying themes of counter-cultural approaches "the self" can be identified in almost all attempts to establish a discourse on New Age (see Heelas 1992:115-117; 2008:4-5, 16-18; Hanegraaff 1996:190-110, 137-138; 2007:28-31; Amersfoort 2009:28-29; Guilherme & Magnani 2020:1063-1064; Levin 2022:4-5).Therefore, in conjunction with post-theism's definition also arguably fitting under the umbrella of counter-culture towards a spirituality post-God: New Age can arguably be perceived as secular self-spirituality and thus, in its de facto demarcation as Western esoteric current, represent the binding factor between esotericism and post-theism. In the next section, this chapter will engage Western examples of esoteric self-spirituality and their approaches to sexuality, spirituality, and natural philosophy. Followed by a section identifying key Western philosophical insights, engaging discussions on what "the self" *vis-à-vis* self-knowledge means, towards clarifying a Western vantage point of "selfhood".

3.7 From Lévi To Lavey With *Magia Naturalis*: Occulture As Western Esotericism

In many contemporary lay circles today, terms like the "Occult" can be met with extreme prejudice. However, in academia, it remains one of the key topics that emerge, when embarking on discussions about Western esotericism. However, before any cumulative examination of discourses pertaining to the Occult can be done, it is important to first rectify

these general misconceptions (prejudices) associated with the notion of occult as synonymous with 'evil', 'sorcery', 'black magic'. Or that it is even remotely associated with anything related to crime and criminality (see Armson 2007:144-145 cf. Hanegraaff 2013:3). According to Partridge (2015:1-2) the term 'occult', in a narrow sense, derives from the Latin occultus; translating to 'hidden', 'secret' or 'concealed' (Ørberg 1998:25 cf. Bogdan & Djurdjevic 2014:1). In a stricter sense as a theoretical paradigm, it is an "unhelpfully broad umbrella term" which comprises of knowledge from a plethora of spiritual, transgressive, supernatural, paranormal beliefs and practices. Many of which, are sometimes considered "perverse, ephemeral or childish" (see Partridge 2014:1-2 cf. Dyrendal, *et al.* 2016:6-7; Kapp 2022:3).

Apart from these misconceptions, as mentioned earlier, it is worth reiterating that the Occult deals mainly with the esoteric realm, specifically that of Western esotericism (see Rudbøg 2013:15-16). Yet, as is the case with 'esotericism' in and of itself: scholarship also shows no unanimity in formulating a universal definition. Bogdan & Djurdjevic acknowledge this, in noting that terms such as "the occult", "occultism", "occult sciences", "occult properties", and "occult philosophy" are used interchangeably, even though they owe their common linguistic ancestry to the aforementioned Latin (see Von Stuckrad 2006:1365 cf. Bogdan & Djurdjevic 2014:1-5). Hanegraaff adds to this in proposing that scholars of Western esotericism, predominantly employ the term 'occult sciences' as umbrella category for magic, astrology, alchemy and also often includes divination as well as witchcraft, yet he also acknowledges that this has not gone uncontested where certain scholars contest that it removes the autonomy from certain discourses. Hanegraaff maintains that we can only truly understand the 'occult sciences' if we understand magic as a sort of (primitive) science, *magia naturalis.*

In a Greek context, this notion of *mageia* has a positive connotation as "worship of the gods", however due to 13th century Christianity, all that changed (Hanegraaff 2013:2-4).

Bogdan & Djurdjevic add that Occultism as a discipline, converges the epistemologies of both religion and science, yet cannot be reduced to either. As Occultism in theory and practice, originated in 19th century France, via the post-enlightenment writings of Alphonse-Louis Constant (better known as Éliphas Lévi), exploring the hidden aspects of reality ordinarily inaccessible to the senses, which would later also give birth to the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn (Bogdan & Djurdjevic 2014:1-2 cf. McIntosh 2014:223-224). The Golden Dawn as it is more commonly known, was arguably one of the most influential organisations of its kind, within the Western occult paradigm (see Plaisance 2014:160-164). A secret organisation formed in 1887 in London, its inner workings derived from Egyptian, Greek, Hebrew, Hindu, Buddhist, and Christian sources, which – to this day – serve as the basis for many 20th century magico-religious movements and even many New Age beliefs (Graf 2015:7-15). This section will briefly introduce prominent role players, who contributed to the formation and development of post-enlightenment occultism in the West, as we know it today.

3.7.1 Éliphas Lévi (1810-1875): Baphomet, Knights Templar, And *Histoire De La Magie*

Our journey starts with Éliphas Lévi, or Alphonse-Louis Constant, one of the primary historiographers pioneering discourse on the Occult, was born a shoemaker's son, and born at the pinnacle of the Napoleonic Wars in 1810, Paris (McIntosh 2015:220-224). He was a fragile and studious young man with extreme religious devotion, which made his parents encourage him to study for Catholic priesthood (see Hanegraaff 2010:118-126). His piety and

intellectual ability astonished his teachers to such degree that they appointed him as a deacon, and he obtained a teaching position at Petit Séminaire de Paris which was a prestigious Catholic school. However, this stroke of luck proved fatal to his career, when he was appointed to teach a catechism class to young women (see McIntosh 2015:221-222). He fell in love with one of his pupils, quarrelled with the superior and realised that he was not suited for celibacy and left the priesthood before being ordained (Greer 2017:8-11). His pseudonym is said to be intended as a Hebrew transliteration and anagram of Constant's Christian names, Alphonse-Louis (McIntosh 2011:99 cf. McIntosh 2015:223).

"Thus, Christianity did not owe any hatred to magic; but human ignorance has always been afraid of the unknown. Occult science was obliged to hide in order to avoid the passionate aggressions of a blind love; she covered herself within new hieroglyphs, concealed her efforts, disguised her hopes. Thus, was created the jargon of alchemy, a continual deception for the vulgar transmutation of gold and a living language only for the true disciples of Hermes" (Lévi 2017:28).

Lévi was not only a pioneer within the esoteric field, but also a key figure that paved the way for Occultists such as Aleister Crowley, Helena Blavatsky and more. He made his debut with his magnum opus called, Dogme et de la haute Magie (Transcendental Magic: its Doctrine and Ritual) published somewhere between 1854 and 1856, where he explored not only Kabbalah, but also Numerology – accompanied by practical advice on the creation of sacred spaces, talismans and what he called 'magnetic chains' between people (McIntosh 2014:223-224). According to Otto, Lévi as an author has yet to receive appropriate scholarly attention, with specific reference to his *raison d'etre* after his transition to the occult during the 1850s; leaving his monastic Catholicism behind to become a ceremonial magus (Otto 2015:421-422). Although, it is undeniable that Lévi's influence and reputation in occult discourse lies not just

in his aforementioned acclaimed magnum opus, but also his self-historicism of a deviant religious group in his Histoire de la Magie (1860), rooting (positive) magic in a well-researched historical backdrop rivalling even biblical dimensions (see Otto 2015:426-433).

It is also relevant to mention for the purpose of this study, that Lévi was responsible for the drawing of Baphomet (or the "Goat of Mendés"), one of the most unique and well-known esoteric images in the world. According to Strube, the androgynous figure was originally published in Lévi's Dogme de la haute magie (1854) and also served as a frontispiece for his two-volume literary work, Dogme et rituel de la haute magie (1855-1856). Contrary to popular belief, the figure does not represent Satanic or anti-Christian attitudes; rather its symbolism represents a duality of opposites, which was related by Lévi to the Knights Templar, even though the particular connections to the Knights Templar have not been investigated (Strube 2016:38-39).

Karlson-Weiman espouses that Lévi clearly delineated the meaning of his drawing in the aforementioned works. Characteristic of Lévi's occultism, where he referred to the Universal Agent, also called an Astral Light or sometimes the Great Magical Agent: a force or subtle fluid which all of the universe is permeated by, and any disruptions to the flow of this fluid is the catalyst behind illness and pain. Baphomet thus takes the form of said astral light, but the mythology behind Baphomet, or Achamoth goes much deeper (Karlson-Weiman 2013:17-18). According to Partner the term is said to have originally derived from the medieval French word for Muhammad (Partner 1993:137). Mahmutćehajić argues that Baphomet is a distortion of the name Muhammad by the Templars, who established their presence in the house on Mount Sion, after the first crusade later to be accused and burnt at the stake for

worshipping this false idol, Baphomet (Mahmutćehajić 2015:413-414 cf. Karlson-Weimann 2013:15-23).

However, Partner (1993) maintained that the name is rather derivative of two Greek words meaning 'colour' (baptism) and 'spirit'; connected to the Knights Templar via a verse play called Les Templiers. Written by French literary scholar and lawyer François Raynouard, performed with great success at the Théâtre Français in 1805, disappointing Napoleon for portraying the innocence of the Templars. Later, Napoleon grew suspicious of the Templars' secrecy, and compelled the Papal archives to be brought to France, where in 1810, Raynouard would be one of few scholars to study the archives and despite discovering they were not innocent: there was no evidence of dark suspicions, pertaining to magical or Gnostic practices by the Templars'. Instead, it was discovered that this myth of Baphomet *vis-à-vis* the Medieval Templars were a fabricated theory by Austrian orientalist Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall who published a document in 1818 accusing the Templars of being Gnostics and Orphites (Partner 1993:137-140 cf. Mahmutćehajić 2015:412-413).

In the end, according to Strube, the symbology behind Lévi's Baphomet is a depiction of a collective of esoteric imagery: firstly, its apparent identification with the "Goat of Mendes" (or "sabbatical goat"). Such goat imageries were widespread throughout Lévi's works, where it would be drawn as a commonplace symbol being present at witches' sabbaths (Strube 2017:40-44). Not to mention, because of Lévi's ecclesiastical education, he noted several works on demonology where the sabbatical goat is discussed: among which, the winged goat-headed Devil from Francesco Maria Guazzo's (1608) Compendium maleficarum is but one. Another influence was the Tarot card Le Diable from the Marseille deck; Heinrich Khunrath's (1595) Amphitheatrum sapientiae aeternae and its famous alchemical androgyne.

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Along with a print from Clovis Hesteau de Nuysement's (1639) Traittez de l'harmonie et constitution generalle du vray sel, secret des philosophes, et de l'esprit universel du monde and a few alchemical symbols (Strube 2017:40-42).

Baphomet remains a figure that represents duality and balance in all aspects of life, including sexuality (Crowley 1929:33 cf. Strube 2017:60-64). These infamous symbols discussed above, which are frequently misrepresented and misunderstood, remain integral to the foundational establishment of the study and development of pre-Faivrean esotericism in the West. Yet, aside from iconographies resemblant of the erotic, pornographic, and sexual, Deveny opines that Levi's works provide little information on the substrates of magical praxis and experience (Deveney 2008:355-356). As Levi notes, "sexual love is always an illusion, since it is the result of an imaginary mirage. The astral light is the universal seducer symbolised by the serpent of Genesis" (Lévi 2017:91). However, Another relevant anecdote from Lévi presents a more optimistic tone towards the erotic: "…it is for this reason that sexual love can often be produced by a breath or by touch, and not only by the touch of the person themselves but through objects that they have touched or magnetised without knowing it. The soul inhales and exhales exactly like the body. It inhales what it believes to be happiness and exhales the ideas which result from its intimate sensations" (Lévi 2017:102).

3.7.2 Madame Blavatsky (1831-1891): Theosophy As Universal Wisdom

Lévi's contemporary, Елена Петровна Блаватская (*Helena Petrovna Blavatskaya*), or "Madame Blavatsky" as she is more commonly referred to, was also a large key figure in 19th century Western esotericism (occultism), credited with the founding of the Theosophical Society (Hammer 2015:250-251). The society drew from a wide variety of Western esoteric

sources and provided an alternative to both dogmatic religion and materialistic science, transcending the differences between the two, towards a single universal truth (Rudbøg 2012:90-95). Blavatsky led a controversial life, thus contributing to the fact that her life is oft impossible to trace. And for these reasons, it is likely that a definitive historiography of Blavatsky's life may never be written (see Hammer 2015:250-253).

Blavatsky was born to an educated and aristocratic family in the Russian Empire, now Dnipro in Ukraine. Despite her family's education, most of her knowledge on the occult came from her grandfather Prince Paul Dondoukov-Korsakov, who owned numerous books on mysticism and the occult, reading widely on these subjects before the age of fifteen (Godwin 2013:15-16). Around the 1850-1860's, Blavatsky travelled to Tibet with a caravan of Buddhist Kalmyk pilgrims, who according to Ulanov, Badmaev and Holland were a sect within Buddhism, who signed an agreement securing Russian assistance against raids by Cossacks and Bashkirs, later giving birth to Kalmyk secular law, a codex that related to Buddhist clergy (Ulanov, *et al.* 2017:300-302).

After travelling almost all over the world to various territories such as India, Greece, Odessa, Constantinople, Eastern Europe, Asia Minor, Egypt, and more, Blavatsky settled in Russia with her husband in 1863, during which accounts appeared of mysterious illnesses, paranormal powers as well as travels to the Balkans and the Middle East with the suggestion of meeting adepts (see Rudbøg 2012:329-330). In 1870, Blavatsky sailed from India to Greece and settled in Egypt for a time, where she reconnected with Copt magician Paulos Metamon and started a "Spiritualist Society" (Lachman 2012:38-42). Shortly thereafter, in 1873, she was ordered to go to America; sailing to New York and found herself destitute for the first time – doing menial jobs in order to survive (Rudbøg 2012:330-331). Eventually she

was discovered by the press and contacted the spiritualist movements in New York and a year later she met Henry Steel Olcott, with whom she investigated spiritualist phenomena, and her public life began (Godwin 2013:15-17 cf. Rudbøg 2012:330-334).

The Theosophical society was established by Blavatsky in 1875 and is still considered by scholars as a starting point for the field of Western Esotericism (Gruffman 2021:2-3). With the Theosophical Society, Blavatsky presents a paradox between science and theology: and according to Bester, subsequently presenting materialism versus dogmatism and that spiritualism is the possible common denominator between these polarities. He considers it a compromise as it promised to prove statements of religion through the application of scientific epistemology. He adds that in Blavatsky's view, spiritualism has never considered itself more than just a science, a philosophy, and a search in hidden as well as inexplicable forces within nature (Bester 2017:60-61). It is also worth mentioning that the term Theosophy was not invented by Blavatsky, but rather is a derivative of two Greek words: θεός theos which translates to "god/ a god" and σοφία sophia "sound judgement" or "wisdom" (Liddell & Scott 1961:737, 362 cf. Rudbøg 2012:74-75).

In addition, Hanegraaff also notes that despite Blavatsky and Olcott's Theosophy concept being demarcated as a Western construct, it had a very strong non-Western, Orientalist influence. Something which Hanegraaff describes as "positive Orientalism" (Hanegraaff 2020:29), which is a product of European thought, finding its roots far back in history where it was considered the epitome of a "universal" ancient mystical wisdom. Blavatsky's original Theosophy as a Western esoteric construct thus became increasingly entangled with Indian religions, yet it required the suppression and marginalisation of certain practices within these traditions in the process (Hanegraaff 2020:29-30). When it comes to sexuality and Theosophy,

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the name Johann Georg Gichtel, "The Theosopher of Amsterdam," comes to mind (Faivre 2008:283 cf. Rudbøg 2012:84). Gichtel distinguished himself by trademarking Christian Theosophy and emphasising Sophia, who, in his view, embodies Jesus's Wesenheit (substantiality), shares the same physical essence, and, apart from the Virgin Mary, stands as the most significant female figure "who immersed herself in Mary's virginal essence" (Faivre 2008:283-284). Furthermore, Gichtel held that one of the consequences of the sinfall of Adam and Eve was the existence of the phallus as an instrument of Venus and not Sophia (Faivre 2008:284).

In addition to this, Faivre remarked that based on the pericope of Proverbs 8:27–31, Gichtel noted the "playfulness" aspect of Sophia: according to him, she was incarnated in the same body as we are, therefore possessing the same members (Faivre 2008:284–285). Consequently, Gichtel regarded that she "played" with God, also "playing" with Adam while longing into the present day, to be humanity's playmate, which Faivre regards was often marked by an erotic tone where Gichtel explains the process of completely surrendering to Sophia's body, mind, and spirit via imagination, which results in a sort of orgasmic lightning engulfing the senses (Faivre 2008:285). Additionally, Faivre notes that similar erotic-esque practices are noted in the Theosophia Practica, purportedly substantiating Gichtel's views through a variety of anecdotal experiences (Faivre 2008:285-286).

3.7.3 Aleister Crowley (1875-1947): *Ordo Templi Orientis*, *Thelema*, And Magick

Aleister Crowley (Edward Alexander Crowley) remains one of the most important and misunderstood figures in Western esotericism, being influenced by both Blavatsky and Lévi (see Crowley 1929:51-54). Crowley was not just a British poet, avid mountaineer, novelist,

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and painter. Aside from these self-proclaimed titles, he was also considered a magician, scholar, and a spy claiming to have acted under instruction from British intelligence (Spence 2000:359:360 cf. Churton 2017:26-28). Yet, to others he was also labelled The Great Beast 666 (see Bogdan 2021:16-17) a nom de guerre he, himself later proclaimed as he came to identify himself with the anti-Christ mentioned in The Book of Revelation. Moreover, according to Pasi, even the most dedicated of scholars to the field of esotericism, make no secret of their contemptuous expressions when it comes to the mention of Crowley. An example of which can be seen in Scholem's (1995) *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* where he writes that "no words need be wasted on Crowley's Kabbalistic writings in his books on what he was pleased to term 'Magick'…" (Scholem 1995:94, 434). Furthermore, Pasi maintains that other scholars have since realised Crowley's value as respectable subject for Western esoteric scholarship (Pasi 2014:1-5; 2012:53-54).

An example of this can be seen in Hedenborg White who affirms Pasi's sentiment; espousing that in the last few decades, academia has shown a significant interest in Crowley – acknowledging him as foundational to any discourse on Western esotericism (see Urban 2006:109-112). Furthermore, Hedenborg White situates Crowley as a sexual visionary among the likes of contemporaries such as Edward Carpenter (English Utopian socialist, anthologist and early gay rights advocate); Havelock Ellis (progressive English intellectual and social reformer, physician, eugenicist, and human sexuality scholar) and D.H. Lawrence (writer, poet, champion of modern sexuality discourse). Crowley is also best known for his rebellion against his upbringing in an Evangelical dispensationalist movement called, the Plymouth Brethren founded by John Nelson Darby, a minister in the Church of Ireland. Crowley joined the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn in 1898 and quickly rose through the ranks, ending his involvement in 1900 (Hedenborg White 2021:1-2).

According to Bogdan, Crowley became a vociferous critic of Christianity, after his disillusionment with the Plymouth Brethren, identifying the faith as a slave religion with a depraved sense of morality (Bogdan 2021:19-20; 2014:293-295). Crowley published an extensive discussion of Christianity, called The Gospel According to Saint Bernard Shaw, a review of Shaw's preface to his play Androcles and the Lion in 1912, where he criticised Shaw's view of portraying Jesus as a socialist and for misinterpreting the Bible in order to reduce Jesus to the political meta-narratives that Shaw himself, championed (Bogdan 2021:20-21). For this reason, and several others, Crowley has often been dubbed "The Wickedest Man in the World" and the "Man We'd Like to Hang" (Bogdan 2021:21). However, he remains the most influential figure in the discourse of 20th century Western esotericism: Crowley is credited for the creation of magick – which he described as, "the Science and Art of causing change to occur in conformity with the Will". This is not about defining it as a supernatural phenomenon, but rather a method through which to alter consciousness and allowing us to therefore see our world differently (McClaughlin 2016:63-64).

Crowley considered himself a prophet, and instead of abandoning theism in totality, Crowley instead, similar to Blavatsky, opted for philosophical scepticism combined with a flavour of Oriental mysticism, referring to religio-spiritual traditions found in certain yoga disciplines, Indic sources (i.e.Tantric Buddhism & Hinduism) and spiritual exercises from Western European traditions such as ceremonial magic, astrology, Rosicrucianism, Kabbalah, Tarot and alchemy (Bogdan 2014:293-294 cf. Pasi 2014:23). Combined, these worldviews gave birth to Crowley's The Book of the Law which he claimed was dictated to him, by an entity named Aiwass: announcing the advent of a new development in the spiritual evolution of humanity and identifying Crowley as "the Beast"; his prophet. This newfound path proposed

the liberation of the individual, accompanied by awareness of the self, solidified by the maxim: "do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law". And this gave birth to his newfound religion Thelema (Hedenborg White 2021:2 cf. McClaughlin 2016:66-67).

In addition, Bogdan (2014:293) mentions that this concept of liberation and self-awareness as magickal discipline, had sexuality or "sex magick" (eroto-comatose lucidity) as method. Crowley believed that sexuality was a direct means through which the aforementioned ends, without the confines of ceremonial magick, could be achieved. As the power of the magickal endeavour, lay in the mind of the practitioner themselves (Urban 2006:109-111; Bogdan 2014:293). It is also quite clear from Crowley's writings that he associated particular parts of "sex magick" with Hindu Tantra not just as mere physical and spiritual liberation of the body but also as route towards birthing a novel social order (Urban 2008:404-405).

In addition, the methodological specificities have been elaborated on, in his official instructions to higher ranking initiates within the O.T.O. *Ordo Templi Orientis*, in which Crowley intended these Eastern tantric practices as a means to obliterate the archaic and dying Christo-normative West, towards the heralding of a new era in human history (Urban 2008:405 cf. Djurdjevic 2012:115-118). Crowley also believed that the sex act ought to be approached as a holy sacrament and the consummation of sexual fluids, a Eucharist (Crowley & Reuss 1914:216 cf. Urban 2008:409-410; Djurdjevic 2014:13-15). It is therefore incontrovertible that Crowley had an immensely important role in the development of not only Western esotericism but credited with the pioneering of discourse on religion in his creation of Thelema and sex magick, despite being labelled with a variety of pejoratives due to his 'invention' of the latter and others' misunderstandings of his character (Jones 2014:4-5).

3.7.4 Anton Szandor Lavey (1930-1997): Satanism, Sex Magick And Self-Spirituality

Generally, the first thought which comes to mind when contemplating a discourse on Anton LaVey is that of a cultic conman, who through theatrics and horror *mise-en-scéne* promoted Devil worship in the late 1900's (see Introvigne 2016:299-306). This is a dominant stigma that has misrepresented LaVey and his philosophy of Satanism, since his adoption of his identity as "The Black Pope", and more so, when he opened the Church of Satan on Walpurgisnacht, 30 April 1966 (Fritscher 2004:27 cf. Introvigne 2016:306-312). LaVey (born Howard Stanton Levey) owes much to Crowley in his development of the Satanic philosophy, with some even arguing plagiarism: especially when considering its emphasis on the will, treatises on sex magick, and the employment of Enochian keys in his works (see Kapp 2022:5). However, the dominant stigma surrounding LaVey's philosophy of Satanism pertaining to so-called "Devil worship" due to his incorporation of Levi's Baphomet, in addition to stigma from politics and alleged sex crimes, could not be further from the truth. As this specific religious philosophy, also called "romantic Satanism" (Van Luijk 2016:114-116) has been clearly defined by scholars of Religion as a spirituality surrounding the self and corporeality (Lap 2012:90-95; Karlson-Weimann 2013:24-31; Petersen 2014:424 & Dyrendal 2016:59) aiming towards hedonism, empowerment, and self-knowledge (see Starr 2015:75-82).

Yet, the common ontology of all satanic strata is LaVey and The Church of Satan. Of which the institutionalisation thereof, was (then) the first of its kind anywhere in the modern world. Representing the first establishment of religious Satanism as a legally organised religion (Lap 2012:83-89 cf. Van Luijk 2016:2-4). The author has chosen this spiritual paradigm for this study as it is novel to the academic research palate and engages emphatically on the liberation concept of sexuality and the body. The ethos of the satanic philosophy is one of

'secular rationalism' guided by the 9 Satanic Statements (see LaVey 1969:25), which means that its spiritual experiences are not restricted to the religious or transcendent spheres but is more characteristic of that which is oft considered profane, rational, and secular-esoteric experience (Du Toit 2006:1253; see Petersen 2014:399-407; Petersen 2010:77-85).

However, according to Petersen in a later publication, even though it is generally considered a religious philosophy as opposed to a cult, it is more aptly explained under the definition of Heelas 1996's concept of New Age "self-spirituality" (Petersen 2016:1-4), as Heelas uses this as the lingua franca for an anthropocentric spirituality that deems life as a conventional experience being not what it should be (see Heelas 1996:18 cf. Petersen 2016:4). This perspective simultaneously serves as a guide for the path which can be taken to obtain 'perfection', while illustrating what's known as the left-hand path in terms of what needs to be done in order to obtain 'salvation' (see Flowers 1997:2-3). Granholm agrees with the connotation of Satanism as the left-hand path philosophy, but problematises the confusing discursive approaches to Satanism, as it eliminates similar movements and discourses such as, for example, The Temple of Set, and The Satanic Temple (direct descendants of the Church of Satan) as well as Dragon Rouge, listed in the category of 'Occultic Groups' (Granholm 2012:209-211 cf. Laycock 2020:84-86).

Moreover, it is possible for terms like 'salvation', 'perfection', and even 'adversarial' to create further confusion when associated with Satanism. Hence, the statement begs the question; what is understood as the path to these 'spiritual' ideals? If we take Heelas 1996's model of self-spirituality as a premise for understanding Satanism, it is noteworthy to mention that the salvation construct implied earlier is not in a normative religious sense as (for example) in the Christian soteriological (salvific) sense (Heelas 1996:19). This concept of salvation is

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connoted to the idea that humans are sinful (or lost) and need to be saved, which is then inevitably brought about by faith in Christ who allows access to eternal life (see Willmington 2018:1-10). No, in Satanism rather, starting with the concept of perfection: Heelas explains this phenomenon as an individual "moving beyond the socialised self" (Heelas 1996:18-19 cf. Heelas 2008:153-159), which Dyrendal argues in more depth, as the seeking of a "de-traditionalised" self, liberated from the constraints of repressive socialisation (Dyrendal 2016:59-60). And in doing so, coming into contact with that which (or rather who) we are by nature. And therefore, he argues that the "intellect" along with the "ego" should be done away with for the proposed "inner realm" is the exclusive source of creativity, vitality, tranquillity, and love (Dyrendal 2016:60-68 cf. Heelas 1996:19-20).

Repressive socialisations according to Freud, are understood as inherited guilt in terms of one's sexuality (Nagbøl 2013:131). Therefore, one could argue that at the heart of Satanism as self-spiritual narrative lies the liberation (or salvation per se) of the natural self which in itself is considered sacred (Petersen 2014:424). This notion is not alien to the Crowleyan sensibilities of sex magick, discussed earlier in this chapter, where he metaphorically relates it to a holy sacrament and Eucharist. There remains, however, the notion of the left-hand path which still requires, more in-depth exploration to fully grasp the notion of Satanism as Western esoteric philosophy (see Faxneld 2013:76-79). The concept of the "left-hand path" in Western esotericism, was coined by Helena Blavatsky (see Blavatsky 2006:738 cf. Evans 2007:178); later adopted by Stephen Ülowers in his work *The Lords of the Left-Hand Path* (1997) and accompanies the definition of "self-spirituality" as developed by Paul Heelas' The New Age Movement (1996). It is a philosophical construct, which requires sincere clarity to avoid misconception (see Dyrendal, *et al.* 2015:3-9). Flowers thus argues as fundamental basis, a dichotomy or two pillars for this narrative stance, distinguishing between 1) the objective

universe – the natural or external cosmos, which essentially operates mechanic and organic (Flowers 1997:1-4).

Meaning, it is ruled by natural and predictable laws that form part of a time-space continuum, which presupposes that all these laws can be discovered and quantified via rational means (see Kedar 2017:1-2). As opposed to 2) the subjective universe – which denotes the conscious "filter" of any and all sentient beings extant within the objective cosmos; it is the unique manifestation of an indirect conscious experience within the objective universe, and inevitably the filter through which the objective universe proceeds, thus strongly rooted in the metaphysical foundations of reality (Flowers 1997:1-3 cf. Gleiser 2017:3-6). The distinguishing factor between these two paradigms in this universal dualism is that the subjective is not governed by the objective laws and thus has the ability to act out in a non-natural manner (Flowers 1997:1-2), which implies that it is freed from the five senses and all three dimensions of the objective realm, as Flowers proposes that "the subjective universe is capable of a full spectrum of possibilities, ranging from virtually absolute precisions to almost total delusion as it is not bound by natural laws [of the objective universe]" (Flowers 1997:2).

Granholm further builds on this theory and summarises it into three main discourses: 1) an ideology of individualism, positioning the individual being at the epicentre of the existential (spiritual) universe. 2) This promotes a goal of "'self-deification", also known as θέωσις (Theosis); in the existential and material sense, it means human rational and sensual perception is elevated to a dominant and superior state (see Petcu 2014:571-572), involving obtaining as much control as possible of individual existence. This is achieved through 3) antinomianism, from the Greek ἀντί (anti), "against and νόμος (nomos)", "law" which

promotes the questioning and breaking of societal, religious, and cultural taboos towards a quest of personal liberation (Granholm 2012:213; Petersen 2011:353-355).

As indulgent religio-spiritual praxis, LaVey's Satanism, and the concept of hedonistic sexuality, had been inseparable since the very start. As propaganda and alleged cases of widespread "SRA (Satanic Ritualistic Abuse)", derivative of a "Satanic Panic" emerging in the 1980's onwards (see Engela 2013:18-33 cf. Kapp 2022:2-3). Even though these cases were proven as elaborate fabrications by the FBI (Lanning 1992:14-20), this still has not prevented "Satanic Sex" as the LaVeyan concept of "free love", from rather being connoted to or stigmatised with inter alia child and sexual abuse. Even though it is emphatically denounced in the Satanic Bible, and sexual indulgences and endeavours are restricted to consenting adults (LaVey 1969:70). On the other hand, what does the Satanic philosophy on sexuality entail? In viewing Satan as archetype of the left-hand path, this also includes carnality, also considered hedonism. Yet, the concept of Satan as symbol for carnal lust, is no myth in contemporary Christian theology (see van Luijk 2013:29-35, 39).

In fact, the Satanic philosophy, venerating Satan as emblem of carnality is very much in accordance with this conception, however the only difference regarding these two narratives is that in Satanism sexuality is seen as a positive force; even useful in spiritual practises for those who have the right mind-sets (Petersen & Faxneld 2014:166-175). However, with that being said, this sexual conceptualisation was not as formulated or set in stone among "early Satanists" who did not stop at celebrating sexuality in purely conventional terms. The influential Polish Satanist: Stanislaw Przybyszewski (1868-1927), practised extramarital promiscuity and considered sexuality to be both a creative and destructive force (Faxneld 2013:53-75), whereas the first German Satanic group Fraternitas Saturni created in 1926

experimented with homosexual rites (Flowers 2006:50, 65). Apart from them, the Parisian Satanist, Maria de Naglowska (1883–1936) encouraged group sexuality or orgies, which correlates with the principle of the left-hand path utilising forms of "transgression" as vehicles for emancipation (Petersen & Faxneld 2014:167-168).

Nevertheless, politics aside, sexuality in LaVey's Satanism is generally approached as a form of magic(k), less focused on (for example) Epicureanism which centralises around sensuality and the enjoyment of the harmless life-pleasures (Wilson 2015:61), and rather more on a surrealistic, magic(k)al emancipatory experience, which focuses on the orgasm and body as a source of creative magical power; harnessed and manipulated by individual practitioners. A meta-narrative owing its origins to Crowleyan thought, and even earlier, Buddhism and Hinduism (Urban 2008:696-697 cf. Djurjevic 2014:44-47). It is also evident that LaVey draws broadly on the Occult, including the pentagram as created by Eliphas Levi, inverting it to commemorate the early colonial witch hunts, where it was believed that witches parodied Christian rituals and symbols.

He also adopted Levi's Baphomet, modified it, and incorporated the inverted pentagram with the Hebrew "Leviathan" – a sea creature from the Hebrew Old Testament, often associated with the Devil (Andrade 2019:32-34). Even though LaVey vehemently opposed the esoteric (see LaVey 1969:21), Faxneld argues that he mischievously incorporates esoteric tropes in his philosophy of Satanism, accompanied by the fact that North American Satanists (belonging to the Church of Satan) understand and read him as "inheritor of secret esoteric traditions" – echoing notions found within Crowley's Thelema and Blavatsky's Theosophy (Faxneld 2017:77-79 cf. Jones 2014:37-38). The tethers between eros, sexuality, and Western esotericism are connections that have been established since before the dawn of
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esoteric scholarship, not just by practitioners (see Crowley 1914:216; cf. LaVey 1969:66–74), but also by the varieties of scholarly analyses available on its various cultural manifestations (Hanegraaff & Kripal 2008:ix–x cf. Lory 2008:49; Deveney 2008:355; Bogdan & Lewis 2014:1-8).

The question, however, remains: is sex magick a uniquely Western construct? Etymologically speaking, this term owes its relative origins and development to the theorems of Crowley's Thelema and LaVey's Satanic Sex (see Urban 2014:566-569 cf. Hammer & Lewis 2010:9-12), but as will be exemplified in more depth in chapters 4 and 5, this thesis argues that similar expressions which Asprem describes as "kataphatic spiritual practices" (Asprem 2017:2-3) exist in the East and Africa, but simply under different nomenclature.

3.8 Towards Self-Spirituality: What Does It Mean To Know Oneself?

A discussion on the self is inarguably one of the most integral themes when it comes to the delineation of spirituality and religion (even esotericism). As it is foundational to even a discourse on Western esotericism, ritualisation, and magick (see Sørensen 2017:119-121). McCalla even noted that, as such, esoteric scholarship has increasingly recognised the existence of a third element in the study of (Western) esotericism aside from faith and rationality (Bogdan 2007:7); unveiling esotericism as a tradition of inner-enlightenment and revelatory experience which is inextricably linked to "bringing knowledge of one's true self in an encounter with the ground of being" (McCalla 2001:435 cf. Broek & Hanegraaff 1998:viii). In addition, the quest for the self in philosophy, entailing conversations about consciousness, personal identity, self-consciousness, personality interlap with esotericism's overall ideal

(Bogdan 2007:5-7), even though factual evidence of these subjects remains elusive and therefore debatable (Dimkov 2020:197-198).

Additionally, Dimkov notes that, especially in Western philosophy, many influential intellectuals have contributed to this discourse on the self: René Descartes (Chamberlain 2020:1-30), David Hume (Greco 2015:699-722 cf. Azeri 2019:511-534), Immanuel Kant, Georg Hegel, et alia (Dimkov 2020:198). Dimkov also maintains that scholars such as Charles Taylor (1989), Marya Schechtman (see Schechtman 1996 cf. Barnes 2015:1-19), and Hilde Nelson are considered the pioneers in the systematic exploration theories of personal identity *vis-à-vis* the self (Dimkov 2020:198-199). Taylor (1989) considered identity as partly defined by one's commitment to a moral or religious code, or the tradition one affiliates oneself with. This is considered the self in moral space (Taylor 1989:25-31 cf. Eliade 1987:20-24).

3.8.1 Know Thyself: An Epistemology Of The Intangible

One of the greatest mysteries, plaguing the human existence since the dawn of intellectual thought, is the idea of "the self", "selfhood", and "consciousness". In this section, we will endeavour to explore in no specific order the various lenses through which the self can be understood starting with psychological approaches to consciousness and selfhood, followed by the philosophical exploration of influential theories on identity, and then finally, exploring the idea of the self in religion with a specific focus on esotericism as definitive paradigm which constitutes secret self-knowledge. The earliest appearance of this idea has been found inscribed on the temple of Apollo, in the ancient Greek city of Delphi: ΓΝΩΘΙ ΣΑΥΤΟΝ (Gnōthi sauton) "know thyself" – one of several popular Greek maxims found in the temple

(inter alia "shun murder", "control the eye", and "crown your ancestors"), predating to around the 8th century BCE while reaching its pinnacle of popularity between the 6th-4th centuries BCE (Green 2018:1-2). Although, the aforementioned dictum has been described as the most famous of them all, partly due to the association of this maxim with Socraties and his apprentice, Plato (Green 2018:2-4 cf. Moore 2015:22-31).

Nevertheless, before we can encroach on such a multiplicitous discussion of what it means to know oneself: we ought first to answer the definition of what constitutes "the self" and further identify the question, does it exist? According to Stollak the idea of the self has been central to scientific discourse for eons (Stollak 2018:2-3). To such an extent that for the past 100+ years a significant number of scientists and behavioural theorists have studied the self and selfhood as the cornerstone of biopsychosocial variables involved in its formation and development of related constructs such as "self-esteem" and "identity" (Stollak 2018:3-4). Stollak, therefore, maintains that it is no secret when espousing the concept related to the self, remains the most widely studied and discussed concepts throughout scholarship (Stollak 2018:4). However, it is also worth noting that this concept also remains one of the most elusive constructs due to its philosophical and epistemological ambiguity, since the era of Socrates (see Moore 2015:6-14). Klein notes that the answer to the question, "what is the self?" has remained elusive at best to all who ask it (Klein 2012:253). In addition to this, some have even gone so far as to argue that there is no such thing as a "self" to be found, one such example is a position made by Giles who notes a concept known as the "No-Self" theory, which is in essence a theory that rejects all theories about the self, arguing that such notions are all collectively untenable (Giles 1993:175-177 cf. Klein 2012:253-254).

Le Bihan adds to this precept, by highlighting that the existence of the self is popularly believed to obviously exist, yet the idea that the self does not exist is commonly assimilated in the term as "eliminativisim" of the self (Le Bihan 2019:1-2). Le Bihan maintains that there is a difference between eliminativism and reductionism, in so far as that the latter regards the self as real and that it agrees with the notion that the "I" is a metaphysical construct (Le Bihan 2019:4-5 cf. Di Francesco & Tomasetta 2015:483-484; Klein 2012:254). Which is in stark disagreement with the former theory, which regards that the self is not to be found in the ultimate building blocks of the world, or composite entities (Le Bihan 2019:5). Concluding that, as such, the ontological stance pertaining to approaches of the self is that there can thus not be composite cross-temporal selves (Le Bihan 2019:5-6). Therefore, the self is a conventional truth and not an ultimate one as eliminativism considers conventions as either useless, or useful. In this case, Le Bihan asserts that the self is considered to be useless (Le Bihan 2019:6 cf. Irvine & Sprevak 2020:365-369).

Another perspective for defining this idea via a construct of "selfhood", is provided by Gallagher which accounts for the common tendency among scholars to pluralise "the" and "self" by adding certain modifiers, such as "the core self", "the neural self", "the material self", and so forth (Gallagher 2013:1-2). In contrast, Gallagher opts instead to use a pattern theory, frequently used in mathematics, to construct his theory of "selfhood" which holds similar to that of a pattern theory of emotions (Gallagher 2013:2-3). In addition, this theory notes that the idea of the self consists of a variety of complex sufficient patterns, created by certain cluster of factors. Which none are arguably (individually) essential and necessary to any particular construction of selfhood (Gallagher 2013:3 cf. Gallagher 2011:1-4).

Gallagher builds on this notion by identifying the relevant clusters of features which underly any construction of selfhood: 1) Embodied: biological and ecological abilities to distinguish self from non-self. (2) Experiential: a first-person (experiential) phenomenon where the self is determined by the experience of various motor-sensory modalities available to it (Gallagher 2013:2 cf. Gallagher 2012:15-17). Furthermore, 3) Affective: manifesting a certain temperament resembling a mix of affective factors, i.e. extroversion/introversion (Gallagher 2013:3-4 cf. Green 2018:20). 4) Inter-subjective: the idea of awareness, consciousness (that someone is gazing at you); self-conscious recognition of oneself as being distinct from others (Gallagher 2013:4 cf. Gallup, *et al.* 2011:80-81). 5) Psychological (Cognitive): traditional concepts of selfhood generally centralise around this aspect which ranges from explicit self-consciousness to a conceptualistic recognition of oneself as "self" (Gallagher 2013:4 cf. Shoemaker 2011:352-353). 6) Narrative: there are different theories of this, but this is the idea that the self is inherently a narrative entity, and vice versa, as our interpretations of self, consist of a narrative structure (Gallagher 2013:4 cf. Schechtman 2011:394-395). Some examples of the above will be considered later in this thesis.

These clusters (or aspects) of the self can be found assimilated in Klein who notes the paradoxical nature of the self. Klein distinguishes between the ontological self, which is our subjective, unified experience of being a self, and the epistemological self, which refers to the diverse neural sources that contribute to our self-knowledge (Klein 2012:254 cf. Green 2018:20-22). Additionally, Klein argues similar to Gallagher (2013) that despite the multitude of neural systems (aspects) involved (such as episodic memories, semantic knowledge, personal agency, et cetera), each contributing independently to our sense of self, they collectively give rise to a coherent sense of identity and continuity over time (Klein 254-255 cf. Gallagher 2013:3). However, intriguingly, studies have shown that individual components

of self-knowledge can be impaired or lost without necessarily disrupting the overall subjective experience of being a self (Klein 2012:254 cf. Klein & Gangi 2010:4-6; Koch 2004:1107-1109; Kircher & David 2003:1-6).

Therefore, Klein suggests that while these neural systems collectively support our sense of self, none of them are individually indispensable for maintaining our subjective unity and identity (Klein 2012:253-255). Klein's conceptualisation thus challenges traditional views of the self as a singular entity and underscores the complex interplay between neural mechanisms and subjective experience in defining the construct known as "the self". However, despite these perspectives, it is important to note that the exploration cannot end with Western constructions alone. Therefore, in the following section, the self will be understood from Western, Eastern, and African philosophical vantage points.

3.8.2 Discursive Approaches To "Self Knowledge" In The West

As mentioned earlier, discourse of the self has featured prominently as early as the days of Socrates (*c.* 469-399 BCE). According to Moore philosophy has long been a discourse that promoted itself as a path to happiness. However, self-knowledge brings about its own paradox in the domain of philosophy, as it has long been a source of puzzlement in philosophical discourse, causing many anxieties; making us reconsider both our beliefs and actions (Moore 2015:ix cf. Buckingham, *et al.* 2011:20-21). One of the most famous Western philosophical dictums derive from Socrates, who said that "the unexamined life is not forth living for men…" Green explains this maxim in relation to classical Greeks overall, who had an already established notion of the examined life comprising not just introspection, but also considerations of ideas such as virtue, justice, knowledge, and piety (Green 2015:5-7). Which

collectively characterises any well-lived life and examining oneself appears to be a necessary step towards a good life (Green 2018:5-8).

Moreover, it can be argued that the idea "know thyself" is the cornerstone of even Socrates' philosophy, and in association with Derrida's "beginning word" λόγος (logos) in his Of Grammatology (1997:17-18), thus turns the Delphic maxim of γνῶθι σαυτόν (gnōthi sauton) into a divine command or Δελφικόν γράμμα (Delphikon gramma), which Socrates notes as such in the Phaedrus (Panagiotopoulou 2024:113-114 cf. Chaffee 2012:102-104). Moreover, Panagiotopoulou further argues that the maxim does not refer to (what we will see later on in Hegel's understanding of the self) a discovery of the hidden "I"; achieved through introspection and self-analysis. Rather, it is a call to know one's limits – acknowledging that one is mortal and that one should not try and equal the gods (Panagiotopoulou 2024:114-115). Socrates was arguably the first philosopher in Western history, to channel the full power of reason into a discourse on the human self (Chaffee 2012:103). This is seen in that Socrates believed that (aside from our physical bodies), each individual possessed an immortal soul which survives beyond the death of the body; exploring this very subject with his friends while on the brink of being executed (Chaffee 2012:103-104). In the following sub-sections, other significant Western thinkers are explored in order to charter a course for a backdrop of an esoteric epistemology of the self.

3.8.3 René Descartes (1569-1650): Meditations Of First Philosophy

One of the most famous anecdotes from Cartesian thought is unequivocally, *cogito ergo sum* or "I think, therefore I am" (see Suzuki 2012:73-75). Moreover, Chamberlain argues that Descartes' *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641) traces a philosophical journey where the

meditator systematically doubts all beliefs to establish a foundation of certainty (Chamberlain 2020:1-2 cf. Hatfield 2014:74-76). Initially conceiving herself as a human being with a body, the meditator undergoes skepticism through arguments like "the dream hypothesis" (see McGushin 2018:85-86) and "the evil deceiver scenario", which challenge her beliefs about reality and selfhood (Chamberlain 2020:2 cf. Hatfield 2014:76-77). Foucault notes that dreams speak truth, and in precisely so because in dream, "I am not the master of the dream" and something (someone) else emerges, someone who speaks, gives signs" (Foucault 2014:48-49 cf. McGushin 2018:85-86, 90).

Subsequently, these doubts lead her (the meditator) to question whether she truly possesses a body or if such beliefs could be deceptive. Chamberlain maintains that despite these challenges, Descartes' meditator ultimately grounds her certainty in the existence of a thinking mind, distinct from the physical world, culminating in the famous assertion "Cogito, ergo sum" (Chamberlain 2020:2). This journey thus not only explores different conceptions of the self—from physical embodiment to a thinking entity—but also aims to establish a secure foundation for knowledge based on the indubitable existence of the thinking self (Chamberlain 2020:2-3). Green explains the Cartesian stance, highlighting that Descartes espoused; "if we cannot banish skepticism then there is nothing left to prevent us from calling into question everything that we believe" (Green 2018:22). In addition, therefore, if one cannot be certain that one has hands, is awake, or even a human being, one can be sure about the fact that one has thoughts (Green 2018:22-23). Therefore, in using the "I", Descartes is not assuming that the very mention of it assumes that one's mind possesses cognitive, affective, and experiential properties (or any other property for that matter) – all that can be known is that we possess the capacity for thought and that we all thus exist as minds; whichever form the bare minimum for the existence of a mind ought to take (Green 2018:23-26).

3.8.4 David Hume (1711-1776): A Treatise Of Human Nature

Perhaps one of the most influential figures on the discourse of the self is Hume. In his works, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, as well as *Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*, his various essays, and in his six-volume work *The History of England*, Hume presents a sentimentalist virtue ethics, meaning that Hume believes sentiment is the essence of ethics as well as that of beauty (see Swanton 2015:45-46), centralising around the evaluation of individuals' characters as virtuous or vicious, rather than bad or good consequences, or bad and good principles of action (Greco 2015:699). What does this mean? In simple terms, this means that Hume's sentimentalist virtue ethics, revolves on evaluating individuals based on their character traits and moral dispositions (Swanton 2015:46-47 cf. Ainley 2017:4-5). Therefore, rather than judging actions solely based on their outcomes or adherence to abstract moral principles (Swanton 2015:47). This approach emphasises the importance of virtues in fostering moral goodness and social harmony, aligning moral judgment with our natural sentiments and feelings (Swanton 2015:47-48).

Although, how is this relevant to Hume's construct of personhood? In Hume's *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739) which is praised as providing one of the most convincing refutations available on the idea of a singular, unified construction of the self which is subsequently dissolved into a bundle of perceptions without any singular connection between them (Greco 2015:700-701 cf. Hume 1739:133-134). Greco maintains that Hume, in his treatise, introduces a somewhat uncomplex narrative of the self, in which he explains it as "that individual person, of whose actions and sentiments each of us is intimately conscious" (Greco 2015:701 cf. Hume 1739:133-135). Moreover, a few pages onwards, Hume is found

discussing this individual as composite of a mind and body: "tho' pride and humility have the qualities of our mind and body, that is the self" (Hume 1739:160-161).

Moreover, this becomes a slight bit more complicated with Hume declaring a wish to define that which he frequently (in many different ways) refers to as the "self", "person", or "the idea of self", "what I call myself" (Hume 1739:134 cf. Ward 2022:4-6). Or the third person, "himself" as well as "the true idea of the human mind" or "the soul" (Hume 1739:138). Hence, with this, Hume is invariably attacking the notion that our identity can provide a stable foundation for experience (Greco 2015:701-702). In summary, Hume's rejection of substance and his theory of perceptions suggest that self-identity (self, person, soul, mind) is a construct, based on the continuous flow and association of perceptions rather than a stable, unchanging entity; a collection of different perceptions united by different relations (Greco 2015:703-704). This view therefore challenges the traditional Cartesian metaphysical idea of the self by emphasising a more fluid and dynamic understanding of personal identity (cf. Ward 2022:3-4).

3.8.5 Immanuel Kant (1724-1804): What Real Progress Has Metaphysics Made?

Kant is well known for his critique of pure reason, and according to him, knowledge is an attitude representing *Fürwahrhalten*, or an attitude of holding-to-be-true which one can hold in the face of representations, among which are judgements (Kraus 2020:218). Other modes of knowledge that Kant mentions in his lectures on pure reason are *glaube* "belief" as well as *Meinung* "opinion", the grounds or *Grund* on which one believes something to be true: Kraus subsequently notes that Kant elaborates that, therefore, such an epistemological ground can either be subjective or objective (Kraus 2020:218-220). Moreover, in light of this, Kant's

metaphysics (philosophy of the self) has been said to be difficult or obscure – which Kant himself was the first to acknowledge in his *Real Progress* essay (Walker 2017:204-205). "However uncertain I may always be and remain as to whether something better is to be hoped for the human race, this cannot infringe upon the maxim, and hence upon its presupposition, necessary for practical purposes, that it is practicable [*thunlich*]" (Møller 2021:138 cf. Kant 1995:309).

Kant's philosophy of the self, he delineates between two fundamental aspects of self-consciousness: the self as subject and the self as object. The self as subject refers to the thinking, rational "I" that is aware of itself and engages in cognitive activities such as intuition and self-reflection (Kant 2002:361). Kant argues that this aspect of the self demonstrates a unique capacity that distinguishes humans from other beings, as it involves the ability to perceive oneself as an object of consciousness (Walker 2017:205). On the other hand, the self as object pertains to what can be intuited or perceived by the self as subject, akin to how external objects are perceived (Kant 2002:361-362). Kant contends that while we can introspect and perceive our psychological self empirically through inner-sense and introspection, understanding the logical self—pure consciousness and spontaneity—is limited (Kant 2002:362 cf. Walker 2017:205).

The logical self represents the *a priori* framework within which all perceptions and experiences are structured, yet its intrinsic nature remains beyond an empirical grasp. Kant's exploration underscores the complex nature of self-awareness and the epistemological limits on comprehending the foundational aspects of the self as a subject of consciousness and rationality (Walker, 2017:205-207). Therefore, Kant's "intelligible self" represents the timeless origin from which responsibility for all actions emanates, yet these actions are undertaken

under specific circumstances and in response to particular conditions. Hence, this poses a challenge for Kant's theoretical philosophy as well, which causes that the subject "I" be a deliberate and purposeful actor (Walker, 2017:207).

3.8.6 Georg F. W. Hegel (1770-1831): Phenomenology Of The Spirit: "I" Equals "I"

In his most influential work, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, Hegel extrapolates on the idea of the self, in moving beyond Kantian and Cartesian subjectivity. Instead, Hegel pays close attention to external reality as opposed to the interiority of the individual. This stance is similar to Hume, who also regarded the self as something objective (see Hume 1739:133-135 cf. Gasparyan 2013:1-5). Manchisi echoes this notion and adds that Hegel believes that one can only obtain self-realisation by stepping outside of oneself – thus, this endeavour is not a private activity, but a process that involves the actions of individuals in society (Manchisi 2022:219). Manchisi maintains that realising oneself, according to Hegel, means that one rationally exercises one's own will of intelligently and responsibly interact with other members of society (Manchisi 2022:219-220). Hegel also understands self-realisation in terms of rational agency and commitment to a broader (perceivably external) social environment (Manchisi 2022:220 cf. Bubbio 2017:144-145). Although it should be noted that society – in Hegel's view – is therefore not necessarily only what one could call "exoteric". Instead, it is an essential component to one's individual identity (Manchisi 2022:220-221). In addition, Russon notes that Hegel's texts are notoriously difficult to read, but Hegel's philosophy has ultimately been characterised by its focus on the self in relation to the nature of "the other" (Russon 2011:1). Russon maintains therefore that Hegel's focus on the other can be distinguished between 1) the interpersonal other (which defines and exceeds moral

experience), 2) the political other: defining and exceeding cross-cultural experience, 3) the divine other: who both defines and exceeds religious experience, and last, 4) the nonsensical other: the other who defines and exceeds all sense which ineffably has roots in Kant's "Copernican revolution" as well as German idealism (Russon 2011:1-2; Pippin 2011:55-58 cf. Bubbio 2017:147, 149-153).

Bubbio in addition notes that Hegel criticises the idea of theological subjectivism, which argues that the "I" (*das ich*) can only exist in relation to God, in being the subject/object in the human-divine relationship in which the establishment of the self can only be validated in relation to God, whom alone is considered to be real (Bubbio 2017:145-146, 149). Furthermore, Hegel regards that the "I" is the human subject, which stands in relationship to the concept (*begriff*), therefore, the relationship between the human subject and concept is not a natural, but rather, historical process driven by "recognition" or *Anerkennung* (Bubbio 2017:154-155 cf. Pippin 2011:60-61). Therefore, this process of historical determination simply explains that which has already been established in Hegel's philosophy of the self: that only in encountering another "I", accompanied by the mutual recognition thereof (i.e. two individuals recognising one another as "I"s), can the other "I" be consistent with its concept (Bubbio 2017:155 cf. Pippin 2011:61).

In other words, the "I" cannot exist independently from coexistence, involving its recognition as such; thus, Bubbio further posits that Hegel's "I", which he considers "absolute idealism" – in other words, concluding that the world has meaning beyond surface appearances (see Meme & Alawa 2022:776-777, 781). Taking into consideration the role played by inter-subjective acts such as mutual recognition that comprise self-conscious thought and human culture (Gallagher 2013:4 cf. Bubbio 2017:155-156). In sum, it can thus be concluded that

Hegel's conceptualisations of "the self" are in essence purely socio-cultural reflections (Bubbio 2017:156 cf. Testa 2016:21-22). Additionally, Hegel's conceptualisation of the self is therefore, "The social essence of the human self-positioned as an estranged force, standing above concrete individuals, thus representing a world reason [absolute spirit]" (Dimkov 2018:199; Testa 2016:1 cf. Hegel 2018:107-108).

3.9 Conclusion

In the beginning of this chapter, the purpose of this chapter was stated as an attempt to identify a uniquely Western 'brand' of esotericism. However, this proved difficult (theoretically), as the precept in and of itself is polemical. Due to little scholarly consensus about whether such a thing exists, and whether it can be identified as a unique construct. Scholars show no unanimity in the definition of esotericism, much less about what a Western demarcation looks like. However, this chapter sought to take a different approach in delineating the discourse pertaining to Western esotericism. Through tracing and understanding the roots of primordial religion in the West, and how native faiths such as Paganism and the Occult not only represent unique expressions of spirituality, but also formed the basis of that which could arguably be considered mystical in nature. Establishing a relationship between the sacred and the profane.

Spirituality builds the bridge between the individual and the mystical experience leading to esoteric knowledge about the self, the cosmos, and existence. This relationship between transcendence and inter-personal phenomena thus serves as a trajectory for the basis of what we now understand as 'Western' esotericism. However, in analysing the politics and polemics of religious evolution in and of itself, it is no secret that religion (and esotericism) is not the property of the West, but rather a global phenomenon. After all, many from the West

have either intentionally or unintentionally borrowed sacred knowledge, textual corpi and traditions from the East and Africa. Thus, this study aimed to focus rather on geographical markers to identify currents emerging in the West (but not necessarily) limited to a Western heritage. However, due to the migratory nature of cultures and their practices, this too became difficult. Even though, prominent discourses (or currents) in the West, by prominent thought leaders could be identified: none of them contained entirely "pure" unique elements of the West.

One thing, however, comes to light in this discourse. And that is; even though (Western) esotericism can be considered novel to academic scholarship: the idea of esotericism as religio-spiritual phenomenon, is as old as human thought. Yet, esotericism with a Western demarcation seems to saturate scholarship on esotericism. And in a world, continuously attempting to draw boundaries around such loaded categories, it becomes necessary to ask whether the "West" as exclusive and overarching category for all esoterica is still relevant? Should we not also give credence to the unique voices in the East and Africa within esoteric scholarship? In other words, one could argue that the research available on phenomena labelled as 'Western' esotericism far outweighs its other geographical counterparts. Therefore, the need for other non-Western areas, or currents, within esotericism becomes ever more apparent. This necessitates the decolonisation of esotericism and thereby birthing a new era of research pioneered around non-hegemonic cultures and practices, containing a wealth of esoteric knowledge. This is not to say that the "West" should be abandoned, rather that we start giving credit where credit is due. In the following chapters of this thesis, these ideas will be explored and discussed in greater depth.

CHAPTER 4

Esotericism In The East: Discussions On Marginality, Eurocentrism And Orientalism

4.1 Introduction

Earlier in this thesis, it was highlighted that discourse on esotericism (pertaining to geo-graphic markers) is a polemical discourse, with very few scholars conceding to the per-ceived parameters of such ideas. This is largely due to the fact that scholars of Western eso-tericism, understand Antoine Faivre's definition that esotericism in and of itself is an intangi-ble form of thought (see Hanegraaff 2019:151 cf. Strube 2021; Zander 2021:16-18; Strube 2023:3, *et al.*), therefore problematising the endeavour of identifying homogenous traditions via geographical demarcations (see Chapter 3). There are, however, those that believe the West is to blame for imposing such a bias on the hermeneutics of Eastern (Orientalist) spirit-ualities. Richard King argued, for example, that the West has imposed a clear literary bias in its conceptualisations of religion. This, King argues is largely due to the emphasis placed in Christianity on the authority of written scripture, and the individual's relationship to God re-sulting in a text-centred hermeneutic of spirituality (King 1999:62-63).

Saif supports this notion in proposing that a West-East divide, has (since the Middle Ages) been the result of ever expanding European economic, ideological, and political objectives. The relationship between the "West" and the "East" have thus been characterised by a com-plex oscillation, or a sort-of "intellectual apartheid regime" – especially during the 19th cen-tury – defining the West's supremacy and superiority over the East (and the rest of the world), due to its aspirations of colonial and imperial subjugation. It is therefore because of the

"othering" of non-Western currents, that there has been an imposition of a Western-centrism which has in turn, caused a neglect in exposure of "Oriental" (for example Islamic) currents (Saif 2021:68-71 cf. Villalba 2021:88-108).

Strube adds to this discourse in admitting that esotericism in and of itself has been the product of a West-East exchange and has been largely influenced by Western ideas. However, in echoing Saif (2021) he asks the crucial question: what about "the rest" that has participated in this exchange (Strube 2023:4-6)? And in echoing the words of Pasi (2010), "if esotericism is not a universal phenomenon, but is specifically rooted in, and limited to West-ern culture, then it should not be necessary to qualify it as 'Western'. The very moment it is labelled as 'Western' it becomes also possible to conceive that other 'non-Western forms of esotericism exist" (Pasi 2010:153). This chapter will attempt to pry open a different discourse on non-Western esoteric spiritualities in the East; identifying what is meant by "the East," and how such a demarcation differs from or correlates to common terms like "the Orient".

The argument of this chapter is no different from contemporary scholarship promoting esotericism as a global phenomenon: espousing that esotericism is neither a Eurocentric concept, nor is it a Western-diffusionist phenomenon. Rather, that it is a global phenomenon, and through identifying non-Western spiritualities, religions, practices, or currents (used synonymously) we gain a better understanding of these unique practices and their differences. Moreover, in aiding the categorisation of esoterica culturally and geographically, we can thus attempt to organise these unique practices, and differentiate them from the perceived overarching hegemony of the Western demarcation in esoteric discourse. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, there is of course no denying that the West played a significant role in the formation of the discourse. There is also no denying the value of the West's influence in

establishing esotericism as a field of study, rather an attempt should be made to give priority to discourses that do not necessarily qualify under the Western demarcation geographically and culturally speaking.

4.2 Eastern Esotericism and The Orient: Separating East From West

Strube (2023) argues that there is a big divide in scholarship pertaining to the "East" and "West", as separate demarcations of esoteric scholarship: the latter considers esotericism as a diffusionist phenomenon, where esotericism emerged in Europe and then dispersed to the rest of the world. Whereas the former in, for example, its devotion to esoteric Buddhism is less interested in why it uses the demarcation of "esotericism" as such. For this reason, Strube proposes that the separation between Eastern and Western scholarship has not been interrogated in scholarship thus far (Strube 2023:10-11).

In addition to this, Irwin (2001) attempted to pry open a discussion on this divide; pointing out that esotericism in the West has been inadvertently dominated by Christianity. Which sought to suppress and often circumvent practices it considered "heretical" and "non-orthodox", due to their internalisation of non-traditional practices, symbols, experiences, and alternative avenues of "initiatic authority". This led to many practitioners and small groups being sent to the stake, due to violent persecution from said institutional authorities (for ex-ample the Catholics and Protestants). Therefore, undoubtedly lacing the history of the West-East divide, pertaining to esotericism, with a polemical history; filled with persecution and criticism from orthodox institutional religion (Irwin 2001:2-4).

4.2.1 Edward Said and The 'Occident': Eurocentrism And The Orient

In attempting to define the paradigm of the Orient *vis-á-vis* the East, it is important to acknowledge the foundational contributions made by Said (1978), who focuses his under-

standing of Orientalism on the Arab world (Middle East) as the "live province, laboratory, and the theatre of effective Western knowledge" regarding the Orient (Said 1978:42-43). Critics such as App (2010) note that Said's Orient, is exclusively focused on the Arab world, and adds that the idea of "Orientalism" has many other connotations and includes references to India, China, Tibet, Japan, and Asia (Central, North, and Southeast) which in other words references more than half of humankind. App continues that the term Orientalism also has many connotations: for example, also referring to the oriental fashions of the 17th and 18th centuries, along with the imitation of oriental styles in garden architecture and visual art (App 2010:xi-xii cf. Kokkinen 2023:114-115).

Mukhopadhyay adds to this by noting that the interest in (for example) India as the storehouse of Oriental wisdom, in and of itself, is a modern development. In citing Claude Alexander's *Oriental Wisdom* (1924) this idea was introduced, where Alexander identified India as the birthplace of secret occult knowledge: he believed that India and its Vedic teachings were the original source of esoteric knowledge and through practising the wisdom of these Vedic teachings one could master clairvoyance and telepathic power (Alexander 1924:20-21 cf. Mukhopadhyay 2019:191).

The sentiments made by Alexander were, however, not a novel discursive approach. As his ideas were preceded by that of Friedrich Schlegel (1808) *Über die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier* (On the Language and Wisdom of the Indian); Edwin Arnold (1879) *The Light of Asia*; Friedrich Max Müller (1879) *The Sacred Books of the East*, and last but not least Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1888) *The Secret Doctrine* (see Chapter Three of this thesis), and many others. In support of this, App (2010) also acknowledges that these ideas of India as the land of spiritual knowledge, owes much to modern Western developments in the 18th century. This

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gave birth to a momentous change in the approach to said discourses (re-moved from the shackles of theology, Bible studies, and invariably Europe's Judeo-Christian worldview). This change, which opened a new door to Orientalism, was promoted by none other than François Marie Arouet, better known as Voltaire (1694-1778) in his endeavour to denigrate the Biblical texts and Christianity. Following the appearance of a number of alleged ancient texts of Indian origins, discovered between the 1760's and 1770's where the notion of Indian civilisation gained traction (App 2010:15-16).

Mukhopadhyay adds to this timeline, in noting that after the English East India Company established itself in Bengal in 1784 Sir William Jones founded the *Asiatic Society of Bengal*, in Calcutta, with the purpose to develop and understanding of the Orient and its culture. It is thus often considered to be the departure point of "Positive Orientalism", which paved the way for a lot of modern Indological and philological scholarship. With this referring to the construction of a romanticised picture of the Orient: Hinduism and Buddhism began to receive significant attention, and this led to what Schwab coined the "Oriental Renaissance" (Schwab 1984:11 cf. Mukhopadhyay 2019:192-193).

Therefore, Mukhopadhyay further argues, the concept of the "mystical" or "magical East", was incontrovertibly a product of 19th century Positive Orientalism, and to which Richard King attests in his book *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India, and 'The Mys-tic East'* that, in fact, the entire notion of mystical Hinduism was a multiplicitous invention, developed in terms of various different Western intellectual and ideological currents (King 1999:2 cf. Mukhopadhyay 2019:192). Therefore, some scholars argue that this entire perception of India (and invariably the "mystical East") was merely an imaginative ideal; perpet-

uating a mutual idealisation of the East by the West and vice versa (see Said 1978:5-9; King 1999:94-95 and Fujda 2012:526-527).

Since Edward Said's work *Orientalism* (1978) there has been significant debate on the subject of what is known as "the Orient", where many regard such terminology to be problematic and a stereotypical category of all non-Western knowledge currents (Chua 2008:1180-1181). Although, Kleinhofa in acknowledgement of the polemics that came following Said's work, noted the linguistic presuppositions surrounding the usage of "Orientalism", yet providing a different perspective. Kleinhofa regards that the term in and of itself did not have negative connotations pre-Said. Instead, the term has been used since the 18th century and is still used in scholarship today, as a neutral reference to the entirety of European studies of Asian traditions – most prominently developed in Germany, France, and the United Kingdom during the mid-20th century (Kleinhofa 2021:31-32). However, the most influential scholarship on Orientalism remains that of Edward Said who defined the dichotomous theory of what he refers to as 'the Orient' and 'the Occident'.

According to Metin (2020) the word Occidentalism derives from the old French word, *occident* meaning "West", or rather "the science of the West". Although rather than seeing it as a mere ideology, in a broader sense: it is the assumption or adoption of a Western imagination and studying the West either scientifically or unscientifically. In terms of the Orient, Said approaches the subject of the Orient pejoratively; as something used by the West not only to understand the East, but also in an attempt to describe it and thereby reimagining or appropriating it and redefining it (see Said 1978:2-4 cf. Metin 2020:181-184). Said's approach to Orientalism and the Occident can be summarised into three key-points: 1) Anyone who teaches, writes, or researches about the Orient – irrespective of their field – albeit they only

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focus on specific characteristics or in general, can be considered an Orientalist and what they do is, in essence, Orientalism. 2) Orientalism is a form of thought premised on the ontological and epistemological distinction made between "the Orient" and mostly "the Occident". 3) A Western approach to dominating and restructuring the Orient (Said 1978:3-4). Elmenfi adds to this in proposing that the aforementioned definitions collectively form part of a larger unit every time the Orient is brought up. It (the Orient versus the Occident) inadvertently remains a discourse of power; whose authority is frequently brought into question with every mention of the Orient (Elmenfi 2023:56). Therefore, Said (1978) believed that due to Orientalism (*vis-á-vis* Occidentalism), the Orient was (and still is not) a free discourse, thought or act. Instead, the dichotomy of the Orient and the Occident is dictated by the authority of the Occident (Said 1978:3).

Furthermore, this complexity is highlighted by what Elmenfi perceives as the pinnacle of the complex relationship between the aforementioned dichotomies. Which is reflective of the fact that the Orient has been used by the West as a surrogate for knowledge: the West (i.e. the Occident) has projected its negative qualities on the Orient, insofar as the West considers itself civilised, advanced and human. In contrast, it subsequently perceived the Orient as violent, barbaric, and underdeveloped, or inhuman (Elmenfi 2023:65-66). Hence, the discourse of Orientalism and the Occident is one that approaches a critical discussion on power and knowledge.

4.2.2 Eastern Spirituality, Esotericism, And Platonic Orientalism

From the 14th century onwards, during which colonial expeditions to the Americas re-oriented European economic, ideological, and political ideals, concepts such as race were redefined

to refer to 'blood' as opposed to climates or countries. This resulted in maps that followed suit, due to Europe in 1492 insisting that its narrative was superior and developing a desire to homogenise the world in its image (Villalba 2021:89-90 cf. Gruzinski 2017:16).

This is relevant because, as Ernst argued, this was the start of colonial and imperial aspirations – experiencing a resurgence in the 19th century – which led to the subjugation of regions and individuals across the globe. Fuelling the notion of a Western autonomy marching towards modernity with rationalistic, technological, and industrial monopolisation; resulting in what Ernst refers to as a sort of "intellectual apartheid regime" in which the West imposed its sense of superiority and segregated itself from the "inferior East" (Ernst 2010:25). Saif (2021) in support of Ernst (2010), addresses this issue quite poignantly in proposing the complex dilemma Esotericism (including but not limited to, the East) faces in terms of geo-politics and invariably scholarship: "now there is 'the West', 'the East', and 'the Rest'" (Saif 2021:70).

Saif maintains that Western-centrism (much like nationalism) in its exclusion of certain (even Western) groups or cultures, has blinded us to the possibility of diverse historical ethnography and connection. This is possibly caused, or indirectly abetted by Western iterations of Orientalism, and/or the appropriations of idealised Eastern practices. In addition to this, Faivre and his single-paragraph mention of other cultures as "other non-Christian traditions", which include references to (for example) Arabic intellectualism (see Faivre 1994:52-53), establishes a polemic of neglect and exclusion of the East. In addition, Saif (2021:71-72) further criticises the reductive approaches perpetuated by Western esotericism that, for example, Eastern traditions (such as Islam and Judaism) emerged and developed as largely autonomous, as well as self-contained religious traditions (see Hanegraaff 2013:15), or the

perception that the West has been the "occident visited by – for example – Judaism and Islam" (Faivre 2006:208).

Furthermore, aside from the dominance of the Occident's influence on Orientalism dis-course, it is incontrovertible that Faivrean perennialist philosophy and traditionalist perspectives are mainly responsible for the romanticisation of the Orient. Again, in using Islam as example, Von Stuckrad (2010:25) supports this in stating that tropes within Orientalism have been reproduced in the over-emphasis of Sufism as an exclusively esoteric current. Whilst, simultaneously, idealising certain Islamic intellectuals whose thoughts are more or less on par with philosophia perennis as intellectual departure point (Von Stuckrad 2010:25-26 cf. Saif 2021:71-72).

Another instance of this is the interpolation of Eastern (Indian) ideas such as karma, chakra, tantra, yoga, and kundalini and its journey across the globe. These ideas, according to Strube, display the pinnacle of the complex "East" and "West" exchange against the backdrop of orientalism, colonialism, as well as the origins of novel religious groups in Europe; accompanied by the New Age movement in the 1960's (Strube 2021:152). Strube maintains, however, that this search for esoteric knowledge in "the East" reflects a much older tradition and can be traced back to ancient Greece, with Plato and his philosophical descendants who were believed to all be initiated into secret Eastern knowledge traditions while in Egypt (see Hanegraaff 2012:12-17), this created an idea known as Platonic Orien-talism.

4.2.3 Plato and Pythagoras: Criticisms and Reformulations Of Eastern Wisdom

During the Renaissance, there was a fascination with Neoplatonism and Hermeticism: with an extreme focus on the writings of Hermes Trismegistus, considered the greatest of Egyptian

sages. According to Strube, Trismegistus is largely to thank for this search of Eastern (esoteric) wisdom whether it took the form of philosophia perennis or *prisca theologica* (Strube 2021:152-153 cf. Chapter Two). Scholars like Saif have also critiqued this neologism of Platonic Orientalism, as perpetuating a narrative which is "widely criticised as a white civilisational narrative" where the East is approached as a carrier region for a romanticised obsession with (Western conceptualisations) of perceived wisdom and essentially contributes to the furtherment of "othering" of non-Western currents (Saif 2021:72-73).

According to Saif, this is exemplified by John Walbridge, in his work *Wisdom of the Mystic East* where he creates a trope of the "wise Barbarian" and also coined the term Pla-tonic Orientalism. Walbridge defined Platonic Orientalism as a fascination with the exotic and the Oriental, which has been prominent among Pythagorean and Platonic philosophy traditions (Walbridge 2001:8-9). Burns adds to this in describing the term as an increasing awareness of "Pan-Hellenic identity", which combined primordial Eastern wisdom with Pythagoreanised Platonism; influenced by pilgrimages to the East (the Orient) towards obtaining scientific and ritual knowledge (Burns 2014:20; 2021:22-25 cf. Saif 2021:72).

In addition to his earlier sentiments, Walbridge extrapolates on his unique construction of ancient orientalism, as the adherence to a collection of allegorical and symbolic interpretations of experiential as well as revelatory modes towards obtaining self-knowledge. Moreover, with commitment towards theurgy and white magic (Walbridge 2001:11-12), theurgy (or transhumanism) is an instance of Pythagorean Platonism and considered a form of "white magic" (see Tilton 2012:180) based on Neoplatonic philosophy, Chaldean Oracles, and Greek magical papyri. These involve enabling one's body via rituals towards being animated by gods and goddesses (Steinhart 2020:2-4).

Hanegraaff supports the notion of Walbridge by highlighting that for thinkers in the Renaissance, Plato was perceived as gnostic, hermetic, and theurgical through the lens of Platonic Orientalism. And he adds that it would be considered very "un-Platonic" of Renaissance thinkers not to be adherents of philosophia perennis, or perennial philosophy (Hanegraaff 2012:12-16). According to Burns the aforementioned Hermetic, Gnostic, and Chaldean theurgic literatures are often associated with what Hanegraaff refers to as the "Platonic Under-world" and is also seen as synonymous with Platonic Orientalism (see Hanegraaff 2012:12-14). The latter term, as coined by Walbridge originated in a study of 12th century Persian Neoplatonist and Illuminationist, Suhrawardī to showcase the tendency for Platonists (in general) to rhapsodise over the primeval wisdom of the East as a pre-Hellenic philosophia perennis which was considered superior to Greek philosophy (Burns 2021:25).

In a more recent investigation, Hanegraaff identifies the idea of Platonic Orientalist gnosis as perennialist philosophy, originated in a "trans-confessional cultic milieu" that developed most prominently in Egypt. And its adherents, regardless of whether they were Christian, Jewish, or pagan, conflated its ideas with their religious worldviews towards the pursuit of the Orient and its fabled sages. Hanegraaff maintains that the attempt to attain gnosis via ecstatic states or altered states of consciousness in the process of obtaining supposed direct access to the realms of divinity, was something that is considered inherent to Platonic Orientalism (Hanegraaff 2016:381-383).

Burns echoes Hanegraaff in acknowledging that the extant narratives that consider ultimate wisdom as having both primordial and Eastern (or "barbarian") origins, are integral to dis-courses pertaining to both what is considered the "Platonic Underworld", and esotericism as

a whole. However, he disagrees in shifting the emphasis of Platonic Orientalism from ecstatic experiences of gnosis to, instead, a preoccupation with revelatory authority (i.e. which authorities enjoy privilege and which practices / teachings, associated with said authorities are legitimised). Burns further avers that Platonic Orientalism; its teachings and practices are distinct from speculations about mystical experience, but also occasionally used to subordinate the authority of non-Greek (barbarian) peoples (Burns 2021:25-26 cf. Hanegraaff 2016:387-388).

However, Saif in her criticism of Platonic Orientalism, has noted that *al-Suhrawardī* – and others – are awkwardly placed in this polemical Western-centric discourse: construing the East as conduit for the allegorical and symbolic iterations of Platonic Orientalist philosophy in the West. Once again, this resembled a sort of Eurocentric idealisation of the East, starting in Greece and classical Rome, experiencing a resurgence during the Renaissance with the West no longer finding it necessary to include the Eastern sciences. Thus, it promoted a narrative that extols the West, at the expense of the declining East (Saif 2021:72-74). According to Von Stuckrad, *Shihāb al-Dīn Yah yā Suhrawardī* (1154-1191) perceived Hermes as the "father of philosophers" due to the fact that Islamic worldviews – specifically that of the Shiites and Sufis – have always been characterised by an openness and plurality towards different philosophical or theological currents. *Suhrawardī*'s philosophy, however, was different from national Iranian tradition as it integrates a variety of perspectives from Zoroastrianism, Hermeticism, Pythagoreanism, Platonism, et cetera (Von Stuckrad 2010:27-29).

4.2.4 From Platonic Orientalism And "Wise Barbarian" To Positivistic Rehabilitation

Additionally, Granholm identifies what he calls a "positive orientalism" – in contrast to the "standard orientalism", a positive fixation on the exotic "Other" (Granholm 2012:496). He proposes that the East (vis-á-vis the West) are both emic categories in the discourse surrounding esotericism and should not be considered definite etic scholarly categories, but rather where the East is valued in terms of its exotic qualities and spiritual values. An example of which can be seen in the positive re-appraisal of the feminine in Eastern spirituality, or Left-Hand Path as opposed to Western constructs of femininity, which is commonly associated with evil, impurity, and thereby separated from the divine (Granholm 2014:499-500, 509-511).

Strube supports Granholm in the de facto separation of Eastern and Western esotericism within academic scholarship as linguistic demarcations. Noting the distinction lies not in debating which practice ought to be considered more correct, or more originally esoteric. However, that the important interpretations lie in the semantic and contextual interpretations behind "esoteric" and "exoteric" forms of religion (Strube 2023:10-11). Stretching from East Asia to the Mediterranean, Urs App argued that the aforementioned notions became a key idea in the birth of Orientalism and a fundamental interpretational lens for Asian religions. The idea of inner (esoteric) and outer (exoteric) doctrine, can be traced back to early en-counters between Jesuit missionaries, Japanese Buddhists, Shintoists, Confucians, and Daoists (App 2010:16-18 cf. Strube 2023:12-19).

Saif, however, regards Granholm's positive rehabilitation of Orientalism unconvincing and accuses it of being influenced by another "over-emphasised arbitrary dyad…administrative-political Orientalism (bad) and intellectual aesthetic Orientalism (harmless)", as the sources

of such a romanticised and positive Orientalism are "facilitated by the violence of colonialism".

Saif further notes that the notion of esoteric Orientalism has misconstrued the beliefs, traditions, and practices of various Eastern religious currents as superstitious, irrational, or a spiritually bereft religion (Saif 2021:74 cf. Sijbrand 2013:5-7). Saif also criticised Von Stuckrad for being superficial in his engagement with Suhrawardī'. This was related to his almost exclusive reference to the Islamic tradition. Von Stuckrad credits Suhrawardī with the pioneering of a philosophical tradition, which integrates various rational approaches with experiential methods towards obtaining truth (see Von Stuckrad 2010:78 cf. Saif 2021:78).

In an earlier work, Saif identifies a variety of other Islamic pioneers within Eastern esotericism and natural magic such as *Maslama l-Maǧrīṭī* (*c.* 398/1008), *Ibn Ḫaldūn* (*c.* 808/1406), *Maslama l-Qurṭubī* (*c.* 353/964) and others (Saif 2017:299-309). Burns (2021:27) addresses the arguments made by Saif; interrogating the question of Platonic Orientalism's relevance as a demarcation (see Saif 2021:72-73). Burns subsequently refers to the most famous and widely cited example of Platonic Orientalism, Numenius of Apamea which perhaps highlights the exploitative and subordinating rhetoric of Platonic Orientalism, acknowledging the value of further investigating the relationship dynamic between power and the development of Platonic Orientalism. Furthermore it acknowledges initial explorations of the discourse being furthered by Hellenic elites from the upper class of classical Roman society (see Burns 2014:15-16 cf. Tommasi 2016:21-24, Burns 2021:27).

Additionally, the trope of the "wise barbarian" (see Saif 2021:71-72) used in scholarship, is rectified by Burns as not being used pejoratively. Rather it is defended, in this particular context, as the most accurate term/translation resembling the vocabulary in the original ancient texts. Yet, Burns also concedes that Platonic Orientalism as a demarcation can also

be mis-leading as the fetishisation of Platonic-Pythagorean literature, was not unique. Even though, simultaneously, fetishisation (non-Platonising writers from the Second Sophistic, for example, Philostratus the Athenian) is incremental to the discourse itself (Banner 2018:91-101).

Lastly, Burns adds that even the term "barbarian" can be misleading, because the Greek term βάρβαρος (*barbaros*) denoted exclusion from Greek, and eventually later, Roman heritage. Furthermore, Numenius never fetishised barbarians either, instead the regions he demarcated with such teachings per se, were usually those who identified with the Chaldeans, Persians, Indians, Jews, and especially the Egyptians (cf. Saif 2021:72-73, 2017:309-310). The latter teachings overlap with those who Said identified as belonging to the "Orient" *avant le lettre* (Burns 2021:27-28).

4.2.5 Orientalism Versus Occidentalism: The Prototypical East, Colonial West, And "The Rest"

The polemical relationship between Orientalism and Occidentalism cannot be understated. It remains a controversial debate across various disciplines: between those who wish to re-define the way Orientalism is understood, as well as those who believe the concept in and of itself is problematic due to its perceived colonial history. Said in his introduction of the concept has, as stated elsewhere: elicited enormous reaction within scholarship; epitomising the politics between how we understand the East, and whether our lens through conceptualising the East has inadvertently perpetuated a (pre-Colonial) bias. Clisby and Enderstein note that discourse surrounding scholarship of the Orient (or the East), has been overly saturated with subordinating approaches and cultural essentialism: where Orientalism – in and of itself – is

but one strategy employed to portray the West as progressive and desirable, while presenting "the Rest" (sic.) as underdeveloped and undesirable (Clisby & Enderstein 2017:2-5).

This was inadvertently the product of the West considering the East as "irrational, menacing, untrustworthy, anti-Western, dishonest" and even "prototypical" (Said 1978:207). However, analysing this complex issue without being reductive, becomes a seemingly impossible task: especially when it comes to esotericism and the so-called "mystic East", and the "Grand Polemical Narrative", as Hanegraaff accurately refers to it in his work *Forbidden Knowledge: Anti-Esoteric Polemics and Academic Research* (2005). Hanegraaff's idea highlights the notion of persistent structural injustice that lies at the heart of Western culture: that esoteric scholarship is provided with the opportunity to rectify this discourse, through its analysis of the notion that underpins this entire discourse: namely, the rejected knowledge model (Hanegraaff 2005:248). Hanegraaff adds to this notion in stating that this model of rejected knowledge entails currents (primarily sorted under esotericism) occupied with inferences to the traditional and cultural exclusion and marginalisation of women, people of colour, various and alternative genders, or sexualities, as well as the victims of Western colonialisation (Hanegraaff 2019:149-150).

Asprem (2021:131-133) illustrated several issues with this concept of esotericism comprising rejected knowledge: the first problem being that of defining the field, secondly, the reinforcement of counter-canonical narratives. Thirdly, the affirming of insider self-understandings, fourthly, the undifferentiated conceptualisation of the rejection process, and finally, the failure to address and explain elected marginality (Asprem 2021:133). The first three issues, according to Asprem lie heavily on longstanding discussions of the historical study of esotericism, whereas the last two, even though also relevant to historical scholarship:

is all the more relevant when we look at the social sciences perspective, along with modern and contemporary esotericism (Asprem 2021:131-143). This volatile conversation only serves to illustrate the complex connection between orientalism, esotericism, and its overall relationship with the occident. As well as how difficult it is to encroach on these discussions on marginality and colonialism, when invariably encroaching on a marginal academic discourse (such as esotericism) in and of itself (see Hanegraaff 2012:3).

4.3 The Religion of Pharaonic Egypt: Spirituality, The Self, And Sexuality In Ancient Egypt

It is also no secret that Egypt has played an important and critical role in the formation of Esotericism in the (Middle-)East, as source for magic and arcane wisdom (McLaren 2016:5-14 cf. Strube 2023:15-19), especially as mentioned elsewhere in this chapter, from the renowned Hermes Trismegistus (a seminal Egyptian esoteric sage) who traversed the Egyptian plains on pilgrimages in search of ancient wisdom, all the way to H.P. Blavatsky and Aleister Crowley (see Bester 2012:65-68,137 & Tully 2010:26-29). Although there are still Egyptologists who deny that there is a correlation between esotericism and Egyptology as most regard the former as anti-scholarship and mere wishful thinking. The famous Egyptologist, Erik Hornung, in his work *The Secret Lore of Egypt: Its Impact on the West* (2001) proposes that esotericists' detachment from Egyptological scholarship has resulted in a utopic narrative of an (imaginary) Egypt as a source of esoteric lore (Hornung 2001:2-3 cf. McLaren 2016:2-4). Such notions are maintained in the Egyptological research by Alfons A. Barb, Geraldine Pinch, and Charlotte Booth. However, before a proper trajectory of Egyptian esotericism can be ascertained: it is important to extrapolate on the Egyptian religious worldview.

4.3.1 The Universe, The Gods, And the King

It is unmistakable that religion shaped the ancient Egyptian culture and society. Van Blerk notes that in the Egyptian cosmology: the world consisted of the gods, the living and the dead. And even though the origins of their principal deities are explained, there is no distinct or coherent account recounting the creation of humanity, even though they chronicled various detailed theologies concerning the creation of their universe, the gods, and humanity (Van Blerk 2019:3). However, van Blerk maintains that they recognised the fact that humans were complex creatures who had the ability to experience various forms of immortality (Van Blerk 2019:3-4). In addition, Fitzgerald notes that Egypt, much like its other ancient near Eastern counterparts, considered the universe as having three basic structures: the earth with the heavenly realms above it, with the netherworld below (see Chapter Three). Moreover, the Egyptians developed a four-model system, to depict their three-tiered universe. First, there was the celestial bird – a cosmically vast falcon named *Horus*; hovering over the earth with the moon and sun serving as its eyes. Second, there was the celestial cow, *Hathor*, depicted as the cosmic cow standing over the earth. Third, there was the goddess *Nut* a celestial woman, who was depicted as arching over the earth balancing herself by way of her hands and feet. And finally, the celestial plane; a convex or flat plane serving as reference to the cosmos. Additional to these four models, there was also the vast cosmic river flowing through the en-tire cosmos (Fitzgerald 2013:4-5).

It is already evident that the Egyptians' religion and worldview, is central to their lived experiences and the environments in which they thrived. It is therefore important to note that their religion was not just polytheistic, but also anthropomorphic and zoomorphic as is discussed in Chapter Three of this thesis (cf. Norén 2020:16). Furthermore, according to Bamunusinghe, ancient Egypt also had independent city states (or "*nomes*") each with their

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own government and local deity or deities who were credited with the city's influence and success (Bamunusinghe 2019:3). During each dynasty, the particular ruler at the time would identify a god as his/her patron and protector. And as soon as one state dominates another, the god of the subjugated state is considered inferior. Occasionally both gods were worshipped, but in other instances: both gods would be combined and worshipped simultaneously with their names hyphenated. The principal god of Lower Egypt was *Horus* (the sun and god of light), whereas Set (the god of darkness) was the principal god of Upper Egypt: two kingdoms who were bitter rivals of one another, who even perceived *Set* and *Horus* as rivals (Bamunusinghe 2019:3-4 cf. Assman & Frankfurter 2007:156).

It is also worth mentioning that during the early period in ancient Egypt, more specifically known as the Early Dynastic Period (1st and 2nd Dynasties) in Egypt, *c.* 3050-2663 BCE (Troy 2012:23-25) the Egyptian pantheon was depicted anthropomorphically as animals: *Amun* was represented by a ram, *Sobek* was a crocodile, while *Thoth* was a baboon or ibis, and *Apis* was depicted as a bull. Yet even though they were depicted with animal iconographies in hieroglyphs: they were not, in fact animals, but actually human. And they were later more sensibly portrayed as having human physiques with the heads of their respective animals (Bamunusinghe 2019:4). However, Bamunusinghe adds that priests in ancient Egypt had a tremendous issue bringing order to such a somewhat confusing plethora of deities, and the solution to this was what is known as the divine triads (see Sales 2012:117-120).

Where the Egyptians organised these deities into familial relationships, or the great nature powers which were assigned divinity and worshipped (sky, sun, Nile, and moon etc.): *Amun* was considered the principal god, with *Mut* as the mother and *Khons* (god of the moon), for

example. Although, the divine triad who arguably had the greatest – and longest period of – influence on ancient Egypt were *Osiris*, *Isis*, and *Horus*. There was, however, a brief period during the reign of pharaoh *Amenhotep IV (Akhenaten) c*. 1379-1336 (Lull 2019:77 cf. Norén 2020:2), when Egypt became monotheistic in assigning *Aton* (*Aten*) as the sole deity, god of the sun disc and its rays (see Norén 2020:16-18). However, this only lasted for a brief period and the people eventually returned to their polytheistic roots again (Bamunusinghe 2019:4-5).

4.3.2 Creation and The Gods: Fragmented Myths and Cult Centres In *Heliopolis* And *Memphis*

As mentioned earlier, the creation myth of ancient Egypt is anything but coherent. Due to the fact that Egyptologists and Religion scholars alike, had been faced with the task to recon-struct Egyptian myth which as is described by Shaw "like trying to piece together a jigsaw puzzle but the majority of the pieces are missing, and someone threw away the box" (Shaw 2014:1). Shaw maintains that despite the scattered, diverse, and sometimes contradictory *corpi* of myths originating from various parts of the ancient Egyptian peninsula there remains a single overarching narrative, which has been identified as "Memphite" or "Heliopolitan" Theology. Despite these so-called cult centres' differences, and perceived competition in their prioritisation of certain role players, phases, as well as aspects of creation, the creation myths of ancient Egypt (*Thebes*, *Hermopolis*, *Memphis*, and *Heliopolis*) remain cohesive in their central themes and structures, despite the geographically relative substitutions of local gods (Shaw 2014:19-21).

According to Nardo, Egyptian creation myths and the various iterations are compared to the four gospels in the Bible: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John who each contain conflicting Christological accounts. However, Christians accept the authority of the gospels, regardless (Nardo 2021:24). The first creation myth emerged in the city of the sun: *Iunu* better known by its later Greek name, *Heliopolis*. According to this narrative, the Egyptian god of the Universe, *Atum*, came into being miraculously and suddenly from the depths of a shadowy sea which had existed eons before the earth did. Nardo maintains that the same narrative indicated that *Atum* fashioned the *benben* (mound of creation) which was the world's first patch of dry land. Priests who attended to the shrines of *Atum* in *Heliopolis* believed that the mound was situated at the very centre of the Universe; subsequently *Atum* created the gods *Shu* (the god of air) and his twin sister *Tefnut* (goddess of moisture and rain) among other modes of creation, via masturbation (cf. Pichel & Orriols-Llonch 2023:163-164).

Atum consequentially continued to create even more deities, *Geb* (the god of the earth) and *Nut* (goddess of the sky). Furthermore, *Geb* and *Nut* went on to create four more gods: Isis, *Osiris*, *Nephthys*, and *Seth* who along with the others constituted the widely accepted and revered pantheon (or assembly) of the Ennead -or nine gods (Lucarelli ed. Scalf 2017:127-129; Nardo 2021:24-27). According to Meeks and Meeks, it is also no secret that the gods had physical bodies: the creator-god's body was said to encompass all creation, as all creation had come from his body. Thus, the gods were sexed beings and also were famed for their sexual encounters, although traditionally endogamy was standard practice, deviations – called creative transgressions – such as polygamy (*Seth* with *Nepthys*, *Anat*, and *Astarte*); *Horus* and his seven concubines, including *Hathor*. *Hathor*, who can be considered the embodiment of female sexuality, carried the epithet "Mistress of the Vulva" (Basson 2012:8-9). Adultery was imputed to *Osiris* and *Nepthys* (sister of *Isis*). Rape, also

not unheard of and was commonly imputed to *Seth* (also having homosexual relations with *Horus*); *Geb*'s incestuous rape of his mother, as well as *Horus*'s creative aspect of the ithyphallic god *Min*, whose violent liaison with his mother (*Isis*) had purpose as it gave birth to the sun. These and other sexual encounters, or transgressions per se, between the gods were common-place and were not particularly frowned upon as it usually resulted in beneficial happen-stances (Meeks & Meeks 1996:65-69).

In addition, the Memphite theology of creation (also referred to as "Shabaka Stone"), is the second variation in the Egyptian creation narrative (see Lesko *et al.* 1991:95-96), that explains the emergence of the city of Memphis as a central and important location in ancient Egypt. It incorporates the Heliopolitan theology but presents the god *Ptah* as the first principle and the creator of the universe, who thought of- and created by speech, the creator god *Atum* (Ockinga 2010:101-102). Thereby transmitting the divine power of *Ptah* to all the other gods. The narrative describes how *Ptah* conceived the elements of the universe with his mind and brought them into being through his commanding speech; the gods *Horus* and *Thoth* are personifications of *Ptah*'s organs of thought and speech. This approach to creation is presented in an intellectual sense, different from other creation stories that focus on physical references (Bodine 2009:16-20).

The extant form of the narrative dates back to 700 BCE, but it is derived from an original text that is over two thousand years older (see Wilkinson 2003:18). Furthermore, in this particular narrative, the Ennead of *Atum* are compared to teeth and lips which announced what the heart of *Ptah* thought and pronounced the names of everything (including gods *Shu* and *Tefnut*) that came into being via his semen and his fingers (Wilson 2011:1-2). According to Wilkinson, *Ptah* was viewed as combining male and female elements within himself, and the

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reference to fingers and semen indicates that *Ptah* fertilised himself via masturbation (Wilkinson 2003:19-20).

4.3.3 On Amorous Humans and Deities: Erotic Rituals, Fertility, And Phallic Festivities

From the above, it is incontrovertible that sex and sexuality played an important role in Egyptian religion and ancient Egyptian society. As mentioned earlier, the goddess *Hathor* can indeed be described as the embodiment of feminine sexuality, because her function as a goddess was arguably mainly related to sex and fertility (see Basson 2012:8-14). According to de Trafford and Tassie sexuality in ancient Egypt was varied and served many functions (social, religious, and ritualistic). The varieties of erotic iconographies and references in ancient Egyptian religion and culture has been well studied and the meanings or interpretations behind them are rooted in Egyptian mythology and cosmology: referring to the creation of gods, the king, or rituals to or involving the goddess of fertility, *Hathor* (De Trafford and Tassie 2006:1-2).

In Egyptian mythology and cultic praxis, an example of this can be found in where *Hathor* lifts up her robe to make her father *Amun* laugh (see Meeks 1996:67), known as an *anasyrma* – a cultic practice originating in ancient Greece, where women ritually exposed their genitals to scare off hostile influences (Sütterlin 2016:39-40). In Esna, located on the west bank of the Nile, the last Egyptian temple to be decorated with hieroglyphic texts (Hallof 2011:1-3), a hymn has been recorded that depicts a ritual taking place on the 29th of *Anthyr*. Which is two women exposing their genitals and breasts in front of a representation of *Hathor*, in order that she may bless the pharaoh and the land.

Furthermore, Herodotus in *Historiae II* describes a festival dedicated to the goddess *Bastet*, during which a ritual journey is made by boat on the Nile to *Bubastis*, where some women would lift their vestments, showing their genitals in front of villages and fields in order to bless them with fertility. In the same historical record, Herodotus recounts a tale of how the blind son of *Rameses II* dealt with infidelity. An oracle from *Buto* informed him that he should wash his eyes with the urine of a woman faithful to her husband, and he was cured (Sullivan 1998:2). Similarly, according to Diodorus Siculus in his *Biblioteca Historica I* the *anasyrma* ritual can also be performed by women to be blessed by a god, and so he describes they would also lift their vestments in front of the *Apis* bull so that the bull may be blessed with virility (Beretta 2023:27-29).

Sullivan also notes that although the Egyptians were not a phallic worshipping society, the penis did feature substantially in ancient Egyptian erotic rituals and votives. Plutarch re-counted in chapters 12-21 in his *De Iside et Osiride* the tale of *Isis* and *Osiris* where he was murdered by his brother, *Seth*, who dismembered him and cast him into the Nile. The narrative continues that Isis collected all the parts of his dismembered body, except for his penis, which would subsequently be devoured by a fish (Sullivan 1998:1 cf. Ziolowski 2017:144-145). Thereafter, the phallus became a sacred object in Egypt. Basson gives an example of this, where women and men alike would present carved phalli to the goddess Hathor not only towards assisting in fertility, but also virility. *Hathor* is known to have been invoked for every love-related endeavour as exemplified by the 19th century *Turin Papyrus* (see Mad-den 2018:2-3), however, most often when a lover's advances were not returned and her presence in love spells are unsurprising (Basson 2012:8-9 cf. Shokeir & Hussein 2004:385-386). Furthermore, Sullivan maintains that erotic dreams were omens of the future, noting that in the *Papyrus Carlsberg XIII* it suggests that if a woman dreams that she has

intercourse with another woman, she will come to a bad end (Sullivan 1998:1-2 cf. Johnston 2010:9-10). It is also worth mentioning that women of high standing in Egypt, were considered as more potent symbols of power and fertility. Which might arguably explain a practice discovered by Xenophon of Ephesus introduced in his *Ephesiaca*, where widowers kept the remains of their deceased wives for an extended period, in order to prevent necrophilia at the hands of morticians (see Tagliabue 2017:135-137 & Todd 2014: 218-219).

4.4 Esoteric Egypt: Nudity, Gender Equality, And Sexuality In New Kingdom Egypt

Such expressions might be perceived as odd or obscene, when viewed through a contemporary lens, and many of them are. However, in antiquity; especially in ancient Egypt. It should be noted that nakedness in and of itself did not have any erotic connotations, culturally speaking. Nudity, in ancient Egypt was often used to illustrate childlike innocence - or something that indicated class – as slaves and servants would usually be naked. Moreover, in temple inscriptions and Egyptian iconography only children were depicted as naked. Therefore, goddesses (even such as *Hathor*) were not portrayed naked, as that would imply the goddess is a child (Basson 2012:9-10).

However, when it comes to the topic of sexuality in ancient Egypt, and the gender power relations that regulated them, the meanings ascribed to sexuality differed periodically. Meskel (2000) argued that – in contrast to the West – there did not exist a discursive category for sex and sexuality in the New Kingdom Egypt (*c.* 1500-1000 BCE), nor did they have a specific term for it, or language defining individuals based on their sexual predilections (Meskel 2000:253-254). Matić agrees, however, suggests that discourse concerning erotica in Egyptology, appears to focus on specific topics such as cosmogonies (sex in creation myths),

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sexuality and fertility, love poetry, same sex desire, festival sex, as well as prostitution (Matić 2024b:22-23).

However, the question remains, how did Egyptian sexuality manifest itself in an esoteric sense? According to De Trafford and Tassie, one of the best places to begin when reading into the nature of Egyptian sexuality and eroticism are the symbolic roles and symbols of the Egyptian deities. The nature of said deities irrevocably reflects the ideas, ethics, and approaches to eroticism that its social context held (De Trafford & Tassie 2006:2-3). Basson supports this notion in adding that sex in ancient Egypt was not something liberal, especially when it came to women. Sex was perceived not just as an act of pleasure, but also recognised as important in the process of procreation as siring male heirs was integral to the continuation of familial lineages (Basson 2012:8-9). Yet, despite the fact that Egypt was (as most ancient civilisations at its time were) patriarchal: it is a well-known fact that some women in Egypt enjoyed greater freedom and independence than other women, anywhere else in the rest of ancient world. Despite the fact that their dress code could arguably be considered more modest than that of their male counterparts, there was no social taboo against nudity or female bodies in transparent, form-fitting garments (Mahmud 2021:165-166).

Mahmud maintains that in Egyptian religion, sexuality is most prominently represented by the goddess of the sky, *Nut*, and the god of the earth, *Geb*. In a common scene, *Nut* is depicted kneeling over *Geb* who is on the bottom, representing Nut as the dominant leader in the sexual process. And despite the fact that such representations were uncommon, women were not subordinate to men in Egyptian society even though the position of the sexual partner served as symbols for authority and power (Mahmud 2021:167-168 cf. Meeks 1996:66-69). In addition, Matić also notes that sexual encounters were attached to social class; arguably

who you are. Therefore, it was said that the ruling (or upper class) enjoyed relations with deities. However, these endeavours – usually procreative in nature – where the divine partner had to be male and the human partner, female, was initiated by the male partner; caused by the desire from the divine for the woman. Instead of the endeavour being a deliberate attempt to sire offspring (Matić 2023a:826-827 cf. Scodel 2021:176).

Matić echoes the sentiments of Mahmud, when addressing the nuanced extant social hierarchy within Egyptian society. He suggests that some women were subordinated to some men (cf. Matić 2021:xx), thus if the sexual encounter occurred vice versa between a mortal male penetrative partner and divine female partner, such would invert ontological differ-ences, since the human seed is incapable of producing divine offspring (Matić 2023a:827). In another publication, Matić (2023b:147-148) elaborates on the examples of these sexual encounters between humans and gods: firstly, *The Tale of the Herdsman* (12th Dynasty *c.* 1991-1802 BCE). According to this narrative, a herdsman encounters a goddess roaming in the marshlands who is described as a woman possessing a non-human form. And the herdsman finds this frightful, however, this turns out to be the goddess Hathor. The erotically charged nature of the location is well known and has been attested to in New Kingdom (*c.* 1550-1070 BCE) love poetry (see Dar-nell 2016:22-23).

Matić further speculates that this might be the origins of the erotically suggestive reference to "walking through the marshlands" in a hymn to *Hathor* found in *Medamud*, a temple from the Ptolemaic period (*c.* 323-30 BCE). Yet, despite the location being suggestive, the story does not evolve into any erotic encounters between the figures (Matić 2023b:147-148 cf. Ashby 2018:64). Secondly, *The Pregnancy of Reddejet* found in the *Papyrus Westcar* (Papyrus Berlin 3033, 9.9-10), where the narrative refers to a woman named Reddejet who

is the wife of a priest of *Ra* who had sex with the deity and later sired three sons, who became kings of Egypt in the 5th dynasty (Matić 2023a:826 cf. Verner 2015:86-87). The divinity of these children was indicated in the narrative, when describing their limbs as made of gold and headdresses of genuine lapis lazuli, which were common features of the gods (Meeks 1996:57; Lepper 2008:49; Matić 2023b:148).

Thirdly, Matić (2023:145-148) maintains that a narrative related to the tale of Reddejet is known as the *Divine Birth Legend* of which multiple early entries can be found throughout Egypt, some as early as the 5th Dynasty king, Djedkare's pyramid complex (*c.* 2410-2380 BCE) and the causeway of king *Senwosret III* (*c.* 1882-1842 BCE). Including the most detailed version, found on inscriptions in the *Deir-el Bahari temple of Hatshepsut* (*c.* 1479-1458 BCE) and the temple of Amenhotep III (*c.* 1388-1351 BCE). The narrative describes the mothers of *Hatshepsut* (named *Ahmose*) and *Amenhotep III* (called *Mutemwiya*) who were sleeping in their palaces and visited by the god *Amun* who took the form of their husbands, *Thutmose I of Ahmose* and *Thutmose IV of Mutemwiya* (Matić 2023b:148-150). They were awakened by the smell of frankincense (a sign of Amun's presence in ancient Egypt) but seeing their husbands instead (Matić 2023b:150).

Nonetheless, they each smiled at Amun – in the form of their husbands – "spread himself to each woman" and they "rejoiced to see his beauty" (arguably a metaphor referencing his manhood) while "his love entered into their bodies", the entire palace began to smell like *Punt* (see Matić 2018:40-41): a place on the opposite coast of the Red Sea known for its frankincense and also being the birthplace of *Amun* (Matić 2023b:149-150 cf. Taterka 2015:119-120). Finally, Matić (2023a) adds that *Papyrus Leiden T20* and *Louvre 3218* from the Ptolemaic period (*c.* 305-30 BCE) indicate references to "Osiris' penis being in *ẖnm.wt*

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women", which Matić believes to be translated as designation for Egyptian female sexworkers (Matić 2023a:826-827).

Following the above, it is incontrovertible that Egypt placed a considerable importance on the erotic experience (both in a procreative and recreative sense). However, despite sexuality being a transcendental experience for many elite Egyptians with the gods, there is also all Egyptians' religious relationship with magic called *heka* (Madden 2018:1-2) incorporated in everyday life, not just the erotic endeavour. Moreover, underpinning all magic in ancient Egypt, was *maat*: a collective term embodied by the goddess Ma'at - representing justice, truth, righteousness, correct order, and balance within the universe. As well as serving as the basis of ethics, law, and morality in Egyptian society (Van Blerk 2018:69-72). Further-more, Basson also notes that magic in ancient Egypt was not perceived as we understand it today. Magic was lived religion, thus everything the ancient Egyptians did, was inextricably connected to magic. It enabled them to heal, create and will things, as well as ensured that when one dies, one would gain access to the afterlife (Basson 2012:iii-iv).

4.4.1 Coffin Sex Spells, Traditional Medicine, And Sex in The Afterlife

In terms of erotic experience, magic and traditional medicine played significant roles in assisting things like sexual dysfunction: taking either the form of incantations to be recited over the affected organ, votives, or carvings of erect phalluses to either *Min* or *Hathor* as offerings. Sullivan notes this and adds that, in the absence of impotence medication, according to *Rammesside Papyrus V no. XII* predating to *c.* 1600 BCE suggests an impotence cure consisting of grinding Acacia leaves with honey and applying as a bandage. Another example comes from a 3rd century CE papyrus detailing instructions on how to allow

a woman to enjoy intercourse: the instructions entail the rubbing of the phallus with the foam from a stallion's mouth and then engaging in intimate relations (Sullivan 1998:3).

This is supported by Hussein and Shokir, who notes a recitation (spell) from the Middle Kingdom to the god *Khnum* recorded in a fragmentary *Papyrus Chester Beatty X* (*c*. 1000 BCE) to be accompanied by the application of remedies, "Hail to thee, great god, who created the upper class. Thou, *Khnum*, who established the lower class. Mayst thou test the mouth of every vulva … be erect, be not soft, be strong, be not weak … Thou strengthen thy testicles with *Seth*, son of *Nut*" – to be recited over the anointed member (Hussein & Shokir 2004:386-387 cf. Budin 2014:43). Another spell, according to Madden, relates to the faithful-ness between *Isis* and *Osiris*, where the male client of a magician (local healer/priest) would be instructed to anoint his phallus with an ointment prepared by the magician. Engaging in intimate relations with his female counterpart would ensure that she stays faithful to him and subsequently any children conceived by her, would be his (Pinch 2004:124 cf. Madden 2018:3).

Other examples of sex magic spells are found the *Egyptian Coffin Texts*, which comprises a collection of spells that represent knowledge formulae, or outcomes, to envisage and practically (via ritual) manifest to a particular individual in the afterlife (Bonanno 2018:275-277). In these spells, there is no indication towards the separation of a person's physical identity and spiritual parts, as the consideration of these constructs as mutually exclusive, did not exist in ancient Egyptian spirituality (see Landborg 2014:141-142). Moreover, these texts frequently took the form of lists, or wishes interwoven in dialogue varying in length with the presumption that any man who carries knowledge of its content will enjoy its fruits in the afterlife (Landborg 2014:20-25). This is especially exemplified in the case of spell 576 in the

coffin texts which prescribes the recitation of the spell's words over Carnelian or Amethyst beads; placed on the right arm of the deceased as part of the process to ensure frequent sex and the ability to please one's partner in the afterlife (Pinch 2004:124 cf. Madden 2018:2-3). According to El Shamy, et alia the spell reads as follows: "As for any man who shall know this spell, he shall copulate in this land by night and by day, and desire shall come to the women beneath him whenever he copulates" (El Shamy, *et al.* 2023:75).

Landborg mentions several other spells in the coffin texts on the sexual theme, *Spell 94 & 96* where the deceased is identified as having intercourse with *Osiris*: "I am this great spirit (*Ba*) of *Osiris* through which the gods have ordered that he will have sex, the one who lives on high by day, which *Osiris* has made from the efflux which is in his flesh, the semen which went forth from his phallus, to go out in the day so that he will have sex through it…" (Landborg 2014:143-144, 215 cf. Bonanno 2018:284-286). Other spells include *spell 75* which partly deals with the theme: "I ejaculate, my spirit (*Ba*) ejaculates in people who are in the Island of Fire. I myself ejaculate in goddesses" (Landborg 2014:213-214) along with *spell 874* which states, "my living spirit (*Ba*) is indeed announced, one who will go out on earth and who will be there, so that it may have sex and stride forth among people" [so says] *Osiris* and likewise they say, the gods. "It is permitted that I return to the living, one who will go out on earth and who will be among people so that it may have sex and stride forth. So they say, the gods" (Landborg 2014:174-175).

4.4.2 Attempted Rape: Seth and Horus Contending For Osiris' Inheritance

Furthermore, when discussing magic and sexuality in ancient Egyptian religion and spirituality, it is important to also note the familiar myth *The Contendings of Seth and Horus*, mentioned

in the 20th Dynasty *Chester Beatty Papyrus I*, where the first and one of the only inclinations, towards homosexuality in Egyptian myth and literature is mentioned (see Meeks 1996:68 cf. El Saeed 2016:115-116). In this narrative which is also alluded to in spell 607 in the coffin texts (cf. Landborg 2014:191), Seth contends with *Horus* for the inheritance of *Osiris*. Subsequently, Seth invites his unsuspecting nephew *Horus* into his bed with ulterior motives. Yet, the latter, not suspicious of *Seth*'s advances accepts his request and finds himself falling victim to *Seth* raping (emasculating) him. According to Meeks, *Isis* warned *Horus* of *Seth*'s intentions, instructing that should *Seth* continue with his advances, *Horus* should collect *Seth*'s semen in his hands (Meeks 1996:68).

Horus did as his mother instructed and thereafter Isis immediately severed her son's hands and cast them into the Nile. Following this event, Horus' mother Isis, assists her son in obtaining revenge by masturbating him, collecting his semen in a container and pouring it over *Seth*'s favourite vegetable – lettuce. Also, a symbol for the ithyphallic god *Min* and considered an Egyptian aphrodisiac (see Shokeir & Hussein 2004:387), later to be eaten by *Seth* (Walsh 2012:179-181 cf. El Saeed 2016:118-119). Eventually, when *Seth* and *Horus* appeared before the assembly of the gods: Thoth instructed the semen from both *Seth* and *Horus* to come forth, as proof for who dominated whom (after *Seth* boasted about dominating Horus). *Seth*'s rose up from the Nile, and *Horus*' emerged from *Seth*'s forehead in the form of a golden disk, later adopted as *Thoth*'s headdress, symbolising him as god of the moon (Meeks 1996:68-69 cf. Gyula 2018:139-140 & Priskin 2019:7-9).

Given the elaborate discussion above, it is pertinent that the Egyptians considered their erotic endeavours as something which could, in modern terms be defined as mystical, esoteric, and transcendental. However, it should be noted that when viewed in context: Egyptians

(regardless of class) were not fanatics or barbaric per se in their all-encompassing expression of their sensuality. Instead, to them, it meant a closer connectedness to the gods and to themselves as sexuality not only served as method for procreation, which defined their existential purpose according to the example set by the gods. It also served as vehicle for self-expression and pleasure, even in the afterlife. As such, the Egyptians unified the material and the immaterial, the mortal and immortal, the eternal and finite, through sexuality; as such solidifying it as sex magick in practice.

Sex and sexuality were essentially the glue that combined religion, identity, leisure, and survival in Egyptian society. Moreover, it was *ma'at* that maintained the balance, restraint, and what could be understood as sexual ethics today. Several wisdom texts, part of the pharaonic wisdom tradition, *Sebayt* meaning "teaching" or "instructions" (Silva 2023:522). Were also composed by Egyptians c. 3000-1000 BCE, containing several maxims on sexuality. One of which, in Papyrus Insinger contains one of the oldest Egyptian aphorisms, "a fool who has no work, his phallus does not let him rest…" (Goff 2005:161 cf. Sullivan 1998:3). It is clear that to the Egyptians, sex and sexuality was not merely a procreative endeavour, but some-thing intrinsically divine that not only afforded some knowledge, but also healing and a deeper connection with the self and the gods. However, it is also worth mentioning that in some cases, sexuality was a transformative act in which humans believed to – in essence – become gods themselves. It was also an aspect of humanity that provided liberation and freedom from the restraints of daily routines, therefore in light of the above, Egyptian sexuality is nothing short of an esoteric experience.

4.5 The Religion Of Hinduism And Its Eastern Esoteric Roots

Hinduism is a well-known religious framework often discussed in conversations about Eastern esotericism. Nevertheless, Hinduism is a complex religious categorisation as it does not pertain to a singular, uniform religious group, unlike other religious classifications (Bradley & Ramsey 2010:7-8 cf. Kapp 2020:36-37). Alternatively, it can pertain to a diverse group of around 700 million (constituting 83% of the overall population) indigenous individuals, hailing from the Indian subcontinent. The term "Hindu" encompasses the entirety of modern South Asia, as noted by Flood (2003:2) and Truschke (2023:248). Brodd, et alia, state that Hinduism does not have a single founder or a single collection of texts. However, many Hindus consider the Vedic texts and Brahmin priests as authoritative for performing rituals, while others may reject both (Brodd, *et al.* 2019:92-93). However, after going through count-less evolutionary stages, it has also been recognised as the most ancient religion in human civilisation (Ghosh & Bagchi 2017:1).

4.5.1 *Hindu* or *Hinduš*? Persians, Akkadians, And Elamites

Truschke adds that between 500 BCE and 1000 CE, the oldest usage of the term Hindu has been found, mentioned by several non-Indians to describe the inhabitants of Northern India (cf. Umer 2014:80-81). Furthermore, inscriptions found in Western Asia dating back to the 6th century BCE, from the multi-lingual Achaemenid Empire whose influence stretched as far as the north-west (contemporary Afghanistan and Pakistan). In these inscriptions, the Achaemenids listed their land ownerships, which included the Eastern part of their empire, often known as *hindush* in Old Persian, *indu* in Akkadian, and *hinduš* in Elamite (Trushke 2023:249). Moreover, the Achaemenids received their geographic demarcation *hindu*, from the Indo-Iranian term *sindhu* meaning "river". Although, scholars remain divided in their

attempts to ascertain the earliest origins of *sindhu* which appeared in the earliest known Indian text (*c.* 1200 BCE), the Rig Veda (Truschke 2023:249-250).

In addition, the term appears in the Zoroastrian Avesta as well as indicated by the *hapta həṇdu* expression, which translates to "seven rivers" (Grenet 2015:25-26). Khorikyan adds that in the *Persepolis* inscriptions of *Darius I* that *Hindush* (or *Sind*) is the country of the Indians who are inhabitants of the western coast, specifically referring to the *Indus River* known today as Pakistan's longest river, where the name for both India and Hindu originate (Khorikyan 2016:27-28). The aforementioned *Indus* people remain one of the most complex and least understood civilisations, especially when it comes to their religion, and scholars still struggle to find common ground to this day (see Umer 2017:1-2 cf. Jhujhunwala 2021:95-97).

Ambalu, *et alia* argue that Hinduism, despite being recognised as one of the oldest religions in the world dating back to the Iron Age, is a term that was coined relatively recently (Ambalu, *et al.* 2013:90-91 cf. Ghosh & Bagchi 2017:1-3). The origins of Hinduism can be traced back to an ancient civilisation that thrived along the riverbanks of the *Indus*, known as the Punjab, between approximately 2500-1500 BCE (Deming 2015:13). Regrettably, there is currently no conclusive evidence that can establish a consistent link between contemporary Hinduism and the urban civilisation of the ancient Indus Valley (Warrier 2007:1-2 cf. Umer 2017:1). According to Wright (2012), the *Harappan* civilisation thrived on the banks of the *Indus River* during the 3rd millennium BCE. This civilisation was also referred to as the *Harappan* religion. (See Dani & Thapar 1996:271-272, cf. Wright 2012:102-103).

4.5.2 Atman Versus Brahman: The Universal Soul in Karma, Samsara, And Moksha

Scholars have identified three fundamental concepts that underpin Hindu spirituality: *karma*, *samsara*, and the diverse heritage of Hinduism. *Karma* refers to the belief that one's actions determine the positive or negative consequences one will experience. *Samsara* represents the ongoing cycle of life, death, and rebirth. Hinduism's heritage is characterised by its ambiguity and diversity. *Moksha*, the ultimate goal of this cycle, represents salvation achieved through complete liberation from the challenges and trivialities encountered in *samsara*, the continuous cycle of rebirth (Brodd, *et al.* 2019:93). Umer asserts that these concepts are all interconnected with *jiva*, which refers to the inherent essence of the soul. *Karma* is regarded as the cohesive force that connects the soul to the cycle of rebirth, known as samsara (Umer 2022:119-120). Although Hindus have the freedom to worship any deities and choose whether to worship in a temple, the overall Hindu traditions have been influenced by four key sources: 1) the four *Vedas*, 2) the *Brahmanas* (commentaries on the *Vedas*), 3) the *Upanişads* (theoretical foundation of the religion), and later 4) the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, two Indian epic poems that elaborated on history, mythology, philosophy, and religion (Ambalu, *et al.* 2013:90-92).

Shunmugam and Sukdaven summarises this in elaborating that in Hinduism, the soul (*atma* or *jiva*) is ensnared in the Samsara cycle, which refers to the unending cycle of rebirth. The objective, however, is not to achieve better circumstances in subsequent lives, but rather to break free from this perpetual cycle: which one achieves through *moksha*, or "salvation" (Shunmugam & Sukdaven 2024:3). Additionally, Shunmugam and Sukdaven maintain that Hinduism delineates four paths through which to attain *moksha*: 1) *Jnana* (the path of knowledge), 2) *Bhakti* (the path of devotion), 3) *Karma* (the path of action), and 4) *Raja* (the

path of meditation). Each path embodies distinct teachings and philosophies that serve as guides on the journey towards spiritual emancipation (Shunmugam & Sukdaven 2024:3-4).

In addition, it is regarded that a key aspect of Hindu spirituality is the connection between atman (soul/spirit) and *Brahman*, which is the all-encompassing soul or ultimate reality that exists throughout eternity (Deming 2015:18). In Hinduism, the ultimate goal for individuals was to transcend sensual pleasures, which were initially seen as deceptive, in order to achieve the union of one's atman (individual soul) with *Brahman* (the ultimate reality) (Lockhard 2010:111). Therefore, many individuals embarked on a quest to attain a mystical connection with the suggested divine, resulting in the emergence of new levels of Hindu spirituality (Kapp 2020:36-37).

This manifested in the practice of *Yogācāra*, which originated around 2500 BCE, and is one of the various Hindu esoteric systems that emerged in ancient times: *Yoga* (for short) is a psychotherapeutic practice that aims to achieve harmony between the mind, spirit, and body through the use of breathing techniques and physical postures. The word *yoga* in and of itself means "uniting" or "yoking". Additionally, it seeks to foster self-awareness of the collective essence of all beings (Kamraju 2023:30-31). *Yoga* was employed by holy individuals as an ascetic spiritual discipline in which it was important to renounce earthly gratifications, and they were highly esteemed for their dedication (see White 2012:8-12). Therefore, in order to successfully accomplish the process of reincarnation and attain a state of harmonious oneness with Brahman, as explained in the Hindu *Upanishads* (Deming 2015:18), one must negate the ego and let go of worldly desires. This state can be compared to a deep and uninterrupted sleep, as described by Lockhard (2010:111-112).

Vedānta, meaning "End of the Vedas," is a significant school of thought introduced by Hindu spiritual seekers. It gained prominence in the *Upaniṣads* and emphasises that the *Upaniṣads* provide insights into the nature of existence (Lockhard 2010:112; Brodd, *et al.* 2019:102-103). However, the *Upaniṣads* differ significantly from the Vedas, which Hindus regard as their authoritative scripture. Instead, the *Upaniṣads* serve as an elaborate commentary on the Vedic texts (Cohen 2018:54-60). The Vedas, dating from approximately 1700-900 BCE, were a compilation of more than a thousand Hymns that were categorised into four collections, commonly referred to as 'the four Vedas': *Ṛg Veda* (the oldest and most significant), *Sama-Veda*, *Yajur-Veda*, and *Atharva-Veda* (Deming 2015:15 cf. White 2012:3-8). Furthermore, like any other system of belief, the *Vedānta* school inevitably gave rise to various sub-branches (see Cohen 2018:571-572). However, Brodd, *et alia* contend that among the numerous sub-branches, three are deemed the most significant:

1) *Advaita Vedanta*, which emerged around the 8th century CE, is a monistic or 'non-dualistic' school of thought. It teaches that *Atman* (the individual self) and *Brahman* (the ultimate reality) are identical, rejecting any notion of differentiation between them and every-thing else. 2) *Vishishtavaita-Advaita* (*circa* 12 CE), originating from the *Vaishnava* sects devoted to the non-dualistic school of *Vedanta* philosophy (Vimal & Pandey-Vimal 2015:9-7 cf. Deming 2015:23-24), proclaimed that everything was essentially the same as *Brahman* and that the soul, along with the material world, constituted the physical manifestation of god (hence not illusory). 3) *Dvaita Vedanta*, which emerged around the 13th century CE, promotes a clear and absolute dualism between *atman* (individual self) and *Brahman* (universal consciousness). This philosophy therefore recognises five distinct divisions within this dualism: the distinction between atman and *Brahman*, the distinction between *Brahman* and

matter, the distinction between different individual souls, the distinction between souls and matter, and the distinction between different forms of matter (Mishra 2024:468-471).

4.5.3 *Kama*: The Vedic Idea of Pleasure And Spirituality

The Hindu spiritual paradigm has successfully incorporated a wide range of philosophical ideas, including some that may seem contradictory. For instance, while some Hindus practiced asceticism for a holy life, it is interesting to note that the Kamasutra, the oldest surviving love manual, was authored by *Vātsyāyana*, a Hindu philosopher who lived a celibate life. This suggests that not all Hindus were ascetic individuals. However, it raises the question of how the Hindu tradition of sexual liberation contributes to this range of diversity. According to Chandrasekar and Gurusamy, the Hindu scriptures depict the human's endeavour to overcome their shortcomings and face various aspects of life, including ethics, security, pleasure, and liberation (Agarwal 2015:2-3 cf. Chandrasekar & Gurusamy 2019:114-116). Kama encompasses the diverse manifestations of sensory gratification, with all beings seeking pleasure through the means accessible to them. Nevertheless, the human inclination towards pleasure is characterised by greater intricacy. Humans inhabit a personal realm that is characterised by their own individual perspectives and is regularly filled with experiences that are either pleasing, displeasing, or neither pleasing nor displeasing.

The oldest existing evidence of our attitudes towards sexuality can be traced back to the Hindu, Jain, and Buddhist traditions. The *Kama Sutra*, written by the sage *Mallinga Vātsyāyana* around 200 CE, is a Hindu text that provides guidance for harmonious social interactions within ancient Hindu society. It focusses on various aspects of love and is influenced by the gods. However, the actual doctrine of Hindu sexuality originates from the Vedic texts. This serves as a clear indication of the evident diversity within Hindu spiritual

traditions, demonstrating that not all Hindus subscribed to the idea of repression or *Sanyasa Ashrama*, a lifestyle of renunciation or asceticism (see Chandrasekar & Gurusamy 2019:114 cf. Kochuthara 2009:71, 84-85; Brodd, *et al.* 2019:93). In addition, the *Kama Sutra* offers comprehensive guidance on the techniques of sexual love, relationships between men and women, and the pursuit of sensual enjoyment within the framework of urban life, marriage, and the lifestyle of a courtesan (Kantha 2023:333-334). The *Kama Sutra* text also delves into the complex facets of human desire, behaviour, and psychology, specifically in the context of love and relationships, in addition to its explicit content. Furthermore, it is considered a guidebook for living a fulfilling life in accordance with Hindu social and ethical norms (see Bawa 2023:430-432).

De Smedt asserts that Hinduism had the ability to elevate sexuality as a phenomenon that goes beyond the physical and psychological aspects, as evidenced in the *Kama Sutra* (de Smedt 1993:1-2 cf. Garcia-Romeu 2010:27-29). *Vātsyāyana* emphasises that both the man and woman possess a spiritual essence during the act, regardless of whether they are in a relationship or not (Pant 2024:183-185). Provided that individuals who explore their sexuality acknowledge that their actions are influenced by divine forces (cf. Bawa 2023:433-435). With the rise in popularity of the *Kama Sutra*, a new form of Yogic spirituality called *Tantra* emerged from the ancient Vedic texts: *Tantra*, deriving from the root tan, which means "expansion" or "to expand" celebrates and honours sexuality as a sacred practice (White 2012:12-15). Alternatively, it more broadly refers to a set of ceremonial guidelines, or in a more specific context, it denotes a collection of knowledge, rituals, and practices related to salvation that are considered separate from and more potent than Vedic teachings (White 2002:253-263 cf. Brittain 2022:103-104). It views the body not as separate from the soul, but as a means to awaken the ultimate energy known as *kundalini sakti* and free the mind, through the

manifestation of the Hindu goddess *Kali*, considered the mystical resident within each individual's body, by stimulating and arousing the kundalini energy via the cakras (Brittain 2022:95-97). According to the tantric tradition, sexual unions (maithuna) are seen as a means of liberating the body through spiritual self-awakening. This liberation occurs during and as a result of the sexual act itself (Kapp 2020:38-39).

4.5.4 Tantra: Erotic Yoga Worship in Devotion To *Śiva* and *Śakti*

When it comes to the tantric practice as a whole, it is important to acknowledge its appropriation in Western society. Since the 19th century onwards, the Asiatic tradition of *Tantra* has been plagiarised by the West due to its obsession with the use of Tantric sex rituals and erotic fantasies (see Yudelove 2000, Richardson 2003, Wallis 2013, Bennet 2021, *at alia*). This phenomenon resulted in the utter disgust of Christian missionaries and Orientalist scholars alike, but a source of erotic allure for many European esoteric groups such as Theodor Reuss, Aleister Crowley, and the O.T.O or *Ordo Templi Orientis* (Urban 2008:401-403). It is important to acknowledge that the West has extensively appropriated Tantra, primarily associating it exclusively with sex and sexuality. According to Brittain (2022:107-108), the belief at hand is misunderstood by the general public. This idea not only overlaps with, but also negatively affects the fundamental spiritual principles found in the teachings (Brittain 2022:107-108). In his influential book, *Tantra Sex, Secrecy, Politics, and Power in the Study of Religion* (2003), Hugh Urban also contended that Tantra has been overemphasised magnified and, ultimately, commodified (by the West), by exclusively being portrayed as perhaps the most alluring and enticing aspect of the "exotic Orient" (Urban 2003:10).

According to Kiss, in evaluating the *Matsyendrasaṃhitā* (a.k.a. *MaSaṃ*), a *Kubjikā-Tripurā* oriented tantric yoga text of the *Ṣaḍanvayaśāmbhava* tradition: the text is a part of a transitional phase in the history of *Śaiva Tantra*. Which according to Sanderson *Śaivism* (lay/initiatory) is a Hindu tradition of devotion to *Śiva*, which reveals a transition from *Kaula* (or *Kaula Gnosis*) practices, to early *Hathayoga* (Kiss 2020:426 cf. Sanderson 2014:). The aforementioned *Kaula* (*Kāmakalā*) was a Hindu Tantric practice was not just centred around the worship of *Śiva Bhairava*, but also his consort the Goddess *Śakti* which appears in various sectarian contexts of what is known as "high Hindu tantra" in the *Śrīvidyā* tradition (see White 1998:172-175).

Moreover, Sauthoff adds that the distinctly esoteric practice of *Śaiva Tantra* can be divided into two branches: an early part of this practice, *Pūrvakaula* which utilises several substances in its practice, including sexual practices, during rituals without restraint. And *uttarakaula* (later *Kaula*) in which practitioners seek union with the goddess via symbolic expressions of these ritual elements (Sauthoff 2019:765-766). Sauthoff maintains that the later Kaula practice focused on eroticism in which erotic rites with women, sanguinary rituals dedicated to particular deities, and the obtaining of supernatural abilities (powers) via yogic praxis, accompanied by altered states of consciousness and/or possession became integral to worship (Sauthoff 2019:766-768 cf. White 1998:175). Additionally, when it comes to *Haṭhayoga* or *hatha yoga* we return to *Matsyendrasaṃhitā* (a.k.a. *MaSaṃ*) which contains a unique variant of sexual rituals pertaining to 13th century *Śaivism* (see Sanderson 2014:1-5).

In addition, Kiss highlights a variety of distinct features of sexual yoga in this text: 1) sexual rituals involving restraint or celibacy, as taught in *BraYā 40* (see Hatley 2018:195-215 cf. Kiss

2015:49), 2) a sexual act where the practitioner applies *vajrolimudrā* at the end, which is the suction of the urethral orifice to draw up combined sexual fluids. 3) sexual rituals where sexual fluids of both the male and woman are combined and consumed towards magical purposes (Kiss 2015:49-50), 4) sexual rituals with one's partner and/or other part-ners, 5) sexual endeavours with visionary or human *Yoginīs* including other "divine beings", and last but not least 6) rituals involving the visualisation / mental projection of a goddess onto the female counterpart and vice versa (Kiss 2020:427-428).

Urban notes that *Tantra* as a tradition is not only present in Hinduism, but also in Buddhism (Urban 2023:7-8). The difference being that in Hinduism, it tends to be an extra-Vedic and the characteristics found in most Hindu tantric traditions is: a) a physical discipline involving physical techniques: *kuṇḍalinī yoga*; b) they are both theistic and non-dualistic; c) speculations on the nature of sound via *mantras*; d) they use symbolic diagrams such as *yantras* as well as *maṇḍalas* e) the *guru* enjoys special significance; f) they are secret; g) they make use of conventionally prohibited substances: meat, alcohol, and sexual fluids and h) they are *dīkṣa* or initiatory where gender and caste are not qualifications (Urban 2023:4-9).

4.6 The Religion of Buddhism: Siddhārtha, Sutras, And Enlightenment in Eastern Esotericism

While Buddhism has its origins in Brahmanism (Hinduism) and shares some initial traditions, it is distinct in several ways. Buddhism rejects the concept of a supreme being, the belief in atman (soul), and the caste system, which sets it apart from Hinduism. The origins of Buddhism can be traced back to around 2500 years ago (*c*. 6-5 BCE) in Nepal and North-ern India. It was founded by *Gautama Siddhārtha*, a member of the *Shakya*-clan (Blomfield

2011:24-27; Patnaik & Marinescu 2019:1-5). *Gautama Siddhārtha*, also known as *Siddhārtha*, was a prince who is credited with the origin of Buddhism. However, there is limited information available about his true identity beyond the *Pali* sutras, which provide some details about his life (Skilton 2013:28-29). Gautama relinquished his royal status in pursuit of freedom from suffering; despite facing numerous challenges. He ultimately triumphed over the cycle of rebirth (*samsara*) and achieved the esteemed status of *Buddha*, meaning 'enlightened one'. However, our knowledge regarding the early stages of Buddhism remains limited (Brodd, *et al.* 2019:93; O'Brien 2019:8-9).

This is confirmed by Burnouf, who provides evidence based on the analysis of texts. It is extremely difficult to determine the complete scope of the entire collection of Buddhist texts. However, Burnouf mentions that if we con-sider a widely accepted tradition that exists between the North and South, these texts can be categorised into three main traditions known as the *Tripitaka*, which means "three baskets" (Burnouf 2010:84-85). These three traditions are the *Vinaya*, *Sutta*, and *Abhidamma* (Pat-naik & Marinescu 2019:1-3).

4.6.1 A Spirituality of Noble Truths: Suffering and Morality

Upon leaving his home at a young age, *Gautama* gained an understanding of the harsh realities of life, which led him to experience a spiritual crisis. He became disenchanted with the fleeting nature of youth and recognised the inevitability of sickness, old age, and death. This realisation prompted him to develop the principle that all ordinary human existence is characterised by dukkha, a term often translated as "suffering" and associated with physical pain and distress. During his meditation under a banyan tree, the *Buddha* came to the realisation that the root cause of suffering, known as *dukkha*, lies in *kama*, which can be

understood as aspiration or desire. Based on this insight, he formulated four noble truths that offer the means to overcome sorrow and eliminate suffering (Vepachedu 2015:1-3).

The noble truths are as follows: 1) All forms of existence are inherently characterised by suffering (*dukkha*), although the Buddha acknowledges that there can be moments of joy and happiness in life, he emphasises that they are temporary and ultimately lead to suffering; 2) The origin of suffering lies in selfish desires (*tanha*) and ignorance (*avijja*); 3) By eliminating selfish desires and ignorance, suffering can be brought to an end, leading to liberation from the cycle of existence (*samsara*) and the attainment of *nirvana* (*nibbana*). The primary objective of Buddhist spirituality, as indicated by Bomhard (2012:18-20).

The fourth and ultimate noble truth provides a practical method for ending suffering (Vepachedu 2015:3), which is directly linked to the 'noble eightfold path'. The *ariya-aṭṭhangikamagga* (Bomhard 2023:190-191), Sanskrit for "the eightfold path", can be divided into three categories, each representing three stages in training: *Pannakkhandha* refers to the category of training that focusses on moral wisdom and it involves mastering the concepts of right view and right intention. On the other hand, *samadhikkhandha* refers to the category of training that focusses on higher consciousness and concentration (Bomhard 2023:353-354) which requires mastery of right effort *sammā vāyāma*, right mindfulness *sammā sati,* and *sammā samādhi* right concentration (Bomhard 2023:353). *Silakkhandha* refers to the moral discipline within the higher wisdom category, which requires the mastery of right speech *sammā vācā*, right action *sammā kammanta*, and right livelihood *sammā ājīva* (Saisuta 2012:2; Shree & Sharma 2014:53 cf. Bomhard 2023:353).

The Buddhist spiritual paradigm is an exemplary model of Eastern esoteric spirituality, encompassing pro-found universal noble truths regarding human spiritual evolution. These

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profound musings from the Buddha are nearly impossible not to resonate with on a profound human level. Like the previous discussions, Buddhism also presents a distinct esoteric viewpoint on sexuality, which this study will explore in more detail, later in this chapter.

4.6.2 Asceticism and Buddhahood: Theravada, Mahayana and Vajrayana

In Buddhism, there are two sexual practices: one for laypeople and one for monastics. The tradition followed by monastics in the main Buddhist schools of *Theravada*, *Mahayana*, and *Vajrayana* is one of complete celibacy (Nash 2014:1627-1630). This means that when someone becomes a monastic, they renounce all sexual desires and expressions (cf. Bomhard 2023:373). Regarding non-clergy members, the ethical standards varied to some extent and permitted a degree of independent decision-making in matters related to sexuality (Harvey 2013:265-266). Any member of the public who identifies with any of these 'vehicles' can choose to undergo training in the *bodhisattva* precepts. However, for those who do not wish to pursue this path, Buddhism still recognises and permits sexuality in any relation-al context, but only within the confines of marriage. It is worth noting that Buddhism, across its major schools, tends to discourage sexual expression due to its negative association with desire (see Bomhard 2023:363-364).

The Buddha considered desire, particularly sensual desire, to be powerful and potentially dangerous (see Thompson 2014:236-237). Similar to Hinduism, Buddhism also has a tantric tradition known as *karmamudra*, which focusses on the sexual yogic sphere: *Karmamudra*, which means "action seal," is a specific technique within *Vajrayana* Buddhism (see Thompson 2014:260-234) involving the demarcation of sacred space via the use of magical items and ritual gestures *mudrā* (van Schaik 2024:2-3) use of a physical or visualised partner, along with the practice of inner heat or *tummo*, to achieve a state of non-duality and bliss

(see Van Schaik 2024:10-11 cf. Kragh 2015:381-386). This magical practice allows practitioners to gain insight into emptiness and propel themselves to Buddahood.

Additionally, as per Urban's research, the *Vajrayana* Buddhist *tantra* tradition or "Buddhist Magic", which evolved alongside Hindu tantra in South Asia, can be traced back to the period between the 5th and 12th centuries. This tradition emerged from earlier *Mahāyāna* literature. The early emergence of Buddhist tantra can be attributed to the gradual development of magical texts, commonly referred to as *kriyā* or "action" tantras. These texts were essentially grimoires and collections of magical rituals that focused on the use of *mantras* and *maṇḍalas* to achieve goals such as protection, healing, and materialistic gains. (Zepa 2022:4 cf. Urban 2023:7-8).

Furthermore, this customary practice includes the participation of a female partner in the *annutarayoga tantra*, which is commonly referred to as the "supreme yoga tantra" (Bäumer 2011:12-15). In a sexual yoga context, there are three female consorts known as *vidya* or "knowledge/wisdom women" (see Kapp 2020:42 cf. Harvey 2013:358-359). They are referred to as follows: 1) *jnanamudra*, which is an imagined or visualised (sexual) partner, not an actual physical consort; 2) *samayamudra*, which represents an actual consort who is fully qualified (appropriate age and caste) and has practical experience in the common path (eightfold path). In addition, the individual has upheld the *samaya*, which refers to the four pledges of the body, speech, mind, and wisdom (Van Schaik 2008:69-71 cf. Kapp 2020:42-43). Furthermore, the term *karmamudra* denotes both an actual consort and someone who may not possess the qualifications of the "pledge seal" *samayamudra* (Busswell & Lopez 2014:419-420). At times, the discussion involves the association of these seals with the *mahamudra*, which is a term used to describe the combination of *prajna* (wisdom) and *upaya*

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(method). The *mahamudra* does not necessarily require a consort. (see Harvey 2013:358-359; Mathes 2008:89-91 cf. Dalton 2020:123-124).

The exotic *Tantra* or *Vajrayana* tradition, one of the three divisions previously mentioned, is regarded as the third major *yana*, following *Theravada-* and *Mahayana* (see Thompson 2014:231-236). This particular *tantra* tradition gained popularity through yogis who demonstrated extraordinary abilities through tantric yoga practices and mystical songs (Thompson 2014:260-261 cf. Langenberg 2015:278-279). These songs were not written in Sanskrit but in the language commonly spoken by the general population. *Tantras* are intricate systems of rituals, meditations, and symbols that originated in the 7th century CE as a result of Indian Buddhism. They later spread to Tibet and became a part of Northern (Tibetan) Buddhism, specifically the *Vajrayana / Mantrayana* versions of the *Mahāyāna*. These versions are considered the primary form of Tibetan Buddhism (Harvey 2013:3-4). Mallinson observes that *hathayoga*, previously believed to be exclusive to Hinduism, can also be traced back to Buddhist *Vajrayana* texts that predate its modern form (Mallinson 2020:179-180). These ancient texts suggest that physical sexual practices were prominent in *hathayoga* during that time. The usage of this term was found in the *Bodhisattvabhūmi*, a text from the 3rd century CE The *Bodhisattvabhūmi* is a part of the *Yogācārabhumiśāstra*, which is a collection of teachings belonging to the *Mahāyāna Yogācāra* tradition (Mallison 2020:180-181). The *Yogācāra* (Sanskrit for "practitioners of yoga") school, also identified as *citta-mātra* (mind-only), or *vijñānavāda* (consciousness school) is one of the two major Buddhist schools belonging to the *Mahāyāna* tradition which emerged during *c.* 3-9th centuries CE in classical India (see Waldron 2010) and eventually spread to China (Qi 2022:1-2; 2022a:238-241).

4.6.3 Tibetan Tantra: Pleasure as Transgression and Antinomianism

Tibetan *tantra* aims to integrate the physical, mental, and verbal aspects of an individual in order to surpass the cycle of existence (*samsara*) and achieve Buddhahood (enlightenment) expeditiously. However, the essence of *tantra* resides in its provocative and nonconformist practices (cf. Kapp 2020:41-43). Zepa clarifies that the tantric practice in Buddhism was not meant for the purpose of indulging in hedonistic pleasures. Instead, its purpose was to serve as a purely esoteric tool that symbolised the transformation resulting from the union of wisdom, emptiness, and compassion (Zepa 2022:6-7). Despite the *Yab-Yum* concept in *Vajrayana* Buddhism being associated with promoting unconventional behaviour, particularly due to the sexual language and symbolism in its rituals (Langenberg 2015:279). Tantric sexuality is frequently taught as a means of channelling sensual desire towards achieving individual Buddhahood. However, certain texts in *Vajrayana* emphasise that enlightenment cannot be reached without engaging in sexual intercourse with a partner (Thompson, *et al.* 2014:260-261). Tantric Buddhism regards the sexual aspect of the body as highly sacred (Jerryson 2018:471), and views sexuality as the most efficient route to enlightenment. However, it is a well-known fact that, in Buddhism, the idea of selfhood as a metaphysical construct was traditionally done away with by some *Upanişads* (Ule 2016:82-84), however as Ule argues:

"In spite of the nonsubstantiality of individual consciousness and the "illusory" nature of the individual self in Buddhism, the individual was not conceived simply as nothing, but as a phenomenal being which can act in phenomenal world: she can meditate, free herself from her karmic conditions, and eventually become enlightened." (Ule 2016:84-85).

4.7 Epistemology of Self-Knowledge in The East

Intellectuals from the East (more specifically Asian and Indian contexts) have been famous for their influential contributions to philosophy and mystical meta-narratives about the self in relation to spirituality (Dung 2021:128), similar to Western philosophical strands. The works of Confucius (see Schneider 2019:91–104), Sun Tzu (Mair 1990), and Gautama Siddhārtha (Dimkov 2020:198 cf. Ule 2016) identify notable thought leaders and contributors in the discourse of selfhood in the East. Other esteemed intellectuals include Jiddu Krishnamurti (see Krishnamurti 1999:12–15; cf. DeSousa 2012:198–207), who each engaged in reflection on the idea of selfhood.

There is a widely held misconception that as soon as one speaks about "Eastern" *vis-à-vis* "Western" philosophy, the former, just like the latter, represents (arguably) a homogenous tradition (Harrison 2019:1–3). However, just like in the case of esoteric discourse, this simply cannot be further from the truth. Harrison points out that unlike European (Western) philosophy, philosophy in the East cannot be traced to a single homogenous source, unlike Western tradition, which could be traced back to the Hellenic intellectuals of antiquity as a common heritage (Harrison 2019:2). Therefore, the more appropriate demarcation in this case, in Harrison's view, would rather be "Asian philosophy." Due to the fact that there is no single unifying premise underlying so-called "Eastern philosophy" (Harrison 2019:2–5). In addition, Dimkov argues that some of the most influential and well-known precepts of the self, derive from the ancient Asiatic philosophy originating in Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, and Hinduism (Dimkov 2018:200–2021).

Similar to the above position of Dimkov, elaborating on the aforementioned traditions and their contributions to a perceived "Eastern" philosophy, is Dung, who not only supports

Dimkov as well as the traditions he mentioned but also notes that India and China are famous for a wide variety of popular philosophical traditions: India, which consists of six schools of thought comprising *Vaiseka*, *Vedanta*, *Lokayata*, *Jaina*, Buddhism, Brahmanism, *Purva Mimansa*, *et cetera* (Dung 2021:128 cf. Dimkov 2018:200). In addition to this, Dung maintains that in China, some of the oldest traceable schools of thought can be found in Moism, Confucianism, Daoism, *Yin* and *Yang*, as well as Legalism. Moreover, while Indian philosophy displays an almost exclusive focus on religio-spiritual issues in its conjecture, Dung posits that in China, ancient thinkers were primarily preoccupied with ethical, moral, and socio-political problems (Dung 2021:128–129). Nevertheless, it is worth noting that some of the most notable considerations of selfhood derived from thinkers in China and India, respectively (Harrison 2019:92–95).

4.7.1 Siddhartha Gautama the "Buddha" (*c.* 485-405 BCE)

Buddhists typically acknowledge the five fundamental components constituting an individual or "self" (Ule 2016:85): form (*rūpa*), sensation (*vedanā*), perception and cognition (*saňjňā*), mental formations (*samskāra*), and consciousness (*vijňāna*) (Karunamuni 2015:1-3 cf. Ule 2016:85). As such, Ule (2016:85) maintains that all these constituents lack inherent existence, as they are composed of perpetually changing *dharmas* (phenomena). They are entirely interdependent. What unifies them into a singular conscious entity? Buddhists reject possibilities wherein unity is solely defined by the interrelations of its components or "elements" (*skandhāh*). Consequently, they believe in the possession of the shared concepts of the unity of an entity, and the continuity of processes without an obligatory binding element, force, condition, *et cetera* (Ule 2016:85-86). The idea of "selfhood" may seem contradictory,

due to the Buddha's longstanding tradition and dedication to selflessness and criticism of self-centredness.

However, as Ule argues, the early Buddhist critique of the concept of Self does not entail a complete repudiation of the notion; rather, it challenges the metaphysical interpretation of the Self as an eternal inner essence within each conscious individual (Ule 2016:85-86). As such, they also reject the notion of *Ātman* (the Self) as a concealed or private "owner" (cogniser, actor) of mental life and experience (Oh 2022:4697). They, however, acknowledge the concept of an individual or an empirical mental entity that exists temporarily and conditionally in a specific form. Only the term "person" cohesively unifies the various constituents of a human being into a singular entity (Ule 2016:86-87 cf. Oh 2022:4700).

One of the most widely cited of the Buddhist *suttas*, representing a brief introduction to the Buddhist philosophical vantage point (Evans 2007:91–92), especially its connection to self-knowledge, is the famous *Kālāma-sutta* or the *Kesamutti-sutta*, more colloquially known as "the Buddha's charter of free inquiry" (cf. Fernando 2017:64-65).

"Come, *Kālāmas*, do not go by oral tradition [*anussavena*], by lineage of teaching [*param-parāya*], by hearsay [*itikirāya*], by a collection of scriptures [*piṭaka-sampadānena*], by logical reasoning [*takka-hetu*], by inferential reasoning [*naya-hetu*], by reasoned cogitation [*ākāra-parivitakkena*], by the acceptance of a view after pondering it [*diṭṭhi-nijjhāna-kkhantiyā*], by the seeming competence of a speaker [*bhavya-rūpatāya*], or because you think: 'The ascetic is our guru.' [*samaṇo no garū ti*] But when you know for yourselves [*kālāmā attanā 'va jāneyyātha*]: 'These things are wholesome [*kusalā*]; these things are blameless; these things are praised by the wise; these things, if accepted and undertaken, lead to welfare and happiness [*hitāya sukhāya*],' then you should live in accordance with them." *Kālāma Sutta*

[*Aguttara Nikāya* 3.65] (see Thera 2008:10–12, cf. Evans 2007:99–100; Fernando 2017:64-66).

This *sutta* is relevant as it provides a practical guide for critical thinking. Thaikeow *et alia* are of the opinion that the context of this narrative presents a unique approach to weighing the pros and cons in terms of critically evaluating knowledge (Thaikeow 2013:60). Furthermore, in the above quote, the Buddha succinctly presents ten criteria for evaluating knowledge: 1) "do not go by oral tradition", or as Thera translates it, "repeated hearing"; 2) nor "by lineage of teaching" / "upon tradition"; 3) nor "by hearsay" / "upon rumour" (see Thera 2008:11); 4) "nor by a collection of scriptures"; 5) nor "by logical reasoning" / "upon surmise"; 6) "by inferential reasoning" / "upon an axiom"; 7) nor "by reasoned cogitation / "upon specious reasoning"; 8) "by the acceptance of a view after pondering it" / "upon a bias towards a notion that has been pondered over" (Thera 2008:11); 9) "by the seeming competence of a speaker" / "upon another's seeming ability" 10) "or because you think: 'The ascetic is our guru.'" / "upon the consideration, 'The monk is our teacher'" With the summative remark "when you know for yourselves" (see Thera 2008:11–12), the Buddha stresses the inherent self-knowledge that allows one to think critically and not become what Evans refers to as "transformative truth" (Evans 2007:95–96), thereby avoiding becoming the intellectual slave of anyone, least of all the Buddha himself (Thaikeow 2013:60–61, cf. Choi & Choo 2019:2-4).

More specifically, Senarath adds to this when positing that the West initially intended for the East to inherit its systems of wisdom, neglecting its myths. However, quite the contrary has occurred; in the 21st century, it has consequently become evident that what was once considered "Eastern myth" is not being translated into modern wisdom (Senarath 2023:1538–1539). In addition, one of the key principles taught by the Buddha is the idea of *pratitya*

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samuppada, which translates to "dependent co-origination," which considers all things in existence to be interdependent. Summarised by the Buddha as "when this is, that is" (Senarath 2023:1539), Senarath interprets this as "when this is not, that is not, and from the cessation of this comes the cessation of that" (Senarath 2023:1539). As such, the Buddha highlights that the core of existence [of the self-] is rooted in coexistence with others. Therefore, we can conclude that the Buddha's idea of "the self," especially when compared to the "Four Noble Truth" and "Eight Noble Path" (see Harrison 2019:105–106), is something illusory, as the self is not possible in separation from its surroundings (Oh 2022:4696–4697, cf. Choi & Choo 2019:9–12).

4.7.2 Sun Tzu (*c.* 771–256 BCE)

Despite the fact that Sun Tzu is well-known for his position as military general, philosopher, and author of *The Art of War* (Tzu 2000), which is considered the oldest and most influential treatise on military strategy in history (Willcoxon 2010:2-4), Not just is this treatise considered a military handbook, but this thesis would like to postulate that his work is irreplaceable, when embarking on a study of eastern philosophy and the importance of self-knowledge. After all, Tzu's treatise is the epitome of a convergence between military strategy and Chinese philosophy, which has had a remarkable impact on influential thinkers such as Confucius, Lao Tzu, and Han Fei (Xu & Dechsubha 2022:7914–7915). Nevertheless, it is also worth mentioning that Tzu's work has been misappropriated in 21st century contexts to reinforce imperial hypermasculine attitudes, especially when considered in the context of the U.S. Department of Defence's campaign in Iraq (see Hwang & Ling 2008:9–12).

Despite this, Sun Tzu's narrative on warfare has still had an irrevocable impact on ideas of self-knowledge; for example, "30. Disciplined and calm, to await the appearance of disorder

and hubbub amongst the enemy: this is the art of retaining self-possession" (Tzu 2000:29). In other instances, within the text, Tzu refers to the value of self-knowledge in determining victory or defeat in battle: consequently, in his treatise, he notes two sayings. 1) "If you know the enemy and know yourself, your victory will not stand in doubt; if you know heaven and know earth, you may make your victory complete." (Tzu 2000:45) 2) "Hence the saying: If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles." If you know yourself but not the enemy, for every victory gained, you will also suffer a defeat. If you know neither the enemy nor yourself, you will succumb in battle" (Tzu 2000:10–11).

Dimovski, et alia provides an interpretation of these anecdotes by stating that the former necessitates proactivity, strategic thinking, and proactiveness. However, in contrast, the latter speaks to the opportunity of positional advantage, which boils down to possessing knowledge, especially noting the fact that knowledge of the self (in addition to knowledge of the enemy) is instrumental in guaranteeing victory (Dimovski, *et al.* 2012:199–200). It is also worth noting that the influential Lionel Giles, in his translation and commentary on The Art of War, highlights five integral virtues of the Chinese (see Confucius 1999:31–39): 1) benevolence or humanity; 2) uprightness of the mind; 3) self-respect, control, or proper feeling; 4) wisdom; and 5) sincerity or good faith (Giles 2005:23–24; cf. Cantrell 2003:5–6).

4.7.3 Master Kong Qiu "Confucius" (*c.* 551-479 BCE)

Confucius is widely praised for being one of the most influential thinkers and Eastern philosophers of his time, known by numerous names (spelling may vary): Kong Zi, Kong Fuzi, Master Kong, Kong Qui, or Kong Zhongni. Yet, out of all of them, the most recognisable is Confucius (Chan 2011:246). Despite the fact that very little is known about the life of

Confucius, or Kongzi, we know that he regarded himself as a teacher and scholar, a revivalist who was cardinally preoccupied with preserving ancient Chinese wisdom and traditional values (Harrison 2019:121–123). In addition to this, it is worth noting that the aforementioned virtue system, as mentioned by Giles (2005:23–24), has its roots in Confucianism.

This is attested by Wǔcháng, who notes these as the "Five Constant Virtues" or Wu Chang, in addition to the "Three Fundamental Bonds," which collectively comprise the doctrine of Confucianism, designed to inspire nobility in the action and thought of traditional China (Wǔcháng 2009:2252). These virtues are "benevolence" (*rén* 仁), "righteousness" (*yi* 義), "propriety" (*li* 義), "wisdom" (*zhi* 智), and "trustworthiness" (*xin* 信), which collectively serve as a summary for all Confucian virtues (Wǔcháng 2009:2252, cf. Wahing 2021:1-2). In addition to these values, Confucius notes in his work *The Analects* (论语), 2.15, "To learn without thinking is labour in vain; to think without learning is desolation" (Confucius 1999:35). Moreover, he highlighted three concepts (not to be confused with the three noble bonds) that serve as the pathway to wisdom: 1) "reflection," which is considered the noblest; 2) "imitation," which is considered the easiest; and 3) "experience," which is considered the bitterest (Wahing 2021:10–11).

Schneider explains that Confucius distinguished between the "small man" (*xiaoren* 小人), who is considered "the thief of virtues", "the root of evil," and "the source of resentment": Confucius believed that when people pursue enlightenment due to self-interest, they depart from the path of virtue and self-cultivation (Schneider 2019:91). However, in contrast, the "enlightened one" (*junzi* 君子) is believed to be a self-cultivated individual who follows the path of "benevolence" (*rén* 仁) as well as "ritual" (*lǐ* 禮), dictating his behaviour, accordingly,

thus fulfilling either or both roles within society (Schneider 19:91‑92). In support of this, Harrison notes that Confucianism, in promotion of his version of "the way" (*tao* 道), taught that "virtue" (*te* 德) was given by heaven but that it was an individual's role to cultivate it (Harrison 2019:125). Consequently, this is the only way that one could lead a good life and carry out one's official role in society well; hence, following "the way" meant cultivating one's virtue (Harrison 2019:125–126, cf. Tan 2021:31-32).

Adding to this, Peters et alia argue that the philosophy of self-cultivation forms the cultural foundation of Confucian thought, rooted in a variety of discourses related to philosophy, human development, transcendence, and spirituality (Peters *et al.* 2021:1-2). Moreover, Peters *et alia* maintain that the precept of self-cultivation is the endless improvement of oneself based on psychosocial processes or practical ethics (from novice to master) aimed at enhancing moral capacities towards perfection. According to Peters *et alia* (2021:2-4), Chinese philosophy represents this practice as the unity between man and heaven. In addition to self-cultivation, social harmony is integral, as self-cultivation leads to harmonious interactions with others due to the development of traits like honesty, empathy, and sincerity (Rozi 2020:129–130). Therefore, the purpose of self-cultivation as taught by Confucius denotes that the self exists in relation to others and one's moral deeds, which lead to social harmony and enlightenment (Rozi 2020:130–131). In *Wei Zheng*, Confucius makes this observation, which reads as follows:

"The Master said, 'See what a man does; observe the roads he has followed; examine in what things he rests; how can a man conceal his real self? How can a man conceal his real self?" *Book II: Wei Zheng* 2.10 (Confucius 1999:13).

4.7.4 Jiddu Krishnamurti (1895-1986)

Another prominent figure of Eastern philosophical thought is Jiddu Krishnamurti, widely revered as philosopher and spiritual leader (Persico 2016:115-116 cf. Pandey 2023:713). The reason why Krishnamurti has been chosen as discursive paradigm for self-knowledge especially pertaining to Eastern philosophy, is because out of all the philosophers, his perspectives are most relevant given his intimate knowledge and affiliation with the Theosophical society (Martins 2018:38-39). In addition, despite Krishnamurti's theosophical background, he became widely known for his writings on topics such as self-reflection, meditation, relationships, and education. Particularly relevant to this research, is his book Meditations (1976:8) in which he remarks that meditation is the dynamic process of self-observation; enabling an individual to transform themselves and in so doing expresses novel values which are constructive for broader society (Krishnamurti 1976:8 cf. Martins 2018:39-41). In one of his meditations, Krishnamurti notes "…When you learn about yourself, watch yourself, watch the way you walk, how you eat, what you say, the gossip, the hate, the jealousy—if you are aware of all that in yourself, without any choice, that is part of meditation." (Krishnamurti 1976:8)

Moreover, Krishnamurti also discusses meditation's function in virtue: He maintains that the ultimate level of discipline is based on continual awareness of both external and interior states, rather than compliance, imitation, or obedience. Meditation is an engaging daily practice that needs teamwork, perceptiveness, and intellect (Krishnamurti 1976:12). More than following social conventions, a good existence involves freedom from jealously, greed, and power, which breed animosity. These impediments can be overcome via self-awareness and knowledge, not deliberate effort. Without self-awareness, meditation is just superficial pleasure. (Krishnamurti 1967:12-13). These sentiments of Krishnamurti are iconically

representative of his "Tradition of No Tradition", which was founded on two fundamental beliefs: firstly, a perennialist perspective on religious truth and secondly, the outright refusal of ritual and technique in religious practices (Persico 2016:121-122).

Furthermore, Persico maintains the first condition is a necessary requirement that establishes the basis for the logical feasibility of the second condition: only if all religions share, or are expressions of, the identical truth and indicate the same underlying reality, can we effectively disregard their distinct cultural systems and frameworks once we have knowledge of that truth or reality—or the enduring path to it. Hence, the distinction between bodies is inconsequential if the soul is considered to be singular and identical (Persico 2016:122). From this idea, it is evident that in order to access the universal spirit, the various forms of physical bodies must be discarded (Persico 2016:122-123). It is also worth mentioning that this is also fundamental tenet of Theosophy: in her seminal work, *Isis Unveiled*, Blavatsky explicitly noted "Truth is singular, and every religion, be it Christian or pagan, is firmly founded on the enduring principles of God and the eternal spirit" (Blavatsky 2006:420). Furthermore, according to the inaugural edition of The Theosophist, the official publication of the Theosophical Society, provides a concise definition of Theosophy as "the ancient Wisdom-Religion, the esoteric doctrine that was once prevalent in all ancient civilisations" (Blavatsky 1879:3-4; 1890:5-7).

Conclusively, Krishnamurti's emphasis on consciousness as vehicle to self-knowledge is not just unique, but novel. The reality of existence was his goal, not celestial paradise or nirvana (Van Bung 2020:272-273). Freedom is introspection with a liberated mindset, not escape. Truth is within everyone, not distant. The fragmented state of consciousness divides human life because the mind lacks stability (Van Bung 2020:274). As the mind becomes attached to

doctrines, teachings, and experiences, stagnation, sorrow, disillusionment, and distress increase. By facing life and exploring consciousness, one can eliminate all aware-ness limitations and achieve ultimate focus (Pandey 2023:716-717). Therefore, it can be argued that Krishnamurti believes, only unwavering focus can free the mind, overcoming in-ternal chaos and discovering the self, including knowledge of the self (Krishnamurti 1956:38-39).

4.8 Conclusion

In this chapter, the concept of the East-West divide in terms of esotericism was explored, where discussions on Orientalism, Occidentalism, and colonialism were encroached. And perspectives on how esotericism manifested itself in the East *vis-á-vis* the West. In addition, philosophical ideas of selfhood from thinkers like Gautama Siddhartha, Sun Tzu, Confucius, and Jiddu Krishnamurti were extrapolated upon to showcase the idea of self-knowledge as virtuous endeavour, therefore delineating the Eastern conceptualisation of "the self" as a moralistic endeavour of virtue ethics. Moreover, this chapter thereby also highlighted how modern European thought contributed to the marginalisation, stigmatisation, and appropriation of Eastern wisdom. It was considered how Edward Said and other orientalist scholars of the late 1900s, inadvertently polarised the discussion on defining the East as a substantive and independent geographical demarcation, without Eurocentric presuppositions.

This in and of itself proved to be a historiographic nightmare, due to the fact that it became clear that when we talk about "East" and "Eastern" – the idea in and of itself became controversial, because of the question that begged which locations ought to be included or excluded. Throughout the discussion it thus became evident that the West has prioritised

certain geographical paradigms above others due to a mythical illusion created by Occidentalist cultural obsessions with a "mystical East".

This illusion was not only perpetuated according to some scholars, by Western projections, but also due to the idealisation imposed on the West that the East (specifically India) was the cradle of ancient mysticism and wisdom. Subsequently, some scholars argued that the East was fetishised by the Eurocentric ideal imposed on the respective wisdom traditions. And it was eventually concluded that the purpose of this chapter was not to make assertions to either 'side' of the polemic, but rather to illustrate awareness of the complexity and precariousness regarding the discourse. Esotericism if we are to echo Faivre, is a form of thought, which many formidable scholars within Esotericism would support. Therefore, noting that such thought streams have no geographical demarcations, and so no-one can really claim singular ownership or origins.

It remains an exchange of ideas through migratory cultures throughout history, therefore, making the discussion on colonialism as a mere precept even more complex. It can, however, be ascertained that the aforementioned traditions highlighted from Egypt to Asia, indicate that cultures showcase a similarity in their approach to sexuality as a ritualistic phenomenon contributing to ideations of healing, knowledge and virtuousness through, especially in Asia, the attainment of enlightenment. From the coffin spells to the Vedas, to Tantra: sexuality as a ritualistic phenomenon remains evident in these cultures as a vehicle to hidden self-knowledge and enlightenment. Therefore, wholly esoteric.

CHAPTER 5

Sexuality And Spirituality In Africana Esotericism: Slavery, Apartheid, Ancestors, Blues, And Ubuntu

5.1 Introduction

One of the less explored voices within esotericism, has to be African esotericism. In the previous chapter, we discussed in depth the influence of colonialism and Occidentalism on Eastern esotericism. And to a large degree, the same polemics are relevant here. Africa remains (to a large degree) underrepresented in esoteric scholarship, due to what the author argued in the previous chapter relating to a pre-occupation with "Western" demarcations. Such (perceivably) Eurocentric demarcations have – even though placing esotericism on the map as academic discourse – developed a polemic where in the contemporary *zeitgeist* it has become important to "give credit where credit is due." This means acknowledging the cultural contributions made by specific geographic role-players in the ever-increasing diversification of esotericism. As Strube (2020:45-46) quite poignantly notes, the "Western" in esotericism has become a volatile concept and has proven to be an impediment to esotericism's further expansion, despite Hanegraaff's criticism of such theorems as radically post-modern (Hanegraaff 2019:151). In this chapter, much like the previous, we are confronted with a similar issue.

However, in this particular chapter, less attention will be placed on post-colonial theory and more on establishing Africa within esotericism and exploring its unique manifestations in African religion, sexuality, and spirituality. Therefore, in this chapter, ritual sexuality, and spirituality in the traditions of Sufi Islam, African American Conjure, and South African

traditional practices as function of African Traditional Religion, ATR (i.e. *iZangoma* and their role) will be explored in no particular order. These perspectives are specifically chosen, as they represent what could be considered Africana esoteric traditions.

Moreover, it is also worth noting, that an exhaustive historiography of these African traditions would be impossible for the purposes of this chapter, therefore any historical trajectory will be introductory and not definitive. This chapter, as with the East in the previous chapter, will however attempt to establish a unique demarcation of African esotericism in its own right, therefore providing a historical trajectory is important where relevant. The usage of Africana in this context, denotes the specific demarcation of *Africana Esoteric Studies (AES)* which is an emerging field in esotericism scholarship, coined by Page and Finley to describe the African and African-diasporic World, or *Afrikana Weltanschauungen* in relation to esoteric religious currents that fall under this category (see Anderson 2022:444-449; Page & Finley 2021:168-178 cf. Finley, *et al.* 2015:163-187; Hanegraaff 2015:60-61)

5.2 Mapping Africa: Demarcating 'African' As Unique Identity Construct

One of the most intricate and profound demarcations to define is that of African. When it comes to understanding this cultural demarcation, it is important to note that the entire "African" construct, encompasses a wide array of cultures, languages, histories, as well as cultural lived experiences that shaped the African continent and cultural identity as we know it. The only issue is that the concept of "African" (as we have identified in the previous chapter) does not refer to a homogenous group (see Marovah 2015:44-45 cf. Kalua 2017:25). Kalua notes that in homogenising "Africa", it fails to take into consideration the mobility of the term and the identity of its diverse peoples. The establishment of a discourse on Africa has always been rooted in locality, imagined space, and lived reality. For some, this means a fixed

geographical space whereas for others nothing defines African culture and identity like the shared lived experience or reality (Kalua 2017:29).

In addition, Manji argues that the apartheid state in South Africa, long used the term 'African' to classify individuals with a particular skin colour; curly hair and certain other features which are premised on colonialist European assumptions about biological phenomena which arguably separates the human species into differing races (cf. Melson-Silimon 2023:3-4). Manji maintains that the term is also applied when referring to those originating from any part of the continental landmass called "Africa". Although, it occasionally excludes Arabic speaking cultures originating from the Northern part of the continent, and even those who migrated from Africa in the distant past because their physiological characteristics were perceivably inconsistent with the "essentialised idea of the African" (Manji 2019:49-50). Former South African president, Thabo Mbeki wrote a stirring speech known by the title "I am an African", which he delivered on 08 May 1996 during the official adoption of *The Republic of South Africa Constitutional Bill 1996*, by the *South African Constitutional Assembly* (see Mbeki 2003:17). In this speech, according to Igboin, Mbeki captures the pinnacle of the nuanced African identity:

"So, let me begin. I am an African. I owe my being to the hills and the valleys, the mountains and the glades, the rivers, the deserts, the trees, the flowers, the seas, and the ever-changing seasons that define the face of our native land. At times, and in fear, I have wondered whether I should concede equal citizenship of our country to the leopard and the lion, the elephant and the springbok, the hyena, the black mamba, and the pestilential mosquito. A human presence among all these, a feature on the face of our native land thus

defined, I know that none dare challenge me when I say—I am an African!" (Igboin 2021:2 cf. Mbeki 2003:17).

According to Mboti, Thabo Mbeki considers the African identity as a matter of intersection, thus the sharing of dismal poverty, suffering, and human degradation is considered a shared blight. Moreover, Mboti further argues that Mbeki's approach to African identity is too abstract and thus considers it aporetic as such a delineation could mean anything: if everyone is an African, then it is arguable that nobody is an African. Therefore, Mboti indicates that therefore Africanness turns into a bottomless identity to a point where the demarcation in and of itself means nothing (Mboti 2013:453-454). Ndubuisi (2013:222-224) adds a fascinating perspective to the conceptualisation of being African as a unique identity marker.

Nevertheless, the idea of African as an identity marker in and of itself is laced with nuances and complexities, including Africa's tragic contact with the West; which included colonialism, slavery, and racialism. Subsequently this resulted in Africa's alienation, while also contributing to a loss of identity as well as no meaningful development. However, Ndubisi maintains that an African is something which refers to a reality or being; in other words, someone who can trace their identity (directly or indirectly) back to African soil or possessing the characteristics of what is known as 'Africanity', thus transcending race and gender (Ndubuisi 2013:222-224).

Mokoathi remarks quite poignantly, that Africa is a paradox that has both its unique history and continent. It is the home of a people who share chronicles of its history in being discovered by the West, as well as being perceived as a dark, subordinate, marginal, and wild continent filled with savage animals and creatures (Mokhoathi 2022:93-94). From a historical perspective, the term Africa is polemical in and of itself when it comes to tracing its

origins. Mokoathi argues that the term was already an accepted term used by the Romans as a replacement for the Egyptian or Greek term "Libya", which refers to "the land of Lebu" or "the Lubins" (Mokoathi 2022:94-95). Akhan (2011:10) adds that there exist several false origins, or "false etymologies" for the term 'Africa': the land was not named after Scipio Africanus (*c.* 236/5-183 BCE), a Roman statesman known for his influence in the expansion of Rome throughout the Mediterranean, but who played a decisive role in the decisions during his African campaigns shaping not only Rome, but the territories and kingdoms of North Africa (Akhan 2011:10 cf. Prince 2021:97-98).

Nor Leo Africanus, an Andalusian diplomat and author who became famous for his publication of *Cosmographia et Geographia de Africa* "The history and description of Africa", later republished by Ramusio (1550) as *Descrittone dell'Africa* "Description of Africa" or "Description by Africa" (cf. Cresti 2019). Rather, Akhan (2011) proposes that 'Africa' has been said to have been derived from the name from the Berber tribe *Afri*, referring to a specific ethnic group originating in around the 16th millennium BCE in North Africa (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya), as well as certain Saharan locations in Mauritania, Niger, Chad, Mali, as well as Senegal (see Sanchez-Mazas 2000:65-66). The Berbers in conjunction with the roman suffix -ca which translates to "land", became the definitive origins for the name of the African continent according to Akhan. The specific ethnic group of the Berbers, referred to earlier, are called the *Aourigha* which is sometimes written as *Afarik*. Therefore, *Afuraka* or *Afuraitkait* serves as the origins for the name 'Africa' (Akhan 2011:10-12), however the argument by Akhan remains disputed.

Mokhoati echoes Akhan, by adding that the term 'Africa' more specifically referred to the indigenous tribes from coastal Mediterranean Africa, deriving from the region known today as

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Tunisia. Moreover, during the 1st Christian millennium, Africa was considered the provincial term, encompassing all the territories from Tripolitania (Western Libya) to the Atlantic (Morocco). From which, eventually, Mokhoati continues; Africa derived its demarcation. From the geographical location and tribe of the Tunisian peninsula, therefore, the name for the continent derives from the *Afri* people from (modern) Tunisia. As a result, in time the entire continent became known by this collective term, named after the *Afri* people (Mokhoati 2022:93-95). It is also worthwhile to mention that the Boers: white settlers in South Africa called themselves Afrikaners, who are from Dutch and Huguenot descent. Afrikaners also considered themselves to be African, which further polemicises the aforementioned construction of 'Africa' as geographical/identity marker (Mokhoati 2022:96 cf. Hollfelder, *et al.* 2020:1-3).

However, Ngwena adds a sense which resembles the notion of African identity, as aired by Mbeki who, in his speech, considered Africanness (or African identity) as something fluid or abstract as criticised earlier by Mboti, rather than concrete. Therefore, Africanness according to Ngwena should embrace inclusive (as opposed to exclusive) parameters, recognising Africa as a shared space and that African identity is rooted in the enhancement of mutual belonging within the earth community (Ngwena 2018:33-34). As such, it is worth acknowledging that this chapter wishes to postulate the same 'liberal' (for lack of a better term) recognition of African identity as something shared by the people who have a common heritage as "children of the (African) soil", echoing the title of the novel A Son of the Soil written by Zimbabwean author and political activist, Wilson Katiyo (1976).

Therefore, all of the above perspectives and ideas are relevant in the encompassing of African identity and Africa as a geographical demarcation. Melber notes that Africa is, at best,

defined by (but not limited to) its geographical location because being African in and of itself is not an indication of shared religion, opinion, politics, culture, or background. Thus as seen above, African scholarship (as a result) resembles diverse thinking, arguments, and convictions which share no common ground apart from their physical or local origins (Melber 2014:xii-xiii cf. Krenceyova 2012:15). However, semantics aside, this chapter cannot hope to provide substantive historiographical evidence to represent the complexity of this discussion. Hence, the premise taken for the purposes of this chapter, serves as an indication of the versatility of this ongoing conversation. Which simultaneously assists in establishing a trajectory for discussing Africana esotericism and religion.

5.2.1 Africana Religion And Esotericism

Firstly, what is meant by the term Africana? Africana as a demarcation refers to the interconnectedness of African people. Pellerin clarifies that during the 1960s and 1970s a collective of historical phenomena, contributed to the study of African people in academic contexts, which saw American Universities receiving an increasing demand for more inclusive curricula, faculties, and students. This took the form of what is often called "Black Studies" (including but not limited to Afro-American, *Africana*, or African American Studies). African studies, or in this case, more specifically *Africana* Studies preoccupied with the study of African experiences through subjects like history, religion, politics, economics, sociology, and anthropology.

 As such, the aim is to foster the appreciation of African identity and culture, as well as emphasising how individuals of African descent have interpreted and constructed their own cultures and lives (Pellerin 2009:42-44). These definitions are supported by the University of

Kansas, College of Liberal Arts & Sciences: African and African American Studies (2024), which identifies 'Africana Studies' as an interdisciplinary and multi-disciplinary study as well as providing an understanding, of African people and their descendants across the Diaspora's experiences (see Azevedo 2019:4-8 cf. KU 2024).

This field, sometimes used synonymously with terms like Afrocentrism is considered the first academic discourse to have challenged social hierarchies within higher education institutions through emphasising "black consciousness" (Mazama 2016:275-278 cf. Asante 2016:227-229). It thus not only diversified the academy in the United States but facilitated fertile ground for seeding the growth of discourses like ethnic and women studies (see Zeleza 2011:17-21). It also includes other more contemporary fields and disciplines that produce knowledge on identity, representation, and difference. Therefore, as a result: discourses on race, gender, class, and sexuality have become de facto discourses in both public and private higher education institutions in the United States and globally (KU 2024 cf. JHU 2024:1-13, HAV 2024:1-17, CSU 2024:1-4, et alia).

The African Diaspora as a term has existed since as early as the late 19th century and manifested as a fully-fledged discourse well into the mid-20th century as an alternative to Pan-Africanism. It was introduced by George Shepperson (1968) in his work *The African Abroad or the African Diaspora*, which revisions African historiography and pushes beyond the limitations of Pan-African analysis. Hence his conceptualisation of an (African) diaspora acknowledges the relevance of African unity, whilst not ignoring the influences of slavery, trade, imperialism, modernity, transnationalism, the African continent itself, as well as the patterns of cultures and their dispersal, while also including African nationalist developments (Zeleza 2011:21-25; Flannery 2016:313-315). Moreover, in terms of religion, Engler (2020)

contributes to this discipline and defines 'Africana religion' as referential to the myriad African religious beliefs and spirituality found within African cultures. This also includes their diasporic thought or rather their hybridised as well as creolised (syncretised) forms (Engler 2020:3).

Africana religion, or African traditional religion has always had a tremendous influence on African thought. However, given the Zeitgeist of African contexts today, which are (almost exclusively) dominated by Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity, these traditional belief systems are continually under relentless assault and face misappropriation. This is because many African countries have been largely influenced by Western organised religion (Ndemanu 2018:70-71). These notions are supported by Forster, who not only affirms the rise of Pentecostalism and misappropriation of indigenous religion via the rising membership of African indigenous groupings (*ZCC*, *Johane Masowe* & *Johane Marange* churches) and postcolonial groupings (prosperity & neo-Pentecostalism) in South Africa (Forster 2024).

This also attests to their important links to the painful history of South Africa's pre-1994 Apartheid regime (sanctioned by the Dutch Reformed Church), as well as the devastating effects of Africa's colonial heritage in which the Dutch, British, and French dealt devastating blows to the cultural, religious, and political identities of Africa's indigenous peoples (Forster 2024). This phenomenon is poignantly paraphrased in the anecdote by the late Kenyan leader, Jomo Kenyatta often also attributed to the late Archbishop Desmond Tutu – though, according to Diogo it might have an earlier origin:

"When the missionaries arrived, the Africans had the land, and the missionaries had the Bible. They taught us how to pray with our eyes closed. When we opened them, they had the land, and we had the Bible" (Diogo 2022:363).

Examples of these devastating blows to traditional African religion, can especially be seen in the development of the South African Police's Occult-Related Crimes Unit which arrived from the country's post-apartheid moral panic, characterised by the rise of evangelical Christianity and the collapse of white privilege. In this instance, "Satan" was the new nom de guerre for the "swart gevaar" (black danger) purportedly posed by black South Africans to white South Africans (Falkof 2019:133-135). This era in South African history has been colloquially baptised as the 'Satanic Panic', during which it was alleged that (certain esoteric religions like) Satanism, and the Occult (see Chapter Three of this thesis) were blamed for township violence and supplying African witchdoctors with firearms in exchange for babies' organs required for sacrifices.

Such prejudicial attitudes resulted in a racialised, Afrikaner evangelical Christian witch-hunt, which not only affected average non-mainstream members of society, but also African traditional religions (i.e. *iZangoma*/Traditional healers) who were actively persecuted by *ORCU* members and stigmatised for alleged *muti* (*isiXhosa*) */ umuthi* (*isiZulu*) murders. The term itself refers to substances crafted by an individual possessing secret knowledge to achieve healing, cleansing, protecting, or strengthening another from evil forces, negative ends of witchcraft, illness, misfortune, and so forth… (Kapp 2024:8-11 cf. Ncala 2017:14-15). However, these narratives pertaining to the religious landscape of the South African context, will be dealt with in greater depth later in this chapter.

These painful injustices at the hands of imported Western Christianity have stigmatised many esoteric (Occult) movements in Africa, including African traditional religion in not just South Africa, but Africa as a whole. This is supported by Kroesbergen-Kamps in her literary work Speaking of Satan in Zambia: Making cultural and personal sense of narratives about

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Satanism in which it is asserted that the devil does not exist in African traditional religion, and in and of itself is an imported idea from Western Christianity (Kroesbergen-Kamps 2022:71-73). Furthermore, Kroesbergen-Kamps maintains that indigenous Africans in Ghana and Southern Togo, called the Ewe, were introduced to the idea of the Devil (a.k.a. Satan) via classical mission churches, as they (the Christian missionaries) rejected the Ewe gods. Moreover, along with the Pentecostal churches as well as African Independent churches later on, ideas like spiritual warfare were introduced and Africans were taught that healing entailed the banishing of evil spiritual forces that withhold material blessings and health (Kroesbergen-Kamps 2022:71-76).

These and many other examples throughout the African continent showcase, how Africa went from a majority population belonging to traditional or indigenous religions to a majority Christian continent, containing about 2.2 billion of the world's Christian population (Masoga & Nicolaides 2021:18-19), with Christianity in no small terms, supplanting African traditional religions (see Wallace 2015:24). However, given the above information illustrating the complex religious, cultural, and historiographic trajectory of Africa. What does African traditional religion and spirituality look like? And can it be considered esoteric?

5.3 African Traditional Religion In South Africa

Before approaching a discussion on African Traditional Religion (ATR), in South Africa it should be acknowledged that the South African cultural landscape is home to a variety esoteric cultures and languages (see Podolecka 2024:244-247 cf. Podolecka & Nthoi 2021:1-27). However, to discuss these relative cultural nuances individually would in and of themselves be a topic for a thesis (see Van Rooyen 2019:9). Wallace notes that since the arrival of the Dutch in 1652 at the Cape of Good Hope, Africa was introduced to a myriad of

Protestant denominations, in addition to the already established Calvinism. Moreover, it is also worth noting slaves brought from the East by colonial powers, further diversified the African religious playing field, by introducing their own religions and cultures, including Islam (see Lodhi 2015:1-4).

In South Africa, however, colonialism resulted in many of the indigenous cultures and their religions being replaced to make space for the advancing Christianity in mission schools. Hence, there was very little debate on what religion is considered "right"; therefore, the banishing of 'magic' and its affiliated traditional practices became criminalised by witchcraft-related legislations (Wallace 2015:24-25). Van Rooyen adds to this in remarking how religion has always played an indisputable role in shaping (South) African thought, culture, social life, economy, and governance. However, what do we mean when we talk about African Traditional Religion (ATR)? Van Rooyen maintains that it is incontrovertible that African traditional religion predates all other forms of religion in Africa. As mentioned earlier, generalising these practices would be unfair towards the rich cultural diversity it encompasses (Van Rooyen 2019:22-29).

Nevertheless, we are still able to identify some central themes in African traditional religious perspectives. Beyers adds to this discourse in identifying that Western concepts of religion have greatly influenced the way we understand religion, due to Western philosophy's separation of the sacred and the profane (Beyers 2010:1). Adding that even our contemporary understanding of religion is (in and of itself) a *eurozentrischen* (Eurocentric) construction, and even in our attempts to understand African religions we have inadvertently abstracted them from their cultural heritage whilst also Westernising them (Beyers 2010:1-2). Diaz echoes Beyers sentiments about the West, but he expands on these Western

misconceptions about ATR. He regards that while it is true that African Traditional Religion (ATR) acknowledges spirits and souls inhabiting certain objects and natural phenomena (cf. Chapter Three of this thesis), however, this is only one small aspect of ATR. He highlights several misconceptions about ATR, noting that it is sometimes wrongfully associated with ancestral worship (Diaz 2018:53). Rather, Diaz maintains that Africans believe that their relatives live on showing an interest in the life of the living; therefore, the living remember their dearly loved departed by honouring them with shrines or placing food and drink items on their graves. This does not amount to religious worship, but rather displays a deep respect for the departed (Diaz 2018:53-54).

According to Butinda, *et alia* survey data of ATR reveal that the majority of individuals believe in either (what the West calls) "witchcraft" or "the evil eye". Moreover, African traditional beliefs centralise around a supreme creator, ancestral spirits, traditional medicine/healing, magic as well as ritual (Butinda, *et al.* 2023:1-2). Furthermore, similar 'magical' practices have been frequently found among the South African Khoisan peoples, which is the name for two major ethnic groups (Khoi-Khoi and San). Both these ethnic groups are identified as the earliest inhabitants of pre-colonial South Africa. The Khoisan communicated their thoughts via myths, rituals, and tales which combined their beliefs into a spiritual universe where good and evil coexisted, as well as where humans along with nature and spirit, existed in dialectic reciprocity (Wallace 2015:27-30).

Hartmann and Sukdaven adds to this in elaborating on the religious beliefs of the Nama KhoiKhoi (a powerful subtribe of the *KhoiKhoi* society); highlighting that the early European Christian missionaries, misrepresented the beliefs of both the San and the *KhoiKhoi* and erroneously portrayed them as moon worshippers during the 17th century (see Hartmann

2022:34). However, after careful investigation, it becomes evident that the *KhoiKhoi*'s celestial cosmology consisted of an interrelatedness between the moon | | *Khâb*, the sun | | *goab* or | | *goara* and the Supreme Being *Tsũi-| |goab*, who is considered separate from the sun and moon. The Supreme Being is accompanied by two other deities in the *KhoiKhoi* religion, namely the evil Being | | *Gaunab* and the ancestral hero, *Heitsi-eibib* (Hartmann and Sukdaven 2024:1-4). Hartmann and Sukdaven also echo Wallace in describing the religion of the KhoiKhoi as representative of the fact that humans, nature, and the spirit coexisted in harmonious kinship since the beginning (Hartmann and Sukdaven 2024:5-8 cf. Wallace 2015:29-30).

In support of the above, it is also worth mentioning that Van Rooyen identifies four basic philosophical foundations (themes) prevalent in African Traditional Religion (ATR) which help to facilitate a proper understanding of ATR: 1) holism or organism, governed by the Law of Harmony; 2) spiritualism governed by the law of the spirit; 3) Dynamism or power-consciousness, governed by the law of power, and last but not least 4) communalism (ubuntu), governed by the law of kinship. Similar to the Khoisan, the *isiZulu* and *isiXhosa* peoples believe in the eternal and indomitable spirit of their ancestors: *amadlozi* (Zulu) or *iinyanya* (Xhosa), and the almighty God (Van Rooyen 2019:24-26 cf. Coertzen 2014:134). Moreover, Coertzen notes concepts of ATR which fundamentally resemble a similar cosmogeny represented by the *KhoiKhoi* people. However, aside from venerating ancestors, nature and worshipping a Supreme Being there are also divinities which are derivatives of the Supreme Being, but who each have their own local name and are brought into existence as functionaries of the "theocratic government of the universe" (Coertzen 2014:134-135 cf. Le Rossignol, *et al.* 2022:2).

According to Masondo the perception of ATR was negative, as pre-1994 for most South Africans it was regarded as shameful to be engaged in traditional religious veneration, ritual, and practices or even to be seen consulting African religious specialists. Many African Christians continued to practice traditional rituals, without the knowledge of missionary authorities; animal sacrifices would be performed in the evening and feasts during the day. And these occasions would be codified by the terms *umsebenzi* and *tirelo* (tea and dinner), which made many Africans uncomfortable, due to its implicit reference to service, as it formed part of the missionary discourse (Masondo 2011:33-34). In addition, as discussed earlier, during the infamous 'Satanic Panic' in South Africa (see Falkof 2012:753-754) many traditional African practices (and practitioners) became a target for the nation-wide witch hunt for alleged Satanic criminals and Occult crime, purportedly targeted against Afrikaner Christians in South Africa (Dunbar 2012:119-120 cf. Kapp 2024:9-11).

5.3.1 Africana Esotericism: Esotericism In African Traditional Religion

When it comes to Africana Esotericism, very little research is done outside the sphere of African American traditions (which we will get to later). However, this means that very little is done about esotericism in the African continent. Nevertheless, we are once again confronted with the geopolitical polemic of the "Western" in "esotericism". As attested by Page and Finley such conversations open up a Pandora's Box of contested nomenclature, complementary and contradictory epistemological methods, as well as conflicting notions about both cultural phenomena as well as the *sitze im leben* in which research about esoteric paradigms are conducted (Finley 2021:169). As discussed at greater length in Chapter Three of this thesis, this is a precarious conversation without any clear-cut answers about whether the "Western"

demarcation is appropriate as an umbrella term for all esoteric paths, as argued by Hanegraaff (2015:82-87).

There are, however, others, like Strube as well as Asprem and Strube *et alia,* who argue in *New Approaches to the Study of Western Esotericism* that we ought to perhaps revise the "Western" demarcation of esotericism, as it remains an impediment to the discourse in a continually unfolding 21st century context necessitating the expansion of metaphorical discursive horizons (Strube 2021:45-47 cf. Asprem & Strube 2021:1-19). However, Page and Finley support this notion. Hanegraaff in attempting to maintain the "West" in esotericism provides cogent and compelling defences. Yet, they remain altogether unconvincing (Page & Finley 2021:169-170 cf. Hanegraaff 2015:61).

Anderson notes that Africana esotericism is a novel discourse in the development of epistemological frameworks in esotericism (Anderson 2022:444 cf. Hanegraaff 2015:61-62). More specifically, he argues that it shares similarities with Afrofuturism and Africology in attempting to bridge the gap between the "Western" Eurocentric bias in esoteric studies, in the approach to the transgenerational study of Black life; re-evaluating the ontological and epistemological assumptions used to study Africa and the diaspora (Anderson 2022:444-445). As seen with Hartmann and Sukdaven as well as Kapp, earlier in this chapter: when it comes to esoteric movements *vis-à-vis* African Traditional Religion (ATR), there is a dominant stigma involved in the understanding of esotericism in South African indigenous practices, perpetuated by the Eurocentric bias imposed by colonialism and Western (European) missionaries. In the specific case of South Africa, the country's jurisprudence has still not done away with the infamous and controversial Apartheid legislation: the *Witchcraft*

Suppression Act 3 of 1957 providing the suppression of witchcraft and similar practices in South Africa (Governor-General 1957:1-3 cf. Ludsin 2012:83-87).

5.3.2 *iZangoma* As South African Shamans: Beyond Race And Gender

Since the adoption of the 1994 constitution after Apartheid, the idea of traditional healing became increasingly popular in public discourse (see Maluleke 1997:27 cf. Masondo 2011:33-34; Urbaniak 2016:142-146). And ever since the emergence of public discourse, traditional healing has seen a significant rise in South Africa, both in clientele and in practitioners (see Shenge 2013:11-12 cf. Kleinhempel 2018:150-151). According to Thornton (2009:17) the clientele comes from both races and includes people from perceived European ancestry – who occasionally also become practitioners themselves (cf. Podolecka 2023:3-4). This occurs despite the fact that many regard the practice of traditional healing / medicine in South Africa as distinctively African (in the perceived sense of the word), in an African country that still bears the Westernised elements of its history. The *iSangoma* tradition refers to a multiplicity of pre-colonial African practices that extend across time, cultures, and languages (Thornton 2009:17-18).

Thornton maintains that *iZangoma* apply a variety of practices consisting of divination/diagnostic, counselling, and medical services. However, the *iSangoma*'s focus is rarely on organic ailments or diseases, rather their focus, in addition to being intercessors between the living and departed ancestors, is directed at preparing muti (medicine) in order to protect clients from vehicle accidents, robbery, witchcraft, infections, unemployment, and loss of love/lovers/spouses (and more). They are also not a typical "poor man's doctor" but rather they are generally regarded as serving the same purpose similar to a registered

medical practitioner and therefore charge as much as medical doctors (Thornton 2009:17-18).

In addition to this, Thornton remarks that there are several traditional healing practices in South Africa, and there are several names (or designations) for them such as "witchdoctor", "shaman", and "rainmaker". However, the term Sangoma refers to a specific subset of healers who underwent strict training, initiation, as well as induction into a college, lodge, or guild. Furthermore, the term Bungoma refers to the specific practice or philosophy associated with this practice, frequently also named Sangoma in English which is derived from the isiZulu term *izangoma sinyanga* referring to those who belong to the ngoma philosophy or tradition (Thornton 2018:1-2). According to Podolecka the etymology of the term sangoma is unknown, however she proposes that according to *iZangoma* it translates to "person of the drum", due to the word ngoma referring to drum music. This is significant because the drums are sacred instruments or energy repositories that assist in getting *iZangoma* into a trance-like state whereby they communicate with spirits (Podolecka 2016:146-147).

Kleinhempel echoes Thornton in referring to a sangoma as a *Bantu* shaman, as the Zulu word itself refers to a specific shamanic position. In African Traditional Religion (ATR) spirits are intermediaries between the living and the divine, moreover in the case of Sango-mas these spirits assume roles of advisors providing counsel and enables the traditional healer to achieve healing and foresight by what Kleinhempel refers as "participating in di-vine power", *uMoya*. Therefore, what Kleinhempel refers to as "mediumistic" becomes an incremental mastery in traditional healing in South Africa, where *iZangoma* contact these spirits via trances, dreams, and several other oracular divinatory practices (Kleinhempel 2017:644-645). The nomenclature of *iZangoma* as shamans is attested by Manzon who noted the concept being adopted by Vusamazulu Credo Mutwa, a South African writer, artist and Zulu sangoma

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who called himself a "shaman" and was recognised by others (including the West) as such (Manzon 2023:7 cf. Podolecka 2018:131-132).

Mutwa is a highly contentious religious figure in South Africa's cultural landscape due to his assertion of being a genuine custodian of the ancient Zulu and South African wisdom traditions (see Mutwa 1999:690-691, xviii; Mutwa 2003:32-34), some scholars dismiss him as an impostor and a fake, one of these being Chidester (2002:79) who discredits him completely and accuses him of spreading a "fake religion" and incorrect understanding of South African culture. Chidester further argues that Mutwa's knowledge has no basis in historical or ethnographic accounts because Mutwa made them up (Chidester 2002:79-81 cf. Podolecka 2018:131-132). Podolecka concedes that he might be an unreliable source of information for scholars, although (despite his contentious identity as "New Age" Sangoma/Shaman) it would be a stretch to identify him as a fraud (Podolecka 2018:150-152).

Stobie notes that *iZangoma* are possessed by either female or male ancestral spirits, however, channelling spirits according to the same gender of the practitioner is usually common practice. Moreover, female *iZangoma* may even be called upon by male *iZangoma* to take an ancestral wife (Stobie 2011:150). In the Zulu culture, ancestors can be dead relatives and, if strong enough, when male and dominant will be able to inhabit the female woman and dictate her actions. In some cases, women *iZangoma* are lesbians *Istabane* "homosexual" (singular), or *izitabane* "homosexuals (plural)" (see Mkasi 2013:vii), whether they consider this as an identity marker or not, and may be called by male ancestors to take an ancestral wife *iThwasa* as the dominant spirit's happiness determines the success of the Sangoma (Mkasi 2016:1-6 cf. Mnyadi 2020:166-167). Hence, should a female Sangoma with a male dominant spirit take an ancestral wife/female sexual partner, they may

collectively satisfy both the community's needs, as well as the individual Sangoma's needs (Stobie 2011:150 cf. Zabus & Das 2021:815). Other terms for same sex relationships in the *isiZulu* language are: *ongqingili*, *inkonkoni*, *oncukumbili* and *izitabane* (Mkasi 2013:32-33 cf. Mkasi 2016:2-3).

Zabus and Das explain this phenomenon in more depth, noting that the phenomenon of ancestor dominance comes with a variety of ancestral experiences associated with *ubizo* or *ukuthwasa* (the call) of *amadlozi* (the ancestors) (cf. Mkasi 2013:24-26). Mainly the ancestors use the dreams of *Amathwasa* (trainees/initiates) or "children of the ancestors" as communication tools, however they also use the ceremonial training of male women (women who are possessed by a male ancestor) by a spiritual mother; including the relationship a male woman has with her female sexual partner *iThwasa* (see Nkabinde 2008:96; Stobie 2011:153-157 cf. Mnyadi 2020:166-167). The latter – in a ritual sense - is known as the *mteto* ritual which is a same sex ceremony during which novices are "married" (Zabus & Das 2021:815-816).

In his book *The Pagan Soul* (1975), South African psychologist and psychoanalytic, Bernard Laubscher, accepted the spiritual worldview on which the Sangoma tradition is based, as he encountered it frequently during his close cooperation with an *iSangoma* in the Xhosa culture. Laubscher explicitly denotes the *iZangoma* tradition as categorised under Esotericism, given his exposure and adherence to the esoteric strain of Freemasonry, the Scottish rite, recounting several spiritually significant and paranormal experiences. Laubscher describes a deep connection between himself and his Xhosa friend and *iSangoma*, Solomon Daba, delving together into the hidden world of Xhosa thought and the concept of *ukuThwasa*, or

the state of being called by ancestral spirits to become an *iSangoma* (Laubscher 1975:72-73).

The shared experience transcends cultural differences and societal norms, leading to a mutual understanding on a universal level of consciousness. Laubscher discovered that the concept of *ukuThwasa* involves an awareness of realities beyond the physical world and a deep connection with ancestral spirits. In addition, the shared experience between himself and Daba, highlights the existence of a universal level of consciousness. Thus, the intuitive flash experienced by Laubscher reveals a landscape of psychic significance, indicating a heightened level of understanding and awareness (Laubscher 1975:72-74 cf. Kleinhempel 2017:657-658).

In support of this, Nomfundo Mlisa in her presentation at the international conference by the *International Association for Jungian Studies* on 27 - 30 July 2017 in Cape Town, *International Conference - Spectre of the Other* (see Chrzescijanska 2017), Mlisa bridges the gap between the cosmology of *iZangoma* and C.G. Jung, incorporating esoteric keywords by highlighting the difference between Jung's approach to paranormal events and the extended concept of the Self. She discusses the state of *ukuThwasa* where diviners undergo training, marked by encounters with ancestors and guiding spirits in dreams or paranormal events. While aligning with Jung's ideas, she emphasises the difference where paranormal events are not dismissed as imaginary but linked to a broader concept of the Self and the collective unconscious. Mlisa further argues the phenomenon of *ukuThwasa* from a Jungian Psychological perspective, emphasising the importance of understanding it beyond Western terms. She explores how experiences during *ukuThwasa* involve symbolism, rituals, dreams, and connections with ancestors, with Jungian psychology aiding in interpreting these experiences and creating a

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broader worldview of unity with others and nature. Therefore, *ukuThwasa* highlights the reality of inner spirituality transcending culture and religion (Mlisa 2017 cf. Kleinhempel 2017:658-659).

5.3.3. Sexuality And Ritual In The *Sangoma* Tradition

Even though homosexuality is a taboo in traditional African cultures as it is considered "foreign", however, as Nigerian anti-gay advocate and 2015 recipient of the *Woman of the Year Award* by the U.S. based anti-gay and anti-abortion group, *World Congress of Families* stated, "in the 19th century, we had homosexuality, it has always existed in the pagan society in Africa…the King was homosexual and was making…sexual advances towards his young pages in his courts. And it is precisely the missionaries from the West who stepped in and made those pages convert to Christianity and told them the righteousness of sexuality and why it was wrong to yield to the advances of the King" (see Kaoma 2018:24-26).

Furthermore, sexuality in Africa as a whole had to do with procreation and every aspect of African sexuality was directed towards such. Examples of this can be seen with Chidester who refers to the *Royal Reed Dance Festival* annually held at the palace of the Zulu king where more than 10 000 virgin girls are invited (Chidester 2012:108). The ritual is performed over four days and enacts the unity of the Zulu nation which is embodied in the ritual purity of its young women. As such, only virgin girls are permitted to partake in the ceremony. Chidester maintains that several myths surround this particular Zulu festival, such as that if a girl is not pure; her reed will break. This disgraces her publicly and with her community (Chidester 2012:108-109).

Cumes notes that ritual impurity can also be referred to as "pollution" *ildiso*, which occurs as a result of coming into contact with what is considered "dirt" or "dirty" (cf. Chidester 2012:134). Examples of these include miscarriages, abortions, birth (specifically of twins), sickness, death, crime (i.e. murder), menstruation, pregnancy and most importantly sex (among other things). Husbands are polluted for up to a year following the passing of their wives or children, and similarly wives following the passing of their husbands. In most cases cleansing rituals are conducted, which involves the bathing in *muti* (Cumes 2013:61-62).

It is also worth mentioning that pollution can also occur via malevolent ancestors or vindictive spirits who have been wronged. Usually, these entities and their affiliated misfortunes are called upon by a witch or sorcerer. Witches and sorcerers are opposite to *iZangoma* who focus on healing, whereas witches or sorcerers call upon evil entities to inflict their will. An example of this is the infamous *Tokolosh/Tokoloshe* which is a dwarf-like evil spirit with a single buttock and an oversized penis, of whom it is said to be used as a witch's sexual consort (Cumes 2013:63 cf. Mkasi 2013:24).

However, when it comes to sexuality and gender Stobie notes that some *iZangoma* are female and lesbian. In this instance, Stobie retells as example, the tale of lesbian and female *iSangoma*, Nkunzi Zandile Nkabinde, as in her autobiography Black Bull (Stobie 2011:156 cf. Carlse 2018:26-28). The name Nkunzi belongs to her late male ancestor who is her main possessing spirit in her healing practice. *iZangoma* enjoy great influence in the Zulu culture, even though most are women, and they are frequently addressed as Baba meaning "Father" (Stobie 2011:156-157). Nkabinde serves as an example of a female *iZangoma* possessed by a male dominant spirit, dictating her personality as well as her sexual agency, therefore Stobie mentions a problematism in the usage of the term "lesbian" as the male ancestor is then

involved in the dynamic of the sexual act, but that rather "transgender" ought to be more appropriate (Stobie 2011:156-159 cf. Mkasi 2016:2; Mnyadi 2020:165-166).

In addition to this, it should be added that *iZangoma* practise across all races in South Africa, where in rituals there have been white *iZangoma* who channel white ancestors (although usually of the opposite sex), and black *iZangoma* who convey messages from white ancestors. Displaying that in the spirit world, things like race (contra to the experiences of average South Africans) do not matter (Teppo 2011:232-233 cf. Nkabinde 2008:126). Teppo also echoes Stobie in remarking that *iZangoma* "oscillate and float between genders (and ethnicities)" (see Mkasi 2016:2; Mnyadi 2020:166), when channelling ancestors, as there is no concern for social taboos and limitations (Teppo 2011:232). For example, during the Apartheid era, not only traditional practices were criminalised, but male homosexuality as well. Even in contemporary society, being openly gay and in a rural suburb (township) can be dangerous and may lead to things like "corrective rape" (see Stobie 2011:156 cf. Nkabinde 2008:145).

Nevertheless, as attested by Stobie it is acceptable – sometimes even necessary – for a female *iSangoma* to channel a virile male ancestor who desires relations with other women, as the *iSangoma* is responsible for the ancestor's happiness because she is dependent on his powers (cf. Mkasi 2016:2-3; Carlse 2018:26-28). Thus, Teppo also maintains that the term lesbian is somewhat inaccurate as the *iSangoma* is arguably a straight woman possessed by a male ancestor, therefore the sexual relations with other women become perceived as a "necessary evil" attributed to the male libido, rather than the female *iSangoma*'s individual sexual orientation (Teppo 2011:236-237 cf. Stobie 2011:150). However, according to Stobie as well as Van Klinken and Otu, Nkabinde as a *de facto* lesbian *iSangoma* is uniquely

confronted with her identity as such, along with her feminist orientation, as well as her traditional roots as a 'butch' *isiZulu* woman when she discusses rituals and traditions such as the virginity testing of girls and the practice of *ilobolo* or the "bridal dowry" (see Stobie 2011:158 cf. Zabus 2013:232; Mkasi 2016:4-5).

Van Klinken and Otu note that while Nkabinde expresses her concern for the policing of young girls' sexual purity via virginity testing, she also exhibits a sensitivity towards the human rights concern which the practice evokes. This is even though she also respects its place in being used by the elders to safeguard the purity of the community (Van Klinken & Otu 2017:76-78 cf. Zabus & Das 2021:824-825). Chidester describes virginity testing in isiZulu culture as a ritual where elderly women inspect young women to determine their purity, where they are divided into three classes: a) those who have never had sex, b) those who have had sex but are still virginal, and c) those who are no longer virgins. This ritual has invoked both traditions, involving the creation of new rituals and the revival of the Zulu goddess *Nomkhulbulwane* as matron of female virginity, as well as eliciting public outcry from human rights advocates who have argued on constitutional premises for it to be outlawed (Chidester 2012:134-135 cf. Behrens 2014:179-180).

However, while there is limited research indicating the practice of ritualised sex per se in the *iZangoma* tradition, there is a strong focus on the same-sex nature of relationships (both sexual and marital) between two women. One reason for this phenomenon, is that *iZangoma* themselves regard heterosexual sex (and sex in and of itself) as unclean and can weaken the *Muthi* (see Morgan & Wieringa 2005:19; Mkasi 2013:vii). Whereas a relationship between a male woman who is considered patriarchal or masculine (i.e. "butch"), and a submissive ancestral wife known as *unyankwabe* or *ukhala Iwenanga* (later *unkosikazi*), is perceived to

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be a male-female relationship rather than a same-sex relationship (Lindiwe 2013:40 cf. Zabus & Das 2021:820-822).

Chidester further explains more broadly that during training, novice diviners not only practised sexual abstinence, but also avoided any and all contact with people who engaged in sexual activity. In doing so, the *amathwasa* or "initiates" maintained their ritual purity by making their own fires and preparing their own meals. The *iZangoma* describe this situation as "fearing the fire from other huts" as "the fire has been near people who have been hot [and had sex]" (Chidester 2012:108). The "fire" in question is considered bad or impure (see Cumes 2013:63) as the man and the woman are hot like a fire, especially when she (the woman) "has the water (semen) inside [her]" (Chidester 2012:108). Similarly, the food consumed by the *amathwasa* must be cool (i.e. untouched by anyone possessing the heat of sexual activity). As such, apart from novice *iZangoma* preparing their own meals, to avoid contact from said heat they are only allowed to eat the food prepared by a small child or an elderly woman who has no pleasure in these things anymore" (Chidester 2012:108-109 cf. Cumes 2013:61-63).

It is therefore clear that the sexual endeavour still had a sacred reputation amongst initiates of the *ngoma* philosophy in South Africa (see Mnyadi 2020:161-163). Although, sexuality in African Traditional Religion clearly serves as a transcendent phenomenon that blurs gender and sexual norms, and even the threshold of carnal and spiritual realms, insofar as that ancestors enact their sexual will through the Sangoma (cf. Mkasi 2016:2). This is evidently seen in the example of Nkabinde who notes that ancestors make use of various parts of the body to make *iZangoma* listen to them: "…Mainly with me it is the back of my body. I will feel something up my spine and then I relax, they will begin to talk to me" (Nkabinde 2008:54-55 cf. Carlse 2018:26-28). The male ancestral spirit possessing Nkabinde, Nkunzi, is the one

defining her sexual desire, or rather utilising her body to gratify his own sexual desire. When she was still being initiated as Sangoma, Nkabinde had a dream where she had female genitalia and had sex with her female trainer. In sharing this dream with her trainer, her trainer mentioned that it is Nkunzi who wants to sleep with her (Nkabinde 2008:68 cf. van Klinken & Otu 2017:77-79).

It is therefore irrevocable that sexuality in the Sangoma practice is inherently Esoteric and characteristic of a unique African esoteric paradigm. Even though it is difficult to offer a single and all-encompassing definition for esotericism, Finley, *et alia* once again remind that it refers to lore, epistemologies, and praxis that pertain to secrecy, concealment, and/or limited accessibility (i.e. only to those initiated) as well as the critical study of affiliated phenomena through history and cultures. Finley, *et alia* acknowledge that *Africana* Esotericism is distinct from Western esotericism, adding that the consistent emphasis on Western esotericism in scholarship is resemblant of a tacit denial of the legitimacy of *Africana Esoteric Studies (AES)*, along with a constant reification of Eurocentrism and a Western intellectual hegemony. Africa and its diaspora cannot conform to Western epistemic paradigms, and as such much of the knowledge in Africa and its diasporas, are considered non-knowledges when evaluated via Western paradigms and as such cannot be included in the Western esoteric framework. Africana esotericism offers a different historical trajectory than the study of Western esotericism, because the West – as a whole – may have aided in the labelling but does not form part of the struggles of the marginalised (Finley, *et al.* 2021:174-175 cf. Hanegraaff 2015:61), such as the East and Africa.

Therefore, for this reason, it remains cardinally important to distinguish between these hegemonic and non-hegemonic 'forms of thought'. And as such acknowledge the historical and epistemological uniqueness of these ideas and knowledge systems. Not only to

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distinguish between these ideas and spiritual practices, but also to acknowledge the sacredness of these concepts and recognising their unique contribution to the globalisation of esotericism as a discourse of cultural and religious syncretism, not hegemony. Mbembe argues that the historical experience of Africans did not necessarily leave traces, and where they were produced, they were not always preserved. How could one write history in the absence of the kinds of traces that serve as sources for historiographical fact (Mbembe 2017:28).

5.4 Islamic Sufism: Unveiling The Nexus Of Sexuality And Spirituality In African Esotericism

It is incontrovertible that Islam has enjoyed a significant influence in Africa, and developed alongside Christianity, as one of the dominant religions on the African continent (McCloud 2013:185-186 cf. Al Rasheed 2024:8-11), containing one third of the Muslim global population (Hagnavaz 2014:124). Nevertheless, it is African Traditional Religion (ATR) that formed the bedrock of Islam in Africa. Islam was founded around the 7th century CE in what's known to contemporaneity as the Arabian-peninsula. As a product of Persian and Judeo-Christian syncretism (see Akbar 2020:88-91), Islam is one of the world's fastest growing religions, and its name derives from an Arabic verb translating to "submit" to the will of Allah (see Green & Green 1992:505-506 cf. Salleh 2015:). Whereas its followers are known as Muslims, deriving from the word *Muslemeen* referring to "those who submit" (to Allah). The Muslims have their beliefs and doctrines, delineated in their holy book: *Al Qur'an* accompanied by the Hadith, accompanied by five pillars: profession of faith (*shahadah*), ritual prayer (*Salat*), alms giving (Zakat/Sadaqah) (see Adamec 2016:379), Ramadan fast, as well as pilgrimage (*Hajj*) (Nweke 2020:43-44). Islamic theology can be summed up by the *Shahada*, which translates as "to

observe, witness, or testify": "…there is no god, but Allah…" (Qur'an 37:35) …[and] Muhammad is the apostle of Allah…" (Qur'an 48:29 cf. Nasr, *et al.* 2015:110).

It is also worth noting that even though Islam (along with Christianity) supplanted African Traditional Religion (ATR), today there are many Islamic reformists in certain parts of Africa (i.e. Ghana and Nigeria) who believe that there is too much *bōkā* (or African Traditional Religion) in Islam. Accordingly, they believe that the Sunnah1 demands that Islam be purified of all (what they consider) non-Islamic or illegitimate innovations within the religion and dogma (Pontzen 2022:67-68). Even though it is widely attested that Islam owes many of its development to ATR and that Islam owes its debut to a large part of the African continent, particularly Ethiopia where nascent Muslim refugees settled after fleeing from the Meccans in 615 CE, which demarcates East Africa as the first place where Muslims were able to settle free of persecution, seven years before their historic migration to Medina (Beverly 2013:185-190). According to Salvaing, the eventual spread of Islam to the African continent occurred mainly between the 7th to the 15th centuries CE and during which, merchants, clerks, and rulers were prominent actors.

Expatriate Muslims were usually accompanied by their clerks, while the former also contributed teachers for the education of African children. Local rulers entrusted the education of their children to these teachers who progressively adopted Islam, and subsequently spreading it to the other social structures (Salvaing 2020:19-21). This section will endeavour to pry open the discussion on Islamic Sufism in Africa, as exemplary paradigm for African esotericism. Unfortunately, this is no easy task, as the discourse of Islam is highly nuanced, depending on region. Haghnavaz notes that even though the majority of Muslims in Africa are *Sunni* or *Sufi* (see Blanchard 2009:1-6 cf. Duderija 2015:1-12), the complexity

of a discourse on Islam in Africa, is highlighted in and through the variety of religious thought, voices, and traditions vying for dominance in their respective African continents. As Islam in Africa is not a static phenomenon but is constantly being reshaped by socio-cultural and economic polemics (Haghnavaz 2014:127-128). Therefore, for the purposes of this chapter, once again a brief historiography of Islam, and its spread to African regions will be discussed. With the majority of the discourse focused on the spirituality and sexuality in Sufism as esotericism, specifically.

5.4.1 In The Beginning: Origins Of Islam And Its Manifestation In Africa

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Islam emerged in the Arabian-peninsula, *c.* 610-700 CE as a monotheistic religion, a continuation of the true religion as taught by Ibrahim (or Abraham) and all the prophets sent after him, including Jesus (Hawting 2005:9-10). Soares (2014) notes that the study of religion in Africa, in particular a focus on Islam in Africa has been relatively marginalised, due to the obsession with ATR and its focus on spiritual possession and Pentacostalism in Africa (Soares 2014:27-29). In addition, according to Amir-Moezzi (2018) as attested by the Qur'an and the Hadith – Muhammad and the message he carried belong to the Jewish, the Christian, and the Muslim monotheisms (see Qur'an 2:111-113, 5:18).

Furthermore, the diverse religious and cultural milieu that gave birth to the Islamic tradition (and its Judeo-Christian predecessors), was strongly marked by apocalyptic theology due to incessant bloody wars between the Byzantines against the Sassanians. Along with the bloody conflicts from Yemen to Ethiopia – notwithstanding the massacres, destructions, displacements of people, and diseases which perpetuated a world fraught with anxiety and uncertainty. Furthermore, Amir-Moezzi maintains that Muhammad emerged in this religious

and culturally diverse context, thus resulting in the plethora of apocalyptic references in Qur'anic literature (Amir-Moezzi 2018:31-33). Moreover, in discussing the origins of Islam, Amir-Moezzi references the hypothesis made by French Islamologist, Alfred-Louis de Prémarre in his 2002 book, *Les Fondations de l'Islam: Entre écriture et histoire* (Islam's Foundations: Between scripture and history) that Muhammad belonged to a Judeo-Christian sectarian group, due to the fact that during the 7th century CE Arabic translations of the Christian Bible existed, or other Jewish/Christian apocalyptic texts (Amir-Moezzi 2018:38-42).

However, aside from the *Charter of Madinah* the oldest narratives we have about Islam's history and that of Muhammad, are mostly narratives that date no earlier than the late *Umayyad* period (750 CE) and which contain later interpretations of early Islamic history (see Oasis 2008). Furthermore, De Prémarre proposes that the Arabia of Muhammad was not a cultural desert, contrary to popular belief, this fact is well illustrated by epigraphic evidence found in the Sinai desert (linguistically written in Arabic, but its style and content resemble Biblical traditions).

Furthermore, De Prémarre continues that Muslim conquests were largely responsible for the spread of Islam and were made possible by the presence of secular native Arabic tribes in Palestine, Mesopotamia, and Syria, including the struggle between the Persian and Byzantine empires. Eventually, the conquered territories and their peoples soon after realised the religious zeal that motivated their conquerors; they were not just the familiar *Tayayê* or *Arabâyâ* from before. Rather, they had new traits and a new name: they were *muhâjirûn*, or "those who created the hijra" (De Prémarre 2002:337). Many Muslims today refer to the pre-Islamic period as *jāhalīyaa* or "the age of ignorance" as it is believed that the Arabs were guided by superstitions and not the knowledge of the one true god (see Webb 2014:69-71).

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Rasyid and Rasyid, *et alia* add to De Prémarre in elaborating that this all changed when Muhammad was established as the prophet, as while he was alive, he served as the sole political and religious guide for Muslims both via his revelations of the Qur'an and his extra Qur'anic words and actions (*sunnah* & *hadith*). The Qur'an was canonised shortly after Muhammad's death (see Khan 2014:203-204), during the late *Umayyad* period (*c.* 671-695 CE) and according to tradition, Muhammad forbade the writing down of his words and actions in order that they would not be confused with the Qur'an (De Prémarre 2002:339 cf. Dérouche 2014:34-35; Rasyid & Rasyid, *et al.* 2021:203-205). In addition to this, something often ignored (overlooked) by conservative Islamic scholarship, is the role of one of Muhammad's wives, *Hafṣa bint 'Umar*, who was integral in the editing and compilation of the Qur'an. As she had memorised it and challenged the prophet Muhammad over the relevance of particular verses and was considered an authority on the Qur'an by her father *Umar* and *Muhammad*. Moreover, it is also worth noting that *Hafṣa*'s edited versions of verses often became the community's prevailing and common readings (Khan 2014:190-192).

Yet, the question still remains, exactly how did Islam migrate from the Arabian Peninsula to Africa? Salvaing provides the answer in noting that the Islamisation of Africa was multi-faceted, following a "minority, court, and majority" model developed by historian John S. Trimingham (1962) in his work *A History of Islam in West Africa* (Salvaing 2020:19 cf. Soares 2014:32). Salvaing accordingly maintains that, initially, the Islamisation of Africa started with small merchant communities in the mid- to late first century, following trade routes via the Indian Ocean and the Nile River, reaching the eastern coast of the African continent (Salvaing 2020:19-20 cf. Hiribarren 2017:19-22).

Subsequently, it evolved into an official state religion, mostly following armed *jihād* campaigns. However, this broad framework does not encompass local variations, prompting the proposal of a chronological model specific to sub-Saharan Africa (see Fisher 1985:153-173 cf. Soares 2014:32). In this proposed model, rulers initially welcomed Muslim clerics for their esoteric knowledge, though they did not convert to Islam, initially (see Gomez 2018:258-259). This relationship was exemplified by the *Jula* clerics in *Gonja* – known today as northern Ghana, who assisted the *Ashanti* emperor with mystical knowledge in fighting against malaria and female sterility (Salvaing 2020:31).

Salvaing (2020:31) maintains that genuine Islamisation occurred when initial contacts between clerics and non-Muslims led to the establishment of scholars as *faqīhs* (Muslim jurists responsible for regulating social norms), as seen in the empires of Mali and Songhay. Although, at an individual level, clerics were revered as *walīs* (meaning "close to God"), facilitating the early spread of Sufism from Egypt and Morocco. Sufi influence, documented from the 16th century onwards, grew significantly by the 18th century, with the emergence of Sufi orders like *Tijāniyya* and *Sanūsiyya* (Sedgwick 2004:51 cf. Mbengue 2013:174-175), which spread throughout East and Central Africa during the colonial period (Salvaing 2020:31-32).

The *Tijāniyya* were a Sufi *tūrūq* (brotherhood) that consisted of Sufi pilgrims that travelled via the so-called "Sudan route" between the cities Katsina and Kano (contemporary Nigeria), Europeans and Africans alike who followed the 19th century Algerian-born mystic *Ahmad al-Tijani* (1735-1815), who according to tradition was inspired by the great medieval Sufi sage Ibn-'Arabi; claiming to be "the supreme pole of sainthood" or "the seal of the saints" (Back 2015:8). *Al-Tijani* allegedly received visions directly from the prophet Muhammad and Allah,

therefore did not have the need to rely on traditional chains of transmission to verify the validity of Islamic ideas traced back to Muhammad (Back 2015:8-10 cf. Sajid 2022:20-21). Soares avers that the attention to Sufism in West Africa (specifically), emerged as a result of 19th century *jihāds* which were associated with particular Sufi brotherhoods. Soares also credits the controversial Muslim scholar, sage, and leader, *al-Hajj Umar Tall* as responsible for introducing *Tijāniyya* Sufism to large parts of Western Africa (Soares 2014:30-31 cf. Syed 2017:3-4).

5.4.2 Between *Al-Bāṭiniyya*, *Ḥaqīqa*, And *Sharīʿa*: Sufism As Islamic Esotericism?

There are several branches (or denominations) of Islamic thought that resemble the various understandings and practices within Islam. Even though there are various groups, they mainly resemble the different approaches to Islamic theology and jurisprudence, *ʿaqīdah* (Kusserow, *et al.* 2015:1-2). Although, despite the evident branches or "sects", there are various movements/sects even within the said individual denominations. Kusserow, *et alia* note that Islam is founded on several core beliefs and practices that are shared among its followers (Kusserow, *et al.* 2015:2-3). However, disagreements over leadership within the Muslim community have brought about the emergence of different branches (or sects), each forming distinct religious identities within Islam over time. Understanding both the similarities and differences between these communities is crucial, especially given the widespread depiction of conflicts in the Muslim world in sectarian terms such as the 'Sunni-Shia divide' or the concept of a 'Shiite crescent'. While the accuracy of such descriptions may vary, it is evident that Islam, since its inception, has given rise to numerous diverse communities spread across the globe (Kusserow, *et al.* 2015:3-6).

The main branches within Islam are mainly *Shīʿa*, *Sufī*, and *Sunnī* which represent the largest groups. However, there are relatively smaller groups such as *Ismāʿīlī*, *Zaydī*, and *Ibadi* – other groups include *Whabbi*, *Salafi*, and *Deobandi*. Iqbal notes that the Qur'an encouraged Muslims to be creative and use their creativity for the benefit of humanity; such creativity is meant to inspire nobility in both thought and action, encouraging the faithful to aid society by way of utilising their creativity for new theories and ideas (Iqbal 2021:2-4). However, for the purposes of this section, it is important to delineate what is meant by the usage of the term "sect". Al-Hindawi and Kadhim argue that sectarianism in religion is a phenomenon that originates when reclusion and dissatisfaction produce intolerance towards the views of the main group, or particular individuals within the group. This results in the formation of a novel group (or sect) unified under the same ideological tenets and rituals. Al-Hindawi and Kadhim maintain that sectarianism is discrimination that derives from individuals who have different interpretations of religious texts (Al-Hindawi & Kadhim 2021:414-415).

Early sociological attempts to define the term "sect" started with Max Weber, who defined the term as descriptive of people who share particular ideological commonalities. Although, when individuals display negative attitudes towards those who do not share those commonalities the process of forming a sect (sectarianism) starts (Weber 1973:55). Another perspective is that of Ernst Troeltsch who introduces a sect as a diverging movement from the main religious structure. Moreover, usually sects that originate within society are also prone to showing hatred and intolerance towards other sects (Troeltsch 1981:248). In addition, Troeltsch builds on his older premise adding that sects often replace the main religious structure, noting also that similar terms such as cult, religious organisation, and denomination are synonymous with "sect" (Troeltsch 1991:372).

Geaves agrees with Weber and Troeltsch, understanding the sect/parent organisation dichotomy, as the process in which the branching away from the parent religious organisation is a protest against a perceived watering down or liberalisation of the initial religion. In addition, Geaves adds that founders of sects will usually emphasise on repentance to the "true" or "authentic" doctrine, whereas the parent religious group would usually accuse the breakaway denomination of apostasy, heresy, or aberration (Geaves 2021:26-27 cf. Al-Hindawi & Kadhim 2021:415-416). This is especially relevant given the nature of esotericism, which according to the aforementioned definitions can also be considered as sectarian (see Hanegraaff 2005:234-247 cf. Hanegraaff 2012:105-106, 111). In the case of Islam, however, Ṣūfism can thus be considered a sect as the three uncontroversial (traditional) sects of Islam consist of Sunni, Shia, and Sufi (see Cusack & Upal 2021:3-4).

Furthermore, Gömbeyaz notes that the *ḥadīth* has had a great influence on the way Muslims perceive sects, as well as how they should be treated, and what the nature of the relationship between one another ought to be:

"Jews were divided into 71 sects. One of them is in Heaven, seventy of them are in Hell. Christians are split into 72 sects. Seventy-one of them are in Hell, the one is in Heaven. I swear to Allah whose mighty hands hold the Muhammad's will, beyond any doubt, my umma will be divided into 73 sects. One will be in Heaven, seventy-two will be in flames.

Said: 'Oh the Messenger of Allah! Who are they?' Thus he spoke: 'They are al-jamā'a (the community)'" (Gömbeyaz 2018:246-247).

According to Díaz, the term Ṣūfism is popular in Western scholarship and has broadened over the years to include a wide range of non-hegemonic phenomena: certain musical genres, devotional dances, ritual practices, trance, or religious healing ceremonies. This wide range of descriptions or associations have inadvertently obscured the inherent meaning of the term (Díaz 2021:517-518). Placing Sufism historically is a polemical endeavour in and of itself, as it is filled with external and internal objections, which are both equally strong and persuasive. As a result, this frustrates the historiographical endeavour from the outset. Demirli argues this, adding that the texts written after mystic *Abū al-Qāsim al-Junayd* (a.k.a *Imam Junayd Al-Baghdadi*) *c.* 298-910 CE a prominent intellectual and Sufi teacher who – similar to Greek philosophy which acknowledges Plato, Socrates, and Aristotle as the fathers of Philosophy – is recognised as one of the three prominent fathers of tasawwuf (known as Sufism or Islamic mysticism) along with sages *Ma'ruf al-Karkhi* and *Sari* as-*Saqati*: *as-Saqati* was the teacher of *al-Kharkhi*, and the latter was the teacher of al-Baghdadi (Demirli 2016:4 cf. Setiawan, *et al.* 2020:172-175).

In contrast to Demirli, Setiawan, et alia however proposes that Sufism originated in the early 3rd century of the *Hijri* (Islamic Calendar). Furthermore, during this timeline Sufis used *taṣawwuf* to transform bad morals into good ones, as they focused almost exclusively on issues related to morality, including other related practices such as "soul training" (*riyadhah*), "spiritual stages" (*maqamat*), as well as "states of consciousness" (*ahwal*). The first Sufi to discuss the concept of *taṣawwuf* was the Imam and teacher of Islamic creeds *al-Harits ibn Asad al-Muhasibi* (Setiawan, *et al.* 2020:172-173). *Al-Muhasibi* was best known for developing the most influential Sufi moral psychology tradition, thanks to his extensive arsenal of intellectuals. His collaboration with other 2nd to 3rd century Sufi scholars, collectively had an incontrovertible influence in laying the foundations for Islamic Sufism.

Famed for his various works, but more specific, his magnum opus work: *Kitab al Ri'ayah li Huquq Allah* (The rights of Allah Almighty and the influence of egoism on him).

The text is arranged in a question-and-answer dialogue format, between a teacher and his students, discussing human egoism and how to be aware in order to not succumb to selfishness. Generally, Sufist texts and literature are premised on themes of self-reflection deriving from the Qur'an and Hadith (Erina, *et al.*, 2022:85-89).In addition to these works, it is important to also note the contribution of *Muḥammad al-Bughālī* whose work *Al-Bāṭiniyya: bayna al-ḥikma wa al-taṣawwuf* (Islamic Esotericism: Between Philosophy and Sufism) proposes that secrecy is the mechanism through which revelatory knowledge or exclusive wisdom is controlled, therefore serving as a condition for the existence of Islamic esotericism (al-Bughali 2016:21-25 cf. Saif 2024:3). Additionally, Dickson notes that the conflict between Orthodox Islamic jurists and Sufis has been one of Islam's most popular stereotypes. Dickson proposes that this perception is stereotypical, because of the fact that in reality and historically speaking, it was not uncommon for the exoteric and esoteric elements of Islam to be married, such as in the case of fuqaha who were also *fuqara* - Sufis who also served as jurists (Dickson 2015:21). Moreover, additionally, Setiawan, et alia propose that Sufism was not just integral to the formation of Islam by the prophet Muhammad, but invariably forms the very core of Islam in and of itself (Setiawan, *et al.*, 2020:173).

When it comes to a more accurate consideration of Islamic esotericism, Saif introduces *al-bāṭin* or *al-bāṭiniyya*, as central –yet misunderstood– theme in Qur'anic exegesis, as well as Islamic cosmology, psychology and theologies that represent a less foreign conceptualisation of Islamic esotericism, frequently and almost exclusively associated with Sufism; translatable as "esotericism", "mysticism", and "occultism" (Saif 2024:2 cf. Saif 2019:45-46).

This discursive framework, Saif identifies, as a historical precept is traceable back to the foundations of the Qur'an (Saif 2024:2). However, Saif maintains that scholars are careful to use the term, due to its extremist preconceptions according to Sunni points of view, which frequently associate it with an extreme dedication to the esoteric at the expense of *Sharīʿa* (Islamic jurisprudence) blaming *Ismāʿīlī* theology as the root of the problem which places emphasis on the distinction between *ẓāhir* (the exoteric) and *bāṭin* (the esoteric) as dimensions of spiritual truth *ḥaqīqa* revealed through the prophets (Saif 2024:2 cf. Saif 2019:23-30). Whereas, usually, the secret knowledge of Muhammad is usually inherited by the Imam who is considered as the mediator and embodiment of these two constructs (Saif 2024:2-4).

Saif further notes, the discussion on esoteric interpretation and its legitimacy primarily centres around the connection between *ḥaqīqa* and *Sharīʿa*: Sufi esotericism seeks the attainment of *ḥaqīqa*, a profound understanding of the Divine from an esoteric perspective (Saif 2024:4 cf. Saif 2019:25-26). This is attested by the Sufi biographer *Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī* who discusses the topic in his influential work, The Ranks of Sufis (*Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya*), where *al-Sulamī* defines *Sharīʿa* as the obligation to submit to Allah, emphasising the significance of Islamic jurisprudence (al-Sulamī 2003:168 cf. Dupret 2018:20-27) or as Begalinova, et alia the literal fulfilment of the law of Allah, as preparation for the mystical path (Begalinova, *et al.* 2021:4-6). Contrastingly, *ḥaqīqa* as "mystical path" (Begalinova, *et al.* 2021:6-7) refers to "perceiving Divinity" which is a direct and enlightening encounter with Allah or *maʿrifa* "gnosis" (Saif 2024:4-6).

Furthermore, Saif notes that *Al-Sulamī* emphasises a strong connection between these precepts, explaining that both *ḥikma* (wisdom) and the law are unacceptable without proper

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validation (Saif 2019:21-22). Additionally, Saif adds that it is believed that the ultimate truth, "knowledge of the inner realm" *ʿilm al-ladunniyya* or *ḥaqīqa*, should be firmly rooted in *Sharīʿa* (Saif 2024:4-5 cf. Begalinova, *et al.* 2021:6). This sentiment is further supported by *Al-Ghazālī* in his work *The Revitalisation of Religious Sciences* or *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn*, those who claim that *ḥaqīqa* (inner) spiritual truth, conflicts with *Sharīʿa*, or that the *bāṭin* (esoteric) conflicts with the *ẓāhir* (exoteric), are considered *kufr* "apostates/heretics", rather than *īmān* "believers/devotees" (Saif 2019:23-25 cf. al-Ghazālī 2007:138-141).

Saif concludes that this conflict between *Sharīʿa* and *ḥaqīqa*, as well as the principles mentioned earlier, allows for the inclusion of a broader spectrum of Islamic movements, including *Shīʿī* and *Ismāʿīlī* in the discussion of esotericism (Saif 2024:3), but for the purposes of this chapter, Sufism as seminal African esoteric paradigm will be discussed exclusively. The reality of the *Sufi* philosophy is servanthood (to Allah) and developing an intuitive perception and comprehension of reality, as a means to attain *tawhid*, which refers to "exclusive commitment to none besides Allah", rejecting all other sources that do not value or reflect the will of Allah. It represents the most exclusive, ultimate, and full sense of devotional attitudes towards Allah alone which represents complete freedom from "human bondages" (Kounsar 2016:95-96).

Hussain notes that in *Sufi* philosophy, the world is merely an illusion, and that reality is the universal desire, true knowledge, and eternal light which self-manifests as a mere reflection in the mirror of the Universe (Hussain 2017:585-587). However, the descriptive ambiguity of Sufism, as a *de facto* esoteric ideology, tradition, and practice has been obscured due to the various phenomena associated therewith. Moreover, the aforementioned ambiguity of Sufism which is quite often laced with exotic and mysterious tones, is a stereotype that has followed

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and characterised Sufism and its adherents, representing the lacklustre epistemic frameworks Western scholarship has perpetuated about Islam (Diaz 2021:517-518).

Such Orientalist-Occidentalist-esque perceptions have been discussed in greater depth in the previous chapter of this thesis, with brief mentions of Islam pertaining to the West's preconceived notions (stigmatisation) of the "mystic East". Saif vociferously criticised these notions as a medieval, Faivrean, and Eurocentric perception persistent in Western esoteric scholarship on Islam (see Saif 2019:3-5). Which not only (problematically) limits and confines Arabs and Islam to the colloquial "middle East" but reproduces what Saif calls "orientalist tropes" of the proverbial "wise barbarian"; contributing to the othering of Islamic religious and esoteric experiences in Africa, among other places including the Americas, Asia, and Europe (Saif 2020:68-72).

Furthermore, it should also therefore be noted that the purpose of this thesis is not to contribute to such Eurocentric or Orientalist tropes, but rather giving credence to non-hegemonic cultures and traditions in esoteric scholarship as a means of aiding the discourse on the globalising of esotericism. Additionally, the multiplicity of esoteric approaches to the body and sexuality as a mediumistic endeavour towards self-knowledge is best exemplified in these religions and their practices. However, the author will delve deeper into the nature of this polemic later in this section.

5.4.3. The Sacred And The Profane: Bodiliness And Sexuality In *Sufi* Islam

Generally, sexuality is a contentious issue in the context of Islam. Dialmy notes this in regard to sexual standards in Islam that are somewhat paradoxical. On the one hand, the expression

of sexuality is permitted but on the other hand Islam makes no secret of its discrimination between male and female sexualities, marital and extra-marital sexuality, as well as heterosexuality and homosexuality. Furthermore, Dialmy (2010:3) adds that sexuality *vis-à-vis* marriage is associated with the word *nikah*, and even the Prophet Muhammad considered the expression of sex within the confines of marriage as equivalent to alms. Even to Islamic jurists, sexual pleasure is considered a way to purify the heart as opposed to abstinence, which hardens it (Dialmy 2010:2-4). Muhammad himself was subsequently no stranger to marital pleasure, something which is especially notable by the fact that he had several wives or as they are known in Arabic, *ummahāt al-mu'minīn* "mothers of the believers", including concubines.

Demiray attests to that in averring that according to popular opinion, Muhammad had 11 wives (nine of whom were alive when he passed away). Moreover, some sources even indicate that he also had concubines aside from his wives (Demiray 2021:141-152). One of Muhammad's wives, *'Ā'isha bint Abī Bakr* is especially controversial as, according to tradition, *'Ā'isha* herself states in a hadith that she was married to the prophet at the age of 6 and moved in with him at the age of 9. At which age, hadith 70 in *Sahih Al-Bukhari* (5134, Book 67:70), acknowledges that *'Ā'isha* consummated the marriage with the prophet. However, while Muslims and popular opinion tend not to question *'Ā'isha's* anecdote regarding her age: scholars believe that she was closer to the ages of 14-18 upon marrying Muhammad in his fourth year of prophethood (who at that stage, is said to have been around 50-60 years old) as they were married in the 2nd year of the *Hijra* (see Knight 2018:8-9 cf. Demiray 2021:144-146). Nevertheless, the attestation of *'Ā'isha's* age remains a controversial subject of extreme dispute within Islamic scholarship (see Damayanti, *et al.* 2023:144-145).

However, aside from this, the idea of love is no stranger to the religion of Islam and even more so in the case of Islamic mysticism. Moreover, Olowo (2022:2) argues that it is indeed a prominent feature in the history of mysticism and manifests quite clearly in all epistemic fields, including but not limited to literature, psychology, metaphysics, and law. One of the first *Sufi* thinkers who introduced the idea of love as a divine characteristic, was *Hassan al-Basri* (Muslim ascetic and "father of Sufism"). However, the idea of love in a mystical sense only became a well-organised and solidified concept within mystical literature around the 9th century CE, and was developed by *Rābiʻa al-Adawiyya* (*c*. 713-801 CE), a famed Muslim mystic and one of the best known female Sufis, who's life has not just been a contentious issue in academic scholarship, but her work has remained paradigmatic in the feminist study of Sufism, gender, power, and sexuality in Islam (Hijjas 2018:216-217 cf. Olowo 2022:2-3).

In addition to this, *al-Adawiyya* also features as one of the founders of medieval *Sufi* asceticism and one of the strongest advocates for all later *Sufi* doctrines of divine love. She remains unique in this discussion as she is one of the few Muslim women who subscribed to an ant-marital lifestyle and philosophy, as she believed "marriage to be an obstacle in the obstacle of annihilating herself in the love of Allah" (Olowo 2022:4) and therefore she rejected many a marriage proposal by interested bachelors. In response to one proposal, she poignantly replied, "O sensual one, seek another sensual one like yourself, have you seen any desire in me?" (see Olowo 2022:4-5).

McGinley, et alia attest to the influence of *al-Adawiyya* and equate anecdotes of her poetry to that of the erotic love poetry between the bride and groom in the Judeo-Christian wisdom text, Song of Songs (cf. Kapp 2021:32-34):

"…Lord, the stars are shining and the eyes of men are closed and kings have shut their doors, and every lover is alone with his beloved, and here am I alone with Thee…O my Lord, if I worship Thee from fear of Hell, burn me therein, and if I worship Thee in hope of Paradise, exclude me thence, but if I worship Thee for Thine own sake, then withhold not from me Thine Eternal Beauty" (McGinley, *et al.* 2019:13).

McKinley, et alia maintain that despite *al-Adawiyya's* fame and influence to this day, she also paved the way for another famous Sufi successor, *Muhyi' al-Din ibn al-'Arabi* (*c.* 1165-1240 CE) more commonly known as, *"Ibn 'Arabi". Ibn 'Arabi* owes his formation as a Sufi mystic to his female spiritual guides (or mentors), Shams of Marchena as well as *Fatimah bint al-Muthanna'* of Seville (McKinley 2019:13). Moreover, *ibn 'Arabi* wrote that *Fatimah* had miraculous powers due to her preoccupation with the first surah in the Qur'an, *al-Fatihah* "The Opening" (cf. Milad & Taheri 2021:8-9). Even going so far as telling her young apprentice ibn 'Arabi, that she has been given 'the opening' and possesses the ability to wield it in any way she pleases, thus blurring the Sufistic concept of mysticism and magic (McGinley, *et al*., 2019:13-14).

Dovel further adds that *ibn 'Arabi* was not a traditional Sufi, in the sense that he did not perpetuate ascetic ideas like his predecessors and contemporaries (see Shaikh 2012:3-4). Instead, he was a revolutionary *Sufi* thinker and his views on sexuality which demonstrated a blatant disregard for traditional dogmatic presuppositions, to a point of rejecting dogmatic thinking in its entirety. This is largely due to the fact that he was exposed to several female Sufis during his formative years, describing his aforementioned mentor, *Fatimah*, as possessing the ultimate of praiseworthy devotions (cf. McGinley, *et al*., 2019:14). Furthermore, it should also be noted that *ibn 'Arabi* did not advocate for the abolition of

orthodox (or legalistic) Islamic dogma, instead he often encouraged the importance of adhering to *Shari'ah* and those in positions of authority (Dovel 2017:55-56). Furthermore, it is clear from Dovel that *ibn 'Arabi* demonstrated his progressiveness by way of his approaches to female sexuality and the expression of sex in and of itself.

Ibn 'Arabi did not view human sexuality in a negative light, and his positivistic approach to sexuality did not necessitate the denial or rejection of the body in order to attain closeness with Allah. Instead, *ibn 'Arabi* believed that utilising the human body (by way of sensuality) can help one achieve knowledge about the self (Dovel 2017:56-57). Therefore, he claimed that humans are thus superior to angels, who are restricted to the spiritual. Whereas humans have the physical experience which incorporates the harmonious collaboration of the spiritual, physical, mental, and emotional realms that collectively serve to place humanity as the most complete mirror of the divine (Dovel 2017:57). Even though it is widely acknowledged that Muslims do not have a negative view on sex, orthodox Islamic teachings considered the expression of one's sexual appetite within the confines of nuptial paradigms, natural and a desirable aspect of human existence (Ali 2013:6).

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, even Muhammad encouraged this and even considered it his sunnah (see Dialmy 2010:4-5; cf. Demiray 2021:155). Moreover, both classical and contemporary Islamic religious literature on sexuality also recognise women's desires and appetites, with several texts in the Qur'an and *hadith* alike acknowledging the gratification of female sexual appetites, focusing on its exclusive place in marriage, and similar to other patriarchal religions of its time, denoting the necessity for women to remain sexually available to the whims and needs of their husbands (see Ali 2013:6-12). Furthermore, *Ibn 'Arabi* rejected the idea that female sexuality corrupted (or interfered) with male devotion. Instead,

he considered the act of sex in and of itself as an indisputably important part of the overall religious experience (see Youssry 2017:88-89).

He argues that once both partners see and recognise the divine image within one another, understanding that pleasure is a gift from Allah, then he believes that the "self-annihilation" brought about through indulging in the sexual endeavour is the ultimate sense in which humans contemplate Allah (Youssry 2017:96-98). Moreover, *Ibn 'Arabi* recognises that sex as an act that represents the most complete possible esoteric union in love, and that there exists no greater union in the "elemental sphere" than the erotic union of the two sexes, and also considering no distinct separation between sexuality and spirituality (Dovel 2017:57-58 cf. Shaikh 2012:9-16).

This is especially visible when reading *Ibn 'Arabi*'s poetry, which tacitly blurs the lines between mystic- and sexual experience. Zargar notes that *Ibn 'Arabi*'s poetry can be classified as amorous lyric (Zargar 2011:120). Moreover, in *Ibn 'Arabi*'s particular case, this genre resembles the common Sufi exegetical undertaking, wherein these esoteric commentators employed existing genres (like *tafsir*), instead of creating new ones, used as vehicle for their insights. Moreover, through this amorous lyric mystic poetry (*nasib*), poets such as *Ibn 'Arabi* utilised this particular genre as novel medium through which the expression of love could be enhanced by gnosis and awareness. As such, lyric poetry as a *Sufi* tradition gained new meaning (Zargar 2011:120-121). Therefore, through reading *Ibn 'Arabi*'s poetry, one can easily acknowledge the fact that his belief system incorporates both spirituality and sexuality as complimentary religious conjunction, relating to how a woman may also embody both spiritual piety and sensual desire (Dovel 2017:58 cf. Rumman 2020:198-199).

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Poem 46 – *Muhyi al-Din ibn al-'Arabi* (*c.* 1240)

"Between innards and beautiful wide eyes, a desire is at war,

and the heart, from that war, is in a state of perdition.

A sweet-lipped girl, dark-lipped, honeyed where she is kissed—

the testimony of the bee is what appears in its white, thick honey.

Plump are her ankles, darkness over a white moon,

On her cheek the redness of sunset, a bough on dunes of sand,

Beautiful, well-adorned, she is not married,

She laughs showing teeth like brilliant hailstones, white, clean, and sharp.

When it comes to ignoring, she is serious, but she plays at love frivolously,

and death is what lies between such seriousness and such play.

Never does the night blacken except that comes upon its trail

the breathing-back-to-life of morning, a fact known since olden times.

And never do the easterly winds pass a lush grassland

that contains girls with large breasts, virginally bashful, playfully passionate,

except that, in their light blowing, the breezes cause to bend and to disclose

the flowers and freshly cut herbs that are carried by the girls…" (Zargar 2011:123-124).

It is, however, worth noting that the oldest erotological work in Islam and veritable sex encyclopaedia, predates to the 3rd to 10th century *Anno Hijra* and is known as the *Jawāmiʿ al-ladhdha* as explored by Myrne in her in-depth treatise on sexuality and eroticism in Muslim women during the 3rd and 4th centuries in premodern Arabic texts from the early medieval Islamic world much of which originated in extra-Islamic Greek and Sanskrit, during Late Antiquity (Myrne 2020:3, 19-24, 51-53). Furthermore Myrne (2020:14) notes, that those who practised Islamic medicine in Late Antiquity distinguished themselves from their Greek

contemporaries in their extreme focus on female pleasure as part of a medical and pharmacological practice as the *Jawāmiʿ al-ladhdha* (Myrne 2020:46, 84-85).

Additionally, works on erotology in medieval Islam focused almost exclusively on sexual technique and etiquette (see Myrne 2020:60-64), but also the treatment of sexual dysfunction (in men) and mutual climax were not only attributed to unknown sages, one of whom *Alī b. Naṣr al-Kātib* who places emphasis on the importance of sexual harmony and the pursuit of simultaneous climax, serving as compensation for the various defects in male sexuality (Myrne 2020:61-62), but also to older women: even though some anecdotal representations of said women were not especially flattering, but parodied by salacious poets (Myrne 2020:63-64, 117-118).

5.4.4. An Intellectual Apartheid: The West Versus "The Rest"?

Given the above, it is evident that Islam represents a rich African textual tradition from which to derive esoteric ideas on the body, divinity, sexuality, and the self all in one. However, as mentioned earlier, there are those who problematise such a romanticised fixation on Sufism as the only expression of Islamic esotericism, labelling it as a sort-of reductionistic and limiting viewpoint about 'esoteric discourse in Islamic culture', to appropriate the anecdote by Von Stuckrad in Locations of Knowledge in Medieval and Early Modern Europe. Von Stuckrad distances himself from a singular coherent tradition of esotericism instead he opts for a more inclusive term relating it to cultural discourse, rather than a coherent tradition (Von Stuckrad 2010:52). Sorgenfrei believes that Von Stuckrad, in doing such, avoids Hanegraaff's West-East dichotomy, directing his initial reference of a discursive approach at Hanegraaff and his delineation of Western esotericism as being a waste basket category for Kafkaesque non-hegemonic rejected knowledge (see Hanegraaff 2013:13 cf. Sorgenfrei 2018:3-4).

However, Sorgenfrei further argues that the argument made by Von Stuckrad (2010:52-53) promising esotericism being secret; being premised on the previous considerations as such by Georg Simmel and his "sociology of secrecy" (Simmel 1906:441-446) as well as Urban with his "analysis of strategies of secrecy" (Urban 1998:210) can easily be applied to Islamic esoteric traditions (not just Western esotericism), as well (cf. Sorgenfrei2018:4). Sorgenfrei therefore maintains that the claim of secrecy along with obscure claims about access to higher knowledge, play just as important a role in Islam with Shi'ite philosophy, as it does in Sufi theology (Sorgenfrei 2018:3-4). Not mentioning other Islamic traditions like the prophetology of the early *Nation of Islam (NOI)*, the masonic background of the Moorish Science Temple, the mysticism of 14th century theorist *Faḍlullāh Astarābādī*, and others (Sorgenfrei 2018:1-5). Saif echoes Sorgenfrei's sentiment but adds that such extreme focus of Sufism as exclusive ambassador to Islamicate esotericism, has been perpetuated by outdated Western perennialist and traditionalist interpretations originating with Faivrean scholarship (Saif 2020:73-74).

Subsequently this created a longue durée of Eurocentric and Orientalist hermeneutical lenses, leading to the West's myopic idealisation, reductivism, and othering of the rich diversity belonging to esoteric currents in Islam. Because of the fundamentally flawed dichotomous model by Henry Corbin, which separates the esoteric from the exoteric in terms of orthodoxy *versus* heterodoxy (romanticising the Sunnism versus Sufi and Shi'a), neglecting manifestations of religion/spirituality other Islamic regions (see Corbin 1960:6). As has been mentioned earlier in this section, and this subsequently perpetuates, according to Ernst a kind of "intellectual apartheid regime" (Saif 2020:70-77 cf. Ernst 2010:25).

Such arguments are remarkably similar to the criticisms highlighted in chapter 4 of this study, pertaining to the Eurocentric (Orientalist) romanticisation of India and the East. It is therefore important to acknowledge these discussions and give credence to the arguments they make. However, when it comes to post-colonial discourse, it is easy to "throw the baby out with the bathwater" as the saying goes. While it is a sound argument to note a historiographic discord in the development of distinct regions, taking this into account practically and theoretically is a mountainous task. Esotericism in and of itself is but a young addition to comparative and interdisciplinary studies, and we are but scratching the surface, acknowledging the fact that discourse is evolving and along with it, the scholarship. However, it is also important to do away with models that do not fit the epistemological ideals of acknowledging esotericism as a collaborative phenomenon, therefore Saif and Sorgenfrei make an incredibly valid point when arguing that (Islamic) esoteric traditions cannot be understood in their entirety, if we do not bring them into a discussion with its other manifestations and their mutual relationship to othering (Saif 2020:82 cf. Sorgenfrei 2018:15-16).

5.5 Placing The "African" In Afro-American: Conjure, Slavery, Creolisation And Blues

5.5.1 Taxonomical Conundrum: Stigma And Pop-Culture

One of the most complex and misunderstood aspects of African diasporic religion, is that of conjure: *Hoodoo*, or is it *Voodoo*, *Vodou*, or just plain *Vodun*? This section about African American Conjure (supernaturalism), aims to explore this unique aspect of African diasporic religion and spirituality, as exemplary case of *Africana* esotericism in the USA by extrapolating on the origins, ritual and traditions of these very much neglected areas of *Africana* esoteric discourse in contemporary academic scholarship (see McGee 2012:233 cf. Clark 2014:9). However, when it comes to the mentioning of these terms, we are plagued by a polemic of

immediate associations with Western popular culture's (mis)representation of conjure in famous Hollywood films like, Roger Moore as *James Bond in Live And Let Die* (1973); *The Skeleton Key* (2005), and the world of *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* (1984). Displaying Afro-American culture as ephemeral assemblage of cursed dolls, charms, and hexes made to control and harm others – including but not limited to – human and animal sacrifice, et cetera (Platoff 2015:3).

However, before a substantial discussion purposed at de-mystifying these unique examples of Africana esoteric discourse can be endeavoured, it is important to establish the differences between terminologies like Hoodoo, Voodou, Voodoo, and Vodun (used interchangeably), whilst also clarifying their relevance and belonging to the African diaspora. African magick and conjuration (or supernaturalism) go by several names, and according to Anderson the noun conjure has been the most prominent to describe African- American supernaturalism since the 19th century. The term in and of itself, initially referred to the practice of summoning or controlling spirits (Anderson 2008:2). However, consequently, various groups within African American culture and religion also adopted other terms to describe their practices such as cunning or tricking (cf. Long 2006:176-177), up until the first half of the 20th century. Other terms used by Afro-Americans from the Georgia and South Carolina regions were *goopher*, *gopher*, or *goofer*, which Anderson believes owes its origins to West Central Africa originating with the Congolese word *kufwa* meaning "to die" (Anderson 2008:2-3 cf. Long 2015:86).

In addition to terms such as *jomo* and *mojo*; popularly used in Tennessee and Missisippi, as well as *zinzin*, *gris-gris*, and *wanga* as names for charms in New Orleans, Anderson maintained that African Americans have also used terms such as *obee*, *obeah*, or *ober* – Jamaican terms referring to African magic and supernaturalism (Anderson 2008:2). Moreover,

these words, despite their colonial (or "Old World") heritage, were partially replaced by the term hoodoo in the early 20th century, which collectively referred to men and women conjurers. These were similar to titles like "rootworker", "trick doctor", "*ober man*", "cunning man/woman", and "witch" (Anderson 2008:2-3 cf. Mellis 2019:2-3).

Alvarado however notes that the terms *Hoodoo* and *Voodoo* have been used interchangeably during the early 1800's with African Americans calling it *Voudou-Hoodoo*, whereas others believe "white folks" began calling it *Hoodoo-Voudou* and vice versa. Nonetheless, Alvaro also notes that Hoodoo can be an independent magickal tradition in and of itself; either embraced and incorporated by Voudouist practitioners, or not. Arguing, in sum, that "…some people Hoodoo, and some people don't…" (Alvarado 2020:52).

However, the term "witch", has come to be used pejoratively in the United States, especially considering its history with the Salem Witch trials and other widespread Witch hunts by the Christian church (see Martin 2012:25-37), during the 16th century and has consequently left a stain on practices like Wicca, herbalism, *obeah*, and other forms of healing and spiritual practices, practiced by (African American) women who possessed *konnoissance* (Connaissance) or "spiritual knowledge, or supernatural insight and power derived therefrom" (Apter 2002:241 cf. Apter 2018:50-51), living in the colonial West (Martin 2012:15). Aside from their persecution, these black women slaves were also fetishised. "*Negro* wenches" were sold to work as prostitutes and escorts in the confines of the colonial plantations, they exchanged sexual favours with the masters and their sons for special privileges and gifts (Apter 2018:107-110).

Moreover, what is the difference between hoodoo and voodoo? The latter, frequently called "*Voodoo*", "*Créole Voodoo*", or "New Orleans Voodoo" refers to the amalgamation of African ancestor veneration (honouring the spirits of the departed discussed in greater depth earlier in this chapter), respect for the elderly and the spiritual life, including traditional African knowledge of charms and herbs as well as European elements of Catholicism (Reuber 2011:7). *Voodoo* (or *Vodou/on*) arrived in 17th century Haiti, known then as Saint-Domingue from West Africa, particularly during the period of Roman Catholic Christianisation (Katić 2020:6); African slave trade, and the Haitian slave rebellions around 1791-1801 and has flourished among small groups in and around the West Indies throughout until the 18th and 19th centuries (see Apter 2002:238 cf. McGee 2012:237-238). Voodoo is still being practised today in many parts of the world, but only by a select few maintaining strict secrecy and exclusivity. Voodoo has not merely been misrepresented by connotations of witchcraft, devil worship, human sacrifice, and hexing, but also through its misrepresentations in popular visual media and culture (Reuber 2011:7-8 cf. Boaz 2023:124-126).

5.5.2 New Orleans Voodoo: Carribean Creoles, And The European West-African Slave Trade

Lane notes that understanding Hoodoo Conjure, requires distinguishing it from New Orleans "Voodoo," also known as Vodou (Haiti), which both derive from the West-African term Vodun translating to "spirit" in the Fon language and was spoken in the ancient Dahomey Kingdom (present day Bénin, Togo, or Southwestern Nigeria), thus alluding to the traditional religion of West Africa (cf. Hurteau 2013:159-160). Hoodoo Conjure, on the other hand, differs from Vodou as it constitutes a system of religious beliefs focused on manipulating spiritual forces to achieve desired outcomes—both benevolent and malevolent—in the material world (Lane

2005:3). Moreover, Vodou is a religion that venerates a supreme Creator God and a pantheon of deities, akin to many established world religions (Anderson 2023:34).

Additionally, the misrepresentation of "evil Hoodoo" as "Voodoo" largely derives from (what has been noted earlier) media portrayals, perpetuating misconceptions that dismiss Hoodoo Conjure as mere "sorcery" or "fortune-telling," obscuring its complexity in magic, herbalism, divination, and witchcraft (Lane 2005:3-4). Moreover, Apter (2002:238) argued that Haitian Vodou owes its roots in African religious traditions, particularly those brought to Haiti, by Europe and its African slave trade during the colonial period. These traditions, collectively originating from various African ethnic groups (such as the Yoruba, Ginen, and Petwo, *et alia*), underwent what scholars call a process of creolisation in Haiti. Apter thus notes that this phenomenon occurred between African religious practices with European Christianity (Catholicism) and indigenous Caribbean beliefs (Apter 2018:45-46).

"Creolisation" refers to the blending and adaptation of different cultural, linguistic, or religious elements in new contexts, but in this particular case, the Caribbean plantation society (cf. de Roux 2016:68). The etymological origins are disputable, but Daut (2020:73-74) believes it derives from the word Créole which is perhaps the most mysterious ethnic and racial reference used in the Americas. As not only is the term's origins unclear, but there are several varieties of spelling and grammar associated with the concept. Nevertheless, Daut notes that according to the Royal Spanish Academy of Arts and Letters the term originated with the word, criollo which was a term invented by the Spanish during their conquests of the West Indies, when referring to all locally born individuals who do not have native (Spanish/European) origins (Daut 2020:73-74).

Additionally, the Oxford Advanced Learner's English Dictionary (8th ed.) defines the word as 1) referring to a person of mixed African and European race (especially in the West Indies), 2) a person – either French or Spanish – whose ancestors were among the first Europeans to settle in the West Indies or South America, and 3) a language formed as a result of a mixture between a European and a particular African language (i.e. pidgin), spoken by slaves from Africa in the West Indies (Hornby 2022:346 cf. Isa, *et al.*, 2015:14-15).

It is therefore worth noting that the history and creolisation of this West-African *vis-à-vis* African American spirituality, was inextricably linked to slavery and colonialism. McGee (2012:237-238) notes that the African borne religion of Haiti has been of particular interest to the Europeans and Euro-Americans alike, since the start of their native slave trade. Together, McGee argues; they made numerous efforts to estrange Africans by deliberately putting them in contexts where they were unable to communicate in their native tongues, nor engage in acts of cultural continuity (McGee 2012:237-238).

Moreover, forcible or coerced conversions to Christianity (Catholicism) were prioritised, as well as in many cases the evangelisation of Africans being utilised as an apology for enslavement (McGee 2012:237-238). This resulted in the inevitable religious syncretism (or creolisation) of religious cosmogonies, as introduced earlier by Apter (2002; 2018). De Roux echoes Apter and McGee, in noting that the common denominator between the Caribbean (i.e. the Antilles chain of islands Surinam, Guyana, French Guiana, and Belize) was a plantation economy that was sustained by the forced labour provided by African slaves (de Roux 2016:68-72).

Voodou (or *Vodoun*) is a creolised religious system born in West Africa (Platoff 2015:3 cf. Manzon 2013:1120), deriving its religious traditions from mainly West Africa and European

Christianity. De Roux (2016:69) also argues that said African slaves presented their traditional religious beliefs and religion in creative ways as vehicles for resistance to European colonialists . Along with using it towards reaffirming their ethnic identity; simultaneously satisfying their religio-spiritual needs. As mentioned before, these religions, especially Vodou in Haiti, drew essential content from (Western) African Traditional Religion (ATR) and ancestry.

While consequently, after the early 19th century, not just constituting a de facto African religion, but also becoming a national religion in Haiti overall (de Roux 2016:69-74). Moreover, De Roux maintains that seeing as African creoles were cut off from their social and political African contexts, as well as forced to submit to the foreign socio-political and religious environs of their European masters, Africans had to adapt their religious expression to the presiding Zeitgeist, resulting in the enshrouding of traditional African beliefs and religion with that of colonial European Christianity (see Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert 2011:9-11 cf. de Roux 2016:75-76).

Thus occurred the identification or disguising of African spirits/gods and goddesses (Apter 2018:29-31) called "*Lwa/Loa*" (although spelling may vary) along with Catholic saints, evolving as syncretic element – or religious creolisation – within African religious theology, purposed towards appeasing, and hiding their outlawed ceremonies from their European owners (De Roux 2016:72-76 cf. Olmos and Paravisini-Gerbert 2011:3-4). Platoff notes that these *Lwa* in *Vodou* are subservient to the supreme and omnipotent god, *Bondye* (similar to the Catholic saints and God). However, even though it is believed by practitioners that these *lwa* number in the thousands, there are a few who are identified and venerated and represented via flags, colours and symbols. Moreover, the *lwa* are categorised by way of their characteristics or family (culture of origin, i.e. *Gède*, *Yoruba*, *Petwo*, *Kongo*, *Ibo*, *et alia*): for

example, characteristics of the *fwet* are cool and soothing in nature, whereas the *cho* possess hot and abrasive personalities, and lastly there are those who bridge these polarities (Platoff 2015:4-6 cf. Scheu 2015:84).

Apter (2018:43-46), while not asserting a direct connection, notes that the Vodou tradition as it is found in Haiti, was produced as a result of the Yoruba, but also attributes contributions made by several other African religious traditions: firstly, the Kongo – specifically that of ritual healing, spirit possession, as well as ancestral veneration influenced Vodou . Secondly, the spiritual traditions of the *Ewe* tribe and their practices pertaining to spirits (*egbes*), divination (*fa*), along with their ceremonial music and dance, influenced the Afro-diasporic religions (among them *Voodou*) in the Americas. Thirdly, Apter also identifies how Dahomey religious traditions, characterised by elaborate rituals, deities (vodun) and spiritual concepts such as divine kingship, shaped Vodou belief and practice (see Manzon 2013:1119-1120). Furthermore, he also notes elements of Igbo religious traditions, including the worship of a variety of deities (*ala*, *amadioha*) and spiritual concepts pertaining to reincarnation and ancestral spirits, contributed to the syncretism of Vodou and its related traditions, such as Santería and Rastafari (cf. De Roux 2016:69-74). Finally, Apter also proposes the influence of Mande religious traditions which consist of complex cosmologies, oral traditions, and ritual praxis as influence on Vodou and its diasporic contemporaries (Apter 2018:46-50 cf. Katić 2020:6-7).

5.5.3 Marie Laveau: Widow Paris, Folk Hero, Or Queen Of Hoodoo? "Dey Seem To Be The Same Thing"

Given the above, it is incontrovertible that the slave trade contributed largely to not just Vodou in the Caribbean, but also brought its heir, Voodoo, to North America by way of the slave trade. Katić echoes Apter and his placing of the African diasporic cultural origins of Vodou. Although, she adds that the Voodoo practice (to be understood as distinct from Vodou/Vodun) in New Orleans, is completely unique in comparison to its African ancestors, in being much akin (yet also drastically different) when put in comparison to its Haitian contemporary, Santería (see, De Roux 2016:69 cf. Katić 2020:7-9). Vodou(n) came to the United States a.k.a. the "New World" (see Mellis 2019:3) via the ports of the slave trade in New Orleans, while bringing with it the famous and mystical folk hero, Marie Laveau, born in the early 17th century, *circa* 1783. Madame Laveau has frequently been hailed with the title "the Voodoo Queen of New Orleans" and was celebrated among people of colour during her lifetime. Known for her (and her mother's) strength as powerful healers, initiated into the secret tradition of Voodoo in colonial Louisiana, whilst also famed for bearing 15 children and allegedly rising from the waters of Lake Pontchartrain in the form of a young girl in 1872 (Martin 2012:37-38 cf. Carter 2019:6-8).

Yet, according to Carter aside from the myth, evidence on Marie Laveau is limited. We know that she existed and lived in New Orleans, working as a hairdresser and a nurse – although dispute exists about her professions (Carter 2019:5). Furthermore, Martin notes that we know she was a free, yet illiterate, black woman and member of the Catholic church who frequently went and prayed for prison inmates on death row (Martin 2012:38). She was married twice and eventually passed away of diarrhoea which was common for someone of her advanced age (Carter 2019:5-6). Martin, however, noted that there was two Marie Laveaus – the mother,

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and the daughter Marie Heloise Eucharist Glapion, who predominantly went by her mother's name (Martin 2012:38).

Although Martin continues that the former, Marie the elder, was born to wealthy Creole parents, and it was subsequently after her marriage to the free man of colour, Jacques Paris, that her life became enshrouded in mystery (Martin 2012:38-39). Shortly after their marriage, according to oral histories, rumour, records and historical scholarship, Jacques disappeared, and his remains were never officially found. During this time, Madame Laveau adopted the moniker befitting her status, The Widow Paris. Becoming known as a frequent volunteer for parishioners of the church; visiting not just death row inmates, but orphans too, along with others in need as prescribed by her faith (Martin 2012:38 cf. Bilinsky 2016:38-40).

Legend also has it that Laveau stalled the public execution of two criminals in 1852, Jean Adams and Anthony Delille who were inexplicably released from their nooses, falling to the ground unscathed as the executioner opened the hatch (see Ward 2004:129-130 cf. Long 2006:203-206). While the nooses were retied, and the men hung successfully a second time, spectators to the execution attributed the mysterious event to her, who allegedly, was also accused to have been responsible for conjuring a torrential thunderstorm before the execution (Martin 2012:38-39).

Furthermore, the most influential and significant historiographical scholarship about Madame Lauveau (the elder) has been written by Marie Ward in her work Voodoo Queen: The Spirited Lives of Marie Laveau, and Carolyn Morrow Long (2006) in A New Orleans Voudou Priestess: The Legend and Reality of Marie Laveau, along with Denise Alvarado (2020), The Magic of Marie Laveau: Embracing the Spiritual Legacy of the Voodoo Queen of New Orleans.

According to Ward (2004) and Long (2006), Laveau a.k.a. "The Widow Paris" can thus be pinpointed as the primary revered ancestor of "negro witchcraft" or Voodoo in New Orleans (Ward 2004:71-72; Long 2006:140-141 cf. Alvarado 2020:50-51). It is therefore worth remarking that Laveau indeed lived a colourful life, filled with mystery and intrigue.

However, despite the myth and lore surrounding her character and existence, her impact on New Orleans is unquestionable. In support of this, Marshall (2015:111-112) notes that people still travel to her grave, marking her tomb with three cross marks (*XXX*), while leaving gifts in the hopes that the spirit of Laveau will favour them. Although, to Voodoo believers, she will not only be an important black feminist figure, but also their high priestess and Queen of Voodoo (cf. Alvarado 2020:45-46).

5.5.4 New Orleans *Voodou* Blues: Eroticism And Love In The Art Of *Gris-Gris*

In noting the legacy of Madame Laveau, one can also not ignore the prominence of eroticism and love in the spiritual praxis of the Voodooists. McGee (2012:241) notes that to many the mere mention of voodoo, summons thoughts of orgies and writhing black naked bodies along with sacrificial animals outdoors in the dark of night, arguing that this idea comes from some of the earliest textual accounts of Vodou, which persist into contemporaneity (McGee 2012:241). However, McGee notes that this is largely due to the influence of popular culture, literature, and film where authors such as H.P. Lovecraft in the Necronomicon: The Best Weird Tales of H.P. Lovecraft, perpetuating implicit connections between voodoo, violence, and base sexuality – describing rites as an "endless bacchanale" (Lovecraft 2008:223). In Lovecraftian lore, however, each of the participants in this rite is naked: jumping and roaring in a circle around maimed human victims. McGee (2012:241-242) further adds that underneath Lovecraft's narrative prose, there lies a hint of psychosexual thrill where killing

becomes an orgiastic endeavour; a central theme in the Lovecraftian imagination of Voodoo religion.

Clark however notes that the association of Voodoo with sex is not uncommon; local newspapers were famous for their particularly damning journalism about Voodoo's supposed orgiastic and illicit sex rituals (Clark 2014:34). Newspapers, such as The Daily Picayune in 1851 reported about a Voudoo meeting where Afro-American women participated in rituals where only some were dressed. Additionally, in 1857 it reported a police raid of a mixed-race Voodoo meeting, allegedly discovering that participants "celebrated the wild orgies of Voodoo, by dancing naked around a cauldron". These reports persisted throughout the 19th century and black alternative religion – in general – became associated with idealised stigma about Voodoo as correlative to sexuality, immorality, and darkness (Clark 2014:34-35 cf. Alvarado 2020:15). This stigma was frequently used as a way to justify and undergird white supremacy by way of supplying "proof" of black degeneracy and hypersexuality (Bilinskry 2016:100).

It should however be noted that these embellished narratives are not just a byproduct perpetuated by popular culture, but also embody what Boaz discusses as 20th century anxieties about African- Americans and race relations (Boaz 2023:55). Black male "voodoo doctors" were accused of kidnapping, enslaving, and murdering white women. In cases where the victims were non-white, though, they traced connections back to whites (Boaz 2023:55-56 cf. Long 2006:31-34). Furthermore, it is scholarly consensus that 'diabolical' sexual themes projected on Voodoo are inherently derivative of racial presuppositions and stigma, surrounding African- American culture and folk religion, perpetuated by popular culture (Martin 2012:61-62; McGee 2014:252-254; Remse 2015:70-72, *et al.*).

However, Ward (2004:125) argued that Voodoo, during the time of Laveau, was very honest and open about sex and sexuality, compared to the Catholics and Protestants. As such, Voodoo obtained its bad reputation. Priestesses were thus rumoured to allegedly cause marital conflicts, run harems and brothels while seducing white men (Long 2006:30), via supposedly using love and separation magick towards promiscuous ends (Long 2006:185-187). However, these are all embellished myths propagated by racial anxieties as real Voodoo magick was predominantly used towards healing and helping. Ward mentions a Laveau formula, involving keeping a man true to his lover. The formula instructs measuring the man's "member" with a piece of silk string, tying nine knots in the string, while cursing outside women (Ward 2004:125). The words spoken entail, "you and so-and-so will fail in bed" and subsequently entails the woman wearing the knot around her waist. Thereby guaranteeing that the man will never have sex with anyone again. Should the aggrieved lover, however, wish the opposite to happen while still ensuring her man's fidelity: "Sneak-Away" candles, "Losement", and "Hot Foot" powders were readily accessible at "spiritual pharmacies" in New Orleans (Ward 2004:125-126).

Chireau also mentioned that Conjure and Hoodoo practices provided last-resort solutions for loneliness, despair, and betrayal. Though, she also remarked that Conjure was not only used for good, but sometimes utilised to advance individuals' personal desires, as well. Some practitioners specialised in the attribution of supernatural harming, which often had sources in sexual or romantic conflicts (Chireau 2003:79-80). Moreover, Chireau (2003:146-148) maintains that in Afro-American blues music from the 20's to 30's, several references to conjure can be found: mostly consisting of erotic allusions, praising female sex appeal or boasting male virility (Stewart 2017:103-104). Men sang of feminine virtues, while comparing it to having the right ingredients similar to that of a Voodoo charm – commonly known as gris-

gris (Anderson 2015:85-87). The mojo charm was also frequently attributed to female sexuality, mojo (charm) was a possession all women had, whilst being something desired by all men (Chireau 2003:146-148 cf. Stewart 2017:106). Martin adds to this in noting that mojo was the only way through which the blues woman may "relieve herself" (Martin 2012:135).

Stewart choes both Chireau and Martin in remarking that blues music served as tangible representation for Hoodoo sexual and love magick in the context of ritual spirit work (Stewart 2017:103-104 cf. Martin 2012:137-138; Chireau 2003:146-147). In addition, Stewart notes reference to one ritual in Bessie Smith's cover of Down Hearted Blues, originally recorded by Alberta Hunter in 1923. "I got the world in a jug, the stopper's in my hand…" (Stewart 2017:106). These words refer to the common Hoodoo love ritual of "stopping up", or bottling the sexual desire of the lover at which the spell is directed.

The successful completion of this Hoodoo love ritual results in the lover being completely under one's control, hence the lyrics continue, "…I'm gonna' hold it until you men come under my command" (Stewart 2017:106-107). Furthermore, the Hoodoo ritual mentioned in Down Hearted Blues embodies themes of freedom, power, and emancipation emerging from the struggle for liberation in African- American culture. In this way (especially through sexual means) Afro-Americans claimed ownership of themselves by rooting themselves in their sexual identities (Stewart 2017:106-107 cf. Douglas 2012).

Furthermore, Scheu and LaMenfo add that Legba (also called Papa Legba) was a prominent erotic spirit (*Loa/Lwa*) known to the New Orleans Voodoo tradition (Scheu & LaMenfo 2015:112). Legba originated as a phallic spirit with roots in the Fon and Yoruba tribes of West Africa (cf. Platoff 2015:5). Upon arriving in the New World, however, Legba (who is also the

7th and youngest son of the sky gods Mawu and Lisa) dropped his sexual identity in order to become a guardian spirit of crossroads and junctions. Moreover, aside from giving clairvoyance to those he deemed worthy, Legba – also known by the name Alegba – is also known as the spokesman and interpreter for Vodun spirits. Furthermore, he is also envisioned as a sexual spirit and is primarily invoked in matters of sex and a mediator between the sexes. Those possessed in his dance, carry a phallic-tipped staff with which to chase younger women in the audience. Legba is principally associated with being a fertility spirit, as well as representing creation and communication (Scheu & LaMenfo 2015:112-113).

As discussed earlier in this chapter, spirit possession has featured as an integral aspect of ATR. However, even though possession as a phenomenon carries a negative connotation to Catholicism (demonic possession), in Voodoo practice, contrastingly, possession is common and generally good-natured. During Voodoo rituals, priestesses may invoke spirits and request them to reveal their presence to ritual members. Spirits would thus take possession of priestesses and act out carnal desires such as smoking, drinking, eating, dancing, singing, as well as gratifying themselves sexually (Mast 2017:32-35). Moreover, each Voodoo ritual starts with the phrase invoking Legba: "*Papa Legba louvri bary è a pou mwen pase* (Papa Legba, open the door for me to pass)". It is also said that a Voodoo initiate can marry his/her patron *lwa* during a ritual ceremony presided over by a *Pè savann*, resulting in the individual falling under the *lwa*'s protection. However, this may have implications for the individual's sex life, as the spirit may request that they (the initiate) remain single, if not married. If married, they are required to abstain from sex on Tuesdays and Thursdays (Hurteau 2013:162-163).

Another example of expressions of eroticism in Voodoo culture is mentioned by Alvarado who avers, "…I've known some sorcerers who like to get high and have sex after midnight in

cemeteries to gather power from the willing spirits and energies there, but don't think anyone will talk to you about it..." (Alvarado 2020:129). Moses echoes Alvarado that this process involves the sorcerer gathering dirt from the place where they had intercourse, which could be on the ground or on the grave of the spirit with whom they made a contract (Moses 2020:18-19 cf.Alvarado 2020:129).

The grave dirt, imbued with the spirit of the deceased, is then utilised towards future sex magick and domination spells, respectively. Graveyard dirt, also known as goopher dust (see Anderson 2015:50-51), is familiar to Voodoo practitioners as a base ingredient in the *medzin* (medicine) chest and is usually applied in spells for justice, luck, gambling, revenge, as well as healing. Alvarado continues that practitioners of Laveau Voodoo maintain this tradition to this day and are famous for utilising cemeteries for a wide range of magical practices, including sex and love (Alvarado 2020:129-130 cf. Anderson 2023:50-52).

Alvarado further elaborates on this by referring to the "Graveyard Love Ritual" (cf. as an example of this, which requires to be performed on the grave of a married couple (Alvarado 2020:132-134). During this ritual, the Voudou loa of Death, magick, and sexuality, Bawon Samdi (The Baron/Baron Samedi) the guardian of the cemetery and the father of all the Gède (see Platoff 2015:4 cf. Pfeifer 2016:143) is invoked. In a ritual which should take place in an uninterrupted graveyard, sometimes accompanied by masturbation, where semen is a sacred release of the spirit (see Beasley 2010:43-44). Along with a collection of trinkets, including lovers ("Adam and Eve") candles (see Anderson 2008:18-20), an incense burner with incense (containing a blend of myrrh, rose petals, lavender and sage) as well as feather fans, a picture of the lovers, charcoal, pink and red flowers, et cetera. Additionally, the Baron's grave should be identified by looking for the biggest cross, or oldest male grave; offering the Baron 15*c*

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with Rum, requesting help with a love ritual, while pouring the rum over the grave (Alvarado 2020:132-134).

In light of the above, we can clearly note a rich history of Africana esotericism in Afro-American supernaturalism, rootwork, and conjure. Sexuality resembles a common tradition of self-spirituality not only towards protecting oneself from evil, but also towards personal romantic and erotic goals. Although, as mentioned earlier, it also has the potential to cause harm if abused. Chireau especially noted this in acknowledging that "blacks were not above manipulating fears of occult powers and poisoning for sexual gain" (Chireau 2003:72). Chireau mentions an example of a trial concerning infanticide in the late 18th century, where a white woman is tried; attempting to justify murder of her illegitimate mixed-race infant. After being manipulated by a "Negro fellow" [sic.] to drink a potion (under the guise that she will be cured of an ailment). Instead, however, she noted that via said potion the man "had carnal knowledge of her body". After which, the man – upon discovering she was pregnant – allegedly threatened to poison, kill, or otherwise destroy her if she disclosed details concerning their relations to anyone (Chireau 2003:72-73, 79-80).

In sum, Afro-American conjure is best described by Anderson as a historical religion, as opposed to a living tradition (Anderson 2023:23). However, New Orleans Voodoo as legacy of Marie Laveau, is best identified as an emerging faith both inspired by Haitian Vodou as well as a retrospective attempt to reconstruct the West-African Vodun religion of black pre-colonial indigenous heritage, via individuals initiated in the Conjure tradition (Anderson 2023:34-35). Moreover, its preoccupation with magick and ritual, with restricted (initiatory) access makes it a perfect example for a discourse on Africana esotericism. Voodoo not only establishes Marie Laveau as pioneer of Africana esoteric discourse but establishes Africa as

a centrifugal trajectory for delineating esotericism and the occult in the African diaspora geographically as globalised non-Western construct.

Page and Finley support this in arguing that especially the African American soul-blues musical genre, represents a unique vehicle for incorporating the esoteric elements rooted in the African diaspora. By their exploration of occult themes, rituals, symbols and ATR, soul-blues artists thereby used their music not only as a form of artistic expression but also as a medium for spiritual exploration and cultural assertion, thus transforming Africana esotericism from liberation discourse to a "scholarship of resistance" (Page & Finley 2021:176-178).

5.6 Philosophy Of "Self" In Africa

The concept of selfhood in Africa, when examined from a philosophical perspective, is highly intricate. This complexity arises from the fact that discussions surrounding African identity (i.e. "the self") are still entangled with the legacies of racism, colonialism, and imperialism. These connections between African identity and the aforementioned historical injustices are inseparable, as has been evidenced by Mungwini (2020:2-4) and Krog (2021:326-330). According to Okolo, there is a common belief that philosophy is often associated with the mystical, mysterious, and esoteric, which is thought to be limited to individuals with high intellectual abilities (Okolo 1989:19).

In addition, Okolo maintains that others perceive it to be the substance of one's worldview and 'moral guide' (Okolo 1993:3). However, in contrast to this, in African philosophy, the African philosopher focuses and reflects on African reality, worldview and experience the African, along with their place in it – not reality, nor the man in abstraction (Okolo 1993:3-6 cf. Ugwu, *et al.* 2023:31-34). Moreover, Negedu, et alia notes that due to the roles played by

colonisation, racism and the slave trade, these events collectively contributed to the alienation of African identity and thought in their quest for meaning and authentic self-rediscovery and affirmation (Negedu, *et al*. 2021:449-450). Former South African president Thabo Mbeki noted in his 2001 presidential address in Cuba:

"The stereotype about the Central and South American people…was that they are dark-skinned, quick-tempered, emotional, unimaginative, unintelligent, dishonest and inefficient. If the same survey about Africa today was conducted in some countries of the North, I would not be surprised if we got exactly the same outcome. The critical matter however is that we have a duty to define ourselves. We speak about the need for the African Renaissance in part so that we, ourselves, and not another, determine who we are, what we stand for, what our vision and hopes are, how we do things, what programs we adopt to make our lives worth living, who we relate to and how." (Mbeki 2001). Negedu¸ *et alia* therefore propose that Mbeki's speech in 2001 not only heralded the revival of "the African self," but also became the epicentre for connecting various currents within African philosophy. In addition, it has consequently formed the foundation of the numerous contemporary African studies in philosophy (Negedu, *et al.* 2021:450). For a more in-depth discussion on the complexities surrounding African identity, confer Chapter 5 of this thesis.

5.6.1 Kwame Gyekye (1939-2019): Moderate Communitarianism

When investigating African philosophical perspectives on selfhood and the notion of conscious (African) identity: an indispensable resource on this matter is the works of Gyekye, famously known for constructing the idea of personhood (selfhood), from the perspective of the Akan cultural framework (see Gyekye 2010:101-102 cf. Gyekye 1995:61). In his famous

work, An essay on African philosophical thought: the Akan conceptual scheme, Gyekye highlights various states of being recognised in the Ghanian Akan ontology or "the doctrine of being" (Gyekye 1995:68). In this study, Gyekye observes that African philosophical reflection and thought often manifest themselves in traditional religion, as African philosophical ideals are frequently intertwined with religious language (Gyekye 1995:68). Furthermore, it becomes clear that Gyekye consequently establishes a strong connection between this concept of the individual identity (i.e. the self) and the Akan ontology, which he defines as the "doctrine of being" (Gyekye 1995:68 cf. Koranteng-Green 2018:101-104).

Therefore, the identity of the Akans is deeply rooted in Akan religious language (i.e. sunsum), practices, and attitudes, which offers a fundamental understanding of their perception of the self; considered not just natural, but also spiritual (Gyekye 1995:68-69). Therefore, the Akan perspective exists as a dualism between the physical and a tangible spiritual realm, consisting of a variety of supernatural beings: onyankopōn/onyame (supreme being), abosom (lesser spirits), including nsamanfo (ancestors/spirits) including other terms which indicate a pluralistic worldview (Gyekye 1995:69-70). Additionally, Mwimnobi notes that Gyekye's conceptualisation of the self, is thus partially defined by the individual's connection to a cultural community, which is understood as "radical communitarianism" (see Mwimnobi 2003:23; Adeate 2023a:1-3); presupposing that equal moral standing is given to both the individual and the community (Mwimnobi 2003:23-24 cf. Gyekye 1997:45). Gyekye however, in addition, notes that the idea of the individual is present within the African community, although in this context, it does not lend itself to what he refers to as "moral egoism" or selfishness (Gyekye 1997:279 cf. Mwimnobi 2003:25-26). Moreover, Adeate builds on this notion and calls Gyekye's human personhood "moderate communitarianism" (Adeate 2023a:2).

Furthermore, Adeate maintains that Gyekye's moderate communitarianism refers to a relationality between the community and the individual, including the rights and responsibilities within Afro-communitarianism (see Adeate 2023a:2-3; Chimakonam & Ogbonnaya 2022:2-5), in which relationship involves both the community and the individual, exerting a partial influence on the formation of human personhood (Adeate 2023a:3-4 cf. Krog 2021:334). Krog adds that Gyekye (1987:36) supports the view espoused by Professor emeritus Kwesi Dickson from the Department for the Study of Religion, at the University of Ghana, in regarding that this idea of communitarianism is an aspect of African life that has been repeatedly highlighted by both African and non-African writers on Africa (Krog 2021:334-335 cf. Dickson 1981:193-195). Therefore, undoubtedly, for many people, this former particular trait is what defines the essence of what Dickson calls "Africanness" (Dickson 1981:195 cf. Molefe 2020b:6-7).

5.6.2 John S. Mbiti (1931-2019): Strict Communitarianism

Mbiti is considered one of the foundational thinkers in African philosophy, whose works have paved the way for major philosophical movements, especially where the narrative of communitarianism is concerned (Adeate 2023b:1-2). According to Krog, Mbiti is presented as the creator of the communitarian idea and the construct of the individual and his interconnectedness who owes his existence to other people (Krog 2021:335). Additionally, Mbiti espoused that the African view of the self can be summarised by the anecdote: "I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am" (Mbiti 1969:106 cf. Molefe 2020b:19-20). This is classified by Ikuli and Ukanag as an example of strict communitarianism where Mbiti, similar to Gyekye, notes the importance of African community along with its communal nature

is marked by relational ties: hence, in Mbiti's view, the individual cannot exist alone outside of the collective, rather one exists solely as part of the whole (Ikuli & Ukanag 2021:215-216). This can therefore also be considered as "Africana ontology" or "ubuntu" (Matthias 2021:44).

The notion of *ubuntu* is a term derived from the *Nguni* language, which refers to the essence of being human: synonyms for this term can be identified in the *seSotho* noun *botho*, as well as Swahili, *utu*, and Shona, *unhu* (Tarus & Lowery 2017:305-306). In addition, the notion ubuntu can also be understood as a global anthropological truth where humans are identified as social creatures, again, as explained earlier where the individual shares a communal identity with others (Tarus & Lowery 2017:306). Furthermore, the concept of ubuntu is also connected to the African reverence for ancestors, Masango notes that this idea is thus reflective of the common African *dictum*: "it takes a village to raise a child" (Masango 2006:938). As such, the individual is once again portrayed as interdependent on the community, and this is noted by Mbiti who regards that "an individual does not exist alone except corporately" (Mbiti 1969:109 cf. Masango 2006:938).

Masango maintains that this construct of individuality (or the self), within the African communal framework, consists of the paternal (or spiritual) and godly (or divine) attributes which both manifest and are explored fully by the individual within the community (Masango 2006:938-939). Therefore, it can never manifest in isolation, to which the Nguni tribe in South Africa iterates another maxim: "*Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*" which translates to "a person is a person because of other people" (Masango 2006:939). Ikuli and Ukanag notes this as having an implicit connection and play on words reference to an inversion of the earlier mentioned Cartesian anecdote "*cogito ergo sum*" therefore, this idea as promoted by Mbiti promotes the reality of the community above that of the individual (Ikuli & Ukanag 2021:215

cf. Mbiti 1969:141). Therefore, in contrast to Gyekye's unrestricted or radical communitarianism, Mbiti's communitarianism is considered to be "stricter" (Ikuli & Ukanag 2021:215-216, 223 cf. Adeate 2023:4). In Mbiti's case there is an individual, albeit that the individual exists only in reference to the community; this is codeified in Mbiti's Cartesian anecdote: "I am because we are and since we are, therefore I am" (Adeate 2023b:3-4).

5.6.3 Chukwudum B. Okolo (1935-2012): Integrative Humanism

Another seminal thinker within the African philosophical paradigm, is Professor Okolo from the *University of Nigeria*, who has been heralded as one of the first influential African philosophers. Okolo declares that one of the most recurring issues within philosophy, is the issue of the self; its status and place within nature, which he argues is almost as old as the field of philosophy itself (Okolo 1992:477). In his article titled, Self as a Problem in African Philosophy, Okolo echoes the confession of Socrates, Descartes' axiom, and Kant's Copernican revolution as precursors to the idea of self-inquiry, arguing that the quest for self-knowledge has been the challenge of virtually all philosophical schools of thought but also elaborating on the increased interest in African philosophical conjecture about selfhood (Okolo 1992:477 cf. Okolo 2003:247).

Furthermore, Okolo noted that despite the differing interpretations on humankind between the fields of theology and philosophy, the question of self-knowledge, or "understanding of the self" asserts immense importance and attention in philosophical discourse (Okolo 2003:247). In addition to this, Okolo argued in an earlier publication that the African has taken the Delphic injunction to "know thyself" seriously and therefore the concept of existence and beingness in both a cultural and environmental sense, as an African, has become of cardinal

importance to him (Okolo 1989:67-73). In addition, Chukwujekwu and Iloanya notes that within African philosophy and cosmogeny, the notion of social self is not a discrete concept, but rather something which resembles a series of inderactions and interconnections (Chukwujekwu & Iloanya 2020:905). Therefore, they maintain, that to exist means much more than just "being here", rather it means existing in relationship with all that is: both visible and invisible (Chukwujekwu & Iloanya 2020:905-906).

Okolo further argues that in African psychology, one cannot separate the individual African from his ontological and relational coexistence with other individuals, animals, and living beings (Okolo 2003:251-252). Therefore, the African cannot be separated from their communal life and the reality of an individual is thus determined by their relationships with others in a group or community (Okolo 2003:252). Okolo thus echoes not only Gyekye, but also Mbiti in his effort to position the African within the communitarian context. However, it is also worth noting that Okolo recognises that there is a distinctness of the individual within the African community, that is connected to them via the name they have been given (see Chukwujekwu & Iloanya 2020:906-907). As African names in and of themselves, embody sacred meaning to each individual and their families which may explain the circumstances of their birth (Matolino 2008:79 cf. Penzura 2021:69-71). In addition to this, man (in African philosophy) therefore exists the centre of creation which intersects intimately and personally with the visible created order and the invisible world of God, ancestors and spirits. As such the African idea of the self stands in relationship with everything above and below him (Chukwujekwu & Iloanya 2020:905 cf. Ugwu & Ozoemena 2023:2-3).

Another integral position in Okolo's perception of the self is rooted in his argument that a metaphysics of the self, restricted to nature, as it emphasises the self in its individualistic

autonomy is problematic (Chukwujekwu & Iloanya 2020:906). As such he thus justifies the African self, the "I", is subsequently defined by what he calls a "we-existence" just as much as the "we" in "I-existence" (Okolo 1991:128). Ugwu and Ozoemena echoes this in explaining that Okolo's "being-with" infers that "with-ness" exclusively explains the African living, as "within-ness" denotes his existence, similar to Heidegger's mitsein (Ugwu & Ozoemena 2023:3; Ukwuoma 2023:2-6 cf. Okolo 1991:128-129). Therefore, they maintain that the African in Okolo's view, is one who "lives-among-others", labelling it as integrative humanism, therefore denoting one who cannot live alone and whose life is best fulfilled in a communal existence. (Ugwu & Ozoemena 2023:3-4).

5.6.4 Motsamai Molefe (*c.* 1984-Present): Moral Individualism

Arriving at the present day, professor Molefe from the *University of Fort Hare* is an influential academic and African philosopher who introduces a unique contribution to the African philosophical discourse of the self. In stark contrast to the traditions displayed by Gyekye (1987:68), Mbiti (1969:106), and Okolo (2003:247), Molefe argues that African moral cultures are more individualistic than has been represented by earlier influences in the discourse (Molefe 2017a:50-51). In addition, Molefe criticises Gyeke and Mbiti's ideas of moderate (Gyekye 2002:297-301) and strict communitarianism, noting that African scholars are elusive when taking stances which could be classified under either: a) the community enjoying precedence over the individual, b) the individual being equal to the community, or conversely c) the individual enjoying precedence over the community (Molefe 2017b:9-10). Molefe maintains that instead of clarifying these issues, they each add to the polemic in trying to clarify "Afro-communitarianism" (Molefe 2017b:10). However, in clarifying this, Molefe notes that there is an African construction of personhood that is completely distinct from Western

conceptualisations, yet which is foundational to, and characteristic of African philosophical conjecture (Molefe 2019a:42-43).

As such, Molefe discusses personhood by distinguishing its conceptualisations and iterations throughout African philosophy; identifying four unique definitions of personhood (Molefe 2018:3 cf. Molefe 2020a:169-198): 1) the essential fact that one exists as a human being; 2) facts relating to psychological and/or social factors that are crucial for the accounting of one's identity; 3) "onto-moral features," which identify certain human beings as carriers of moral status; and finally, 4) moral agents that lead morally authentic lives (Molefe 2018:3). Molefe builds on this by identifying that 1) and 2) of the aforementioned precepts are metaphysical, emphasising what it means to be human by acknowledging a) what it means to be human in contrast to an object (i.e., a table or grain of salt) and b) including facts that pertain to accounting for one's personal identity (Molefe 2018:3-4 cf. Molefe 2020a:196-197). Furthermore, in addressing the final two paradigms, Molefe adds that these are normative as they assert a notion of moral value as departure point for the consideration of personhood: those who "perform well" are qualified as de facto persons, contrastingly those who do not who are disqualified as *de facto* "non-persons" (Molefe 2018:4 cf. Molefe 2020a:197-198).

Lougheed recognises that Molefe breaks away from the African traditional notions, when departing from the idea that community has intrinsic value by instead arguing that community has instrumental value as the means by which an individual obtains personhood (Lougheed 2022:28-29 cf. Molefe 2019a:42). Additionally, Lougheed maintains that contra Western monotheists, who believe that man's identity exists in relation to his immaterial soul: African philosophers, such as Molefe, regard that the philosophical idea of the self is an evaluative, prescriptive, and normative construct (Lougheed 2022:29). Molefe identifies this as "moral

individualism", in which he argues that African cultures are in some senses fundamentally individualistic (Molefe 2019a:42-43). Arguing that the focus of African ethical thought is strictly aimed towards the individual with the community playing a secondary role insofar as existing as an effective context to establish and secure individual goodness (Molefe 2019a:43-44). Molefe also notes a crucial distinction between being human and being a person, where the former denotes that there are "things" such as you and me (Molefe 2019b:38-39). The latter, thus personhood, he considers a "high praise" associated with one's conduct (Tutu 1999:35 cf. Molefe 2019b39-40).

Krog echoes Molefe's ideas in reference to Desmond Tutu and reconciliation in his book Made for Goodness, where Tutu recognises that "the opposite of wrong is not right, but solidarity with goodness" (Tutu & Tutu 2010:34 cf. Krog 2021:343). Krog interprets this as Tutu suggesting a moral universe and a possibility of wholeness which also exists as invitation to the beauty of the world. Therefore, Krog maintains that goodness is no mere legalistic commandment, rather it is what is considered good for "interconnectedness" (Krog 2021:343-344). Supporting the presumption of Molefe that the construction of the self and self-knowledge involves being aware of one's moral (ethical) conduct as individual. As only then does one constitute as a "self" in relation to one's community. As such, when considering the African construct of selfhood, it is incontrovertible to associate the notion of *Ubuntu* or oneness, as the inherent magic of the self in African esotericism.

This section endeavoured to extrapolate on influential discursive figures in philosophy, in order to formulate a somewhat comprehensive epistemological trajectory for a consideration of "the self" as a relative cultural framework. Through understanding this notion via the lenses of West, East, and Africa: the construction of selfhood in connection to self-knowledge

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became clear, that "the self" as substantive cannot exist in separation from one's narrative identity, one's actions, as well as one's placement in broader society. And such is the purpose of esotericism, the revelation of such secret self-knowledge via the engagement of mysticism and critical evaluations of selfhood towards self-development. Serdyuk supports this idea in noting that the lived experience of an individual creates a value system which directs the distance of one's movement as well as one's social inclusion during interactions with others (Serdyuk 2023:1-2).

5.7 Conclusion

Throughout the course of this chapter, an attempt was made to establish a geographical trajectory on esotericism in Africa, through evaluating certain highlighted religious traditions and influences on esoteric discourse, featuring prominently in Africa. This thesis agrees with Von Stuckrad who noted that there is not a single coherent tradition of esotericism, but rather that it exists within a discursive continuum of various cultures, religions and traditions. However, it is important to recognise that African esoteric discourse (much like the East) owes much of its heritage to the West. Yet it shows that Africa can invariably remain esoteric respectively, without the West. In this chapter, traces of African esotericism were explored in the erotic spiritual traditions of African Traditional Religion (ATR) in South Africa, Sufi Islam, and Afro-American Conjure (Supernaturalism). And while some of these traditions may have very little in common, they are united in their African intersectionality as victims of "othering", due to colonial influence and European attempts at cultural eradication.

Therefore, it is integral to this study to review the African diaspora and African identity constructs without Eurocentric presuppositions and hermeneutics. As such, exploring the African conceptualisation of self and identity as communal phenomenon is cardinally

important to effectively understand African approaches to the self, *vis-à-vis* the notion of "Ubuntu" without imposing Eurocentric presuppositions on constructs of "the self" in Africa. Therefore, recognition was given to influential African philosophers throughout the African continent: Kwame Gyekye, John Mbiti, Chukwudum Okolo, and Motsamai Molefe: who all provide irrevocable contributions extrapolating on the concept of selfhood, each providing a unique approach to understanding the role of community in relation to the formation of the self in the aforementioned *Afrikana Weltanschauungen* especially in considering its relation to Africana esotericism and religio-spiritual identity. As "Africanness" and "Blackness" continue to suffer under essentialist approaches by Western society, perpetually misconstruing African non-hegemonic spirituality as "devil worship" or "witchcraft" while stigmatising it as "demonic". This is remnant of the aforementioned Apartheid-era meta-narrative of the "Satanic panic", demonisation of the Khoisan, and North American popular culture's racialised misappropriation of African- American Conjure, rootwork, and alternative spirituality during their enslavement of African indigenous peoples.

In addition, similarly, it was also argued that Islam has (just as the construct of an Orientalist "mystical" East) been elevated with idealised presuppositions: elevating (prioritising) certain discourses and sects, above another in an attempt to perpetuate a "wise Barbarian" narrative, based on an idealised mysticism and embellished intellectualism due to Eurocentric comparisons. Yet even though scholars like Saif and Sorgenfrei argue against the exclusivist approach to Sufism in Islamic esoteric discourse, this chapter applied Sufism as exemplary – not necessarily exclusive – to prominent African esoteric discourse, not necessarily to perpetuate the Kafkaesque mystical embellishment and idealisation of Islam. It seemed rather to justifiably root it as African esoteric discourse, towards establishing Africana esotericism as independent esoteric construct. This is not to say that there are no other traces

of esotericism within other Islamic sects, rather that sexuality and erotic discourses in Sufism, as unique African constructs, pry open the discussion of tracing Africa ideologically and its unique esoteric roots. However, it is worth acknowledging that this discourse on Africana esotericism as enigmatic religio-spiritual representative of self-knowledge, is far from over. This necessitates a prioritisation of further study of Africa as unique cradle of esoteric beliefs and occulture. Moreover, quite notably each of these respective traditions and discourses have been the subject of several theses. And as such, this chapter cannot do them each justice, comparatively. Nevertheless, a comparative study between Western, Eastern, and African esotericism (towards a global esotericism) is necessary if we are to level and diversify the collective esoteric playing field.

CHAPTER 6

Epistemology Of The Self: Integrating Esotericism As Post-Theistic Spirituality

6.1 Introduction

The concept of hidden knowledge residing within oneself has served as a fundamental theme in the fields of philosophy, psychology, and religious studies (see Harcourt 2011:171–175; Klein 2012:254–255; cf. Steiner 2015:5–6). As stated in Chapter Three by Bogdan (2007:5-7), McCalla (2001:435), Broek and Hanegraaff (1998:viii), as well as Chapters Four and Five, this has been identified as a third element of esotericism that has consistently been acknowledged, but possibly not given enough attention. Furthermore, it could be contended that discussions regarding ritualistic manifestations of sexuality in relation to the physical body, and the sacredness of eroticism, are merely pretexts for individuals who indulge in sensual pleasure and deviant hedonism. This thesis has aimed to demonstrate that approaching sex with a sense of sacredness can potentially enhance one's understanding of it, despite its inherently personal nature.

Furthermore, Stephenson and Meston found, through the analysis of repeated-measures data, that sexual well-being is consistently linked to life satisfaction in a diverse range of individuals studied over a period of time (Stephenson & Meston 2014:6–10). According to Stephenson and Meston (2014:10), the individuals mentioned reported feeling highly satisfied in their relationships and had low levels of anxiety about attachment, which were identified as factors that provide protection. Women who experienced a decline in their sexual well-being had smaller decreases in their overall life satisfaction if they reported high

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relationship satisfaction or lower attachment anxiety. These findings indicate that having a healthy and positive relationship with sex, can help reduce the negative effects of sexual difficulties on overall life satisfaction (Stephenson & Meston 2014:10–11; cf. Flynn *et al.*, 2016:1649–1651). It is therefore relevant to note that sexuality and having a healthy relationship therein not only increases life satisfaction but also increases health.

Gianotten, *et alia* note this in showcasing that benefits from sexual intercourse include a reduction in pain, improved sleep, an improved immune system, influencing a positive mood and increasing physical exercise and so forth (Gianotten, *et al.* 2021:3-8). Therefore, this chapter wishes to note that despite the fact that sexuality (especially in a magickal sense) is beneficial for one's physiological wellbeing overall, but in applying it as a spiritual practice via sex magick, it has the potential to assist as vehicle in the revelatory process of secret (esoteric) knowledge about the self, by celebrating and liberating it (see Urban 2004:696-698 cf. 2006:18-20, 45).

This chapter provides a summary of the study objectives, ultimately presenting the findings from Chapters Three, Four, and Five. This thesis includes a comparative analysis of how the traditions examined incorporated sex magick and how it relates to post-theistic spiritual expression. Therefore, overall, this chapter functions as a concluding discussion, emphasising important concepts in this study and offering an understanding of the components of self-knowledge in the context of self-knowledge. In addition, Chapter Six also addresses the constraints of this study and, consequently, identifies potential avenues for future investigation and exploration. Hence, Chapter Six functions as a conclusive chapter, encompassing future study considerations and reflections on the research themes investigated in this thesis.

6.2 Towards A Trans-Linguistic and Cultural (Global) Esotericism: West, East, and "The Rest"

At the start of this thesis, it was noted that esotericism almost exclusively received attention from a Western perspective in academic scholarship, and that such meta-narratives dominate esoteric scholarship as has been seen with Hanegraaff (2013:3-14), Antoine Faivre (1994b:10-13), Julian Strube (2020:45-46), Egil Asprem (2021:130). In addition, however, it was also notable that emerging esoteric scholarship has developed a modicum of malcontent with esoteric scholarship's treatment of the West as a diffusionist cradle of initiatory knowledge to "the rest" (in this case in the East and Africa). This tendency has been exemplified by Liana Saif (2021:67-68) who in accordance with Strube (2021:45-46) and Asprem and Strube, criticised the notion that all esoteric currents ought to be organised under a Western construct as an example of "cultural essentialism" (Asprem & Strube 2021:2-6). In addition, the main arguments are best displayed by Strube who argued that the way esotericism is being perceived, conceptualises it in such a way that non-Western esoteric currents are excluded via the propagation of a religionist approach which thereby excludes non-Western historical contexts (Strube 2021:45-47).

6.2.1 Descriptivism, Religionism, And Comparativism: Towards A Systematic Analysis of Non-Western Esoteric Discourse

In this thesis several approaches were taken to establish a hermeneutical lens through which esoteric discourse within contemporary academic discourse may be understood. While it was identified that religionism has been the most prominent discursive understanding in esotericism, introduced by Faivre and Versluis; aside from religionism, Hanegraaff suggested

another approach in the studying of esotericism, namely "descriptivism" (Hanegraaff 2008:131-132). In this particular case, Hanegraaff points out that scholars who assume such a position tend to be fearful of being perceived as not objective enough (Hanegraaff 2008:132).

Therefore, erring in the opposite direction (away from religionism), especially when dealing with "subjective" experiential phenomena that do not align with scholarly conceptualisations (Hanegraaff 2008:132-133). Chapman describes this act as showing reluctance to prescribe or subscribe to the pronouncements of those who prescribe (Chapman 2020:54). As such, descriptivism is essentially not sharing similar attitudes towards "correctness" as prescriptivists would (see Joseph 2020:17-18) – this act, in so doing, as Chapman maintains is therefore rather indicative of loyalty than of activity (Chapman 2020:54-55 cf. Hanegraaff 2008:133). Throughout the course of this thesis, a balance between religionism, comparativism, and descriptivism may be observed. This is due to the fact that the value of Eliade, in terms of religionism, cannot be understated in the study of esotericism (see Hanegraaff 2016:156-158 cf. Hanegraaff 1995:11-101).

Hanegraaff acknowledges, religionism owes its roots to Carl Jung and most importantly Mircea Eliade, to whom the religionist study of Western esotericism, aside from Antoine Faivre, is deeply indebted to (Hanegraaff 2016:158 cf. Strube 2023a:3 cf. Faivre 2010:183-189). This is evident in the sense that the concept of religionism (despite its grounding in academic objectivity) moves beyond the scholarly when delving into the metaphysical, experiential, or even espousing a spiritual truth which cannot be threatened by historical currents and change in the study of religion *vis-à-vis* esotericism (Hanegraaff 2016:158 cf. Hanegraaff 2012:306-307).

Moreover, when it comes to comparativism, this approach highlights the fluidity of the "Western" boundaries of esotericism, by way of focusing on the East as well as, in the case of this research, Africa and bringing attention to their relative esoteric currents (see Page & Finley 2021:168-170). Asprem notes that they collectively present a powerful case for the dismissal of exclusively referring to esotericism as "Western" in general (Asprem 2014:3-4). In addition, Asprem also mentions another way of going about this discourse and critiquing this demarcation, pointing out that in identifying structural similarities in the aforementioned currents which originate in their relative (therefore other, as in, non-Western) historical, cultural, and geographical contexts. The comparative approach is most evident (Asprem 2014:4-5), as is seen in the preceding chapters. Strube builds on the logic of Asprem by highlighting the terms "occult" and "esoteric" as examples of trans-linguistic and cultural descriptors for the mystical (esoteric) religions and traditions, globally (Strube 2023a:2-3).

In addition , it was noted that there has not yet been a systematic approach to the comparative study of esotericism (Strube 2023a:4). This is something that this thesis aimed to change, whilst also challenging presupposed definitions of esotericism and offering a novel description via the analysis of practices in various contexts (particularly that of West, East and Africa).

Thereby, the universality of esoteric currents was explored via a systematic comparativist approach. Strube proposes a decentred historiography that only can be achieved via esotericism studied as comparative category (Strube 2023b:356-357), which he argues is integral and therefore ought to be indispensable to religious studies (cf. Strube 2024:2-5). As an example of this, Strube remarks that many references to 19th century currents which many scholars would subsume under the category of "Western" (esotericism) were widespread in Bengali and eventually European orientalist discourse, which ineffably gave

birth to Egyptian mystery cults as well as the esoteric language in contemporary (South) Asian scholarship (Strube 2023b:361-362 cf. Strube 2022:65-68).

6.2.2 Riddled with Polemics: Emerging Criticism Of Western Esotericism

Besides Strube (2021:45-47), another vocal criticism emerged from Saif who argues that the Western approach to esoteric scholarship has resulted in a problematic othering of non-Western discourses such as Islam, historicising what she calls: "the binary East versus West" (see Saif 2021:68). Saif extrapolates even further on her rationale in arguing that, "now there is 'the West', 'the East', and 'the Rest'" (Saif 2021:70 cf. Hanegraaff 2013:14-17). It is also worth mentioning that these pioneers of what Hanegraaff describes, "the grand polemical narrative" (Hanegraaff 2005:248) is not new to esoteric scholarship and has been highlighted, although not explicitly, by Ernst who accused the West of an "intellectual apartheid regime" (Ernst 2010:25) through which the West imposed its superiority via segregating other (non-Western) currents and labelling them as "inferior" considering the elevation of Eurocentricity (Ernst 2010:25-26).

This notion by Ernst is supported by Asprem, who additionally argues that combined evidence from Eastern European religions, besides Tantra, Yoga, Zen Buddhism and Taoist Alchemy, collectively provide a substantial argument for the dismissal of an exclusive "Western" demarcation in the study of esotericism (Asprem 2014:4-5). Even Hanegraaff in response to Asprem, notes that a strong case for the dismissal of esotericism as "intrinsically Western" can be made, noting that the usage of "the West" has more to do with an emphasis on historical specificity, than trans-historical universality (Hanegraaff 2016:157-159,165 cf. Asprem 2014:7-11).

However, Hanegraaff regards that such presuppositions, regarding criticisms of "Western" esotericism, are products of radical theorists who are eager to deconstruct Western culture, and that such research is best approached with minimal theoretical baggage replaced by listening to sources (Hanegraaff 2019:151-153). Strube, however, remarks that one need not be radical to recognise the need for the re-evaluation of notions such as "Western culture" (Strube 2021a:45). Strube maintains one need not support postmodern theorems to encourage insights which argue for a plurality of discourse approaches which transcend the "Western" demarcation (Strube 2021a:45-47 cf. Strube 2021b:1180-1183). For a more detailed discussion, revisit Chapter Three.

6.2.3 There Is Light at The End Of The Tunnel: "Esotericism" Is Not Property Of The West

Hanegraaff made an incontrovertible contribution to the development of this discussion on the globalisation of esotericism. Hanegraaff noted that both the opinions claiming that a) esotericism belongs to the West alone, and b) esotericism is a global phenomenon are problematic in the extreme (Hanegraaf, 2015:62). Furthermore, he maintains that if we argue for an extreme global construct, we inevitably run the risk of universalising esotericism, irrespective of its unique attributes and demarcations. Furthermore, if we opt for the latter, such essentialist demarcations (in other words East, West, and so forth) could create misunderstandings (Hanegraaff 2015:62-63). Additionally, Hanegraaff argues that both demarcations are exceptionally difficult to consistently maintain (Hanegraaff 2015:63). Strube rectifies this in discussing the historical and scholarly complexities surrounding the terms "esoteric" and "occult" within global religious studies. He critiques the lack of systematic

reflection on these terms across diverse cultural contexts, advocating for a Global Religious History approach to redefine their meanings empirically and historically (Strube 2023a:3).

Moreover, he highlights the evolution of "Western esotericism" from a universalist to more historically grounded perspective, emphasising its limitations in fostering a comparative study of esoteric traditions beyond the West (Strube 2023a:3-4). In addition, Strube also notes that Zander questioned to what extent discourse will perpetuate the Western imperialist tradition in applying a European construct for non-Western currents (Strube 2023a:3-4 cf. Zander 2021:28-30). Critically, Strube addresses these issues of Zander's terminological imperialism in religious studies, by proposing a decentred historiography that includes non-Western perspectives and challenges essentialist interpretations (Strube 2023a:4). Ultimately, Strube argues for a more inclusive understanding of esotericism and occultism in religious and historiographic discourse, emphasising that esotericism as a construct is not a European concept to begin with (Strube 2023a:4-5). Arguing that its global entanglements invite scholars to explore their complex histories across linguistic and regional boundaries (Strube 2023a:5 cf. Asprem 2014:4-11).

6.3 Restating Research Objectives and Questions

In light of the above, by engaging in a descriptive, as opposed to an exclusively religionist, discussion on esoteric discourse this thesis aimed to highlight that the polemics of a Western demarcation for esotericism do not only exist between West and East, but also Africa. As such, the research aimed to initiate a discussion on esoteric discourse from an inclusive point of view, giving credit to non-hegemonic discourses in the East and Africa, in addition to Western traditions. The central theme uniting these various traditions, in this thesis, is the

approach to esotericism via sexuality. This is argued to be an intrinsically post-theistic vehicle, delineating the pursuit of self-knowledge via bodily exploration *vis-à-vis* eroticism.

In the first chapter, the initial problem statement argued that an introductory investigation into the academic discourse and literature on esotericism alludes to predominantly Western and arguably Eurocentric bias when it comes to the study of Esotericism, as evidenced by the references to Chapter Three in this thesis. Based on this, it was contended that there is therefore a distinct paradigmatic differentiation when it comes to esoteric disciplines in the West, East, and Africa. In addition, although the Western region has received significant attention, the practices in the Eastern region and Africa are rarely investigated or acknowledged for their contributions to esoteric discussion (in the West). Therefore, it was important to demarcate certain trajectories when it came to specified geographical parameters. This was achieved by identifying the roots of Western esotericism, which resemble a multi-cultural exchange instead of a singular homogeneous tradition.

Another concern arose from the often-preconceived idea that sexuality and spirituality are aspects belonging "exotericism," which in a literal sense, implies that the understanding of self-spirituality and sexuality is derived from an external (divine) reality (refer to Chapter One). According to this, it was therefore argued that self-knowledge should not be obtained in the way it is currently done (exoterically). As such, a discourse on the History of sexuality by Foucault, along with the psychosexual development theory of Freud (see Chapter Two2), was discussed: displaying the reductionist and perennialist views often engaged traditionally, by the Stoics and later influencing the Christian Patristic tradition when it came to the body. Creating a polemic for repression and shame accompanied with repression and dissuasion from gratifying the so-called "fruits of the flesh".

This enshrined a modern culture of shame and taboo, when it came to the pursuit of bodiliness. Including the expression thereof. As such, a problem emerged not just related to the expression of sexuality as spirituality, but it presented an obstacle for spirituality and the recognition for sexuality as a form of spirituality. Therefore, this thesis suggested that self-knowledge could be achieved by exploring eroticism as esoteric vehicle towards self-knowledge, which can be seen reflected in examples from esoteric religio-spiritual traditions in the West (Chapter Three), East (Chapter Four) and Africa (Chapter Five). However, another problem was identified and that was the issue of defining esoteric spirituality in the digital age, therefore resulting in the necessity of re-establishing spirituality discourse within the context of esotericism (see Chapter Two).

6.4 Summary of Findings: One Esotericism to Rule Them All?

Building on the above, this thesis inadvertently results in a multiplicity of solutions for the development of esoteric discourse in a global context. This thesis identified that esotericism is not the property of the West and that the usage of the cultural framework of "Western" as promoted by Wouter Hanegraaff, et alia, is superfluous as it obstructs the further expansion of the field into other territories, including the East and Africa, because of its Eurocentric and perennialist ideations of the East as "cradle of mysticism" and Africa the birthplace of the colloquial "wise barbarian". This occurs even though esotericism directly implicates post-enlightenment marginalised discourses.

These currents are not only present in the West, but their presence can also be identified in the East and Africa. Although, very few sources aside from that of Hugh Urban, Julian Strube, Kennet Granholm, and even Liana Saif acknowledge the East in its own right as context for

unique (in this context, separate from the West) manifestations of esotericism. Additionally, even fewer scholarship, excluding that of Hugh Page, Margarita Guillory, Stephen Finley, Stanley Anozie, and Mahmoud Masaeli, along with brief mentions by Wouter Hanegraaff, discuss the notion that there are manifestations related to Africana (or African) esoteric currents in the African lived experience: which this study achieved by providing an in-depth discourse on Africana studies, post-colonialism and colonialism-related history in Africa which contributed to the erosion of African identity and conceptualisation of "the self".

6.4.1 Chapter 1: Esoteric Religion, Sexuality and Spirituality: Introducing the Whats, Whys, Hows and Wheres

In addition to providing much-needed definitions for the approaches that were taken in the process of formulating this discourse on esotericism, the first chapter served as an illustration of the proposed background, methodology, and motivation for the study. In this chapter, the task at hand was to begin painting a picture of the origins and historical background of esotericism in general, as well as the dominant Zeitgeist and attitude that exist towards esotericism, sex and sexuality *vis-à-vis* religion in geographical contexts such as the West. Another topic that was to be covered in this chapter was an introduction to the comparison between the concepts of spirituality and religion. Additionally, this chapter served as guideline for the specific religious and spiritual traditions, that underpinned the subject of discussion in this research and that provided examples for sexuality and self-knowledge. The purpose of this section was to establish the context; while offering a structure for the manner in which the investigation would be carried out by illustrating, in addition to the essential definitions, the research problem, an overview of the existing literature, the research contribution, and the methodology.

As previously stated, esoteric traditions in the East and Africa, aside from the West, have not been thoroughly investigated or acknowledged, resulting in a stigmatic and Eurocentric perception (projection) due to the limited available knowledge about them, as well as the limited explorations of sexuality and spirituality within these contexts. Hence, this thesis chapter, towards establishing a purpose for this research, argued for the elucidation and furnishing of insights into the essence and significance of customs, within these demarcated contexts, in the pursuit of self-awareness via eroticism. Sexuality practices (e.g. eroticism / sex magick), which are established as religious and spiritual discussions, are often, as argued in Chapter Two, subject to repression in various contexts (see Foucault 1982-2018). This repression is primarily caused by the prevailing viewpoints of exoteric asceticism found in religions such as Christianity and to a certain extent Islam (cf. Kirabaev & Christyakova 2020:3-8 & Chapter 5).

This chapter as such justified the purpose for this research, by offering suggestions on how esoteric practices, within their respective contexts, promote autonomy, freedom, and independence (from traditional religious frameworks). It also argued sex magick in esotericism as method for achieving healing, enlightenment, and autonomy in the post-theistic spiritual sexual pursuit (see Chapter Three for a full discussion). These methods thus aim to separate the individual from the monopolies and dogmas of restrictive religious narratives, which often hinder the exploration of sexuality and embodiment as obstacles to spiritual enlightenment (Hartenstein 2015:459-460 cf. Kapp 2020).

6.4.2 Chapter 2: Methodological Frameworks: Esotericism, Sexuality, And Spirituality

In this chapter, esotericism, sexuality, and spirituality were discussed to outline this thesis' methodology in greater more depth. Analysing esotericism as a discursive framework showed that academic scholarship disagrees on its interpretation. However, it is usually defined as rejected or hidden (self) knowledge accessible only to initiates in a prescribed tradition. Thus, it was established that esotericism often refers to exotic and mystical traditions, beliefs, and experiences outside mainstream religio-spiritual discourse. Furthermore, introductory statements examined the "Western" demarcation in contemporary academic discourse in favour of a more globalised approach to esoteric scholarship. However, the third and fourth chapters expand on this idea in greater depth.

In addition, Sigmund Freud's epistemological engagement with sexuality as a psychoanalytic phenomenon personifies the self as esoteric. His seminal theorems on psychosexual development and dream interpretation (with reference to eroticism) show that sexuality is a cognitive and biopsychosocial phenomenon that shapes our identity and sense of self. Thus, Freud's approaches to sexuality are essential to any study seeking epistemological frameworks on the self and eroticism and a foundational basis for defining and conceptualising sexuality and the self. Michel Foucault's four-volume historical-philosophical treatise on sexuality and Western society was examined alongside Freud.

Key discourses in his voluminous and complex rationale of sexuality from the Greco-Roman period to the Victorian age and beyond show that sexuality is still met with suspicion and taboo in some sections of our society. Foucault showed that this is not a new phenomenon, and sexuality has had a contentious relationship with religion and ethics since the golden age.

Most notably, the Christian church was not solely responsible. However, Foucault shows that sexuality and pleasure liberate and enhance self-care. Conclusively, this chapter examined how esoteric discourse has manifested in the digital age and its relationship to conspiracism and misinformation, providing several examples (known and unknown) to contemporary scholarship to distinguish esoteric spirituality from "conspirituality" and transcendentalism.

 In summary, this chapter examined esoteric spirituality through theocentric, anthropocentric, transcendentalist, and *Right-Hand Path (RHP)* and *Left-Hand Path (LHP)* discourses by using the works of thinkers such as Alan Watts, Mircea Eliade, Wessel Stoker, Stephen Flowers, Aleister Crowley, and Friedrich Nietzsche. Thus, it established esoteric spirituality as thelemic (or "willed") transcendental metamorphosis to secret self-knowledge.

6.4.3 Chapter 3: Not-So-Secret Self-Knowledge? Tracing Esoteric Spirituality In The West

Chapter Three proposed the delineation a distinctively Western form of esotericism and self-awareness with the assistance of works from Eliphas Lévi, Helena Petrovna (Madame) Blavatsky, Aleister Crowley, and Anton LaVey, highlighting the self as an overlooked aspect in these esoteric discussions. In terms of theory, it was established that esotericism and the concept of "the self" are elusive, which complicated matters. There is a lack of agreement among scholars and philosophers of religion regarding the existence of such a thing, its definition, and whether it is a distinct, discursive construct. The definitions of esotericism, selfhood, and "Western" demarcations vary among scholars and consequently are not universally agreed upon. This chapter employed Crowleyan notions such as sex magick and *magia sexualis*, along with Western philosophical perspectives on the "self," to present an alternative portrayal of Western esotericism and self-awareness as interconnected topics.

To comprehend the development of prominent religious concepts in the Western world, it was also necessary to trace their origins back to the earliest stages of human existence. Additionally, it is important to recognise that native faiths such as Paganism and the Occult, not only emerged as enduring examples of ancient faith in the present time, but also embody distinct forms of esoteric spiritual expression. The latter established the fundamental basis for the exploration of mystical experiences in the natural world, creating a balanced and peaceful connection between the divine and the secular. Therefore, the spiritualities (confer Chapter Two) highlighted in Chapter Three establishes a connection between the individual and the mystical encounter, enabling the unveiling hidden knowledge about oneself, the universe, and existence via hedonistic expression.

Consequently, it can be reasoned that 'Western' esotericism is founded upon the connection between the will, transcendence, and trans-personal phenomena. Upon examining the politics and controversies surrounding the development of religion, it becomes evident that religion, including its esoteric aspects, is a syncretic worldwide phenomenon rather than a creation exclusive to the Western world. It is important to acknowledge that a significant number of people from Western cultures have purposefully or inadvertently appropriated sacred knowledge, written collections, and customs from Eastern and African cultures. Thus, although this chapter primarily examined geographical indicators for currents specifically characterising Western currents, it is thus incontrovertible that these indicators are not limited to Western currents alone. In addition, the migration of cultures and their practices, complicates this matter and gives rise to debate. As such, while it is arguably possible to identify prominent Western discourses by great thinkers, none of them exclusively consist of "pure" Western concepts.

Moreover, this discussion unveiled a singular aspect: the concept of esotericism (before being established as academic discipline by Antoine Faivre and later Wouter Hanegraaff) as a religious and spiritual phenomenon, has existed since the beginning of human worship, even though the study of "Western esotericism" is relatively recent. Additionally, esotericism scholarship is primarily focused on "Western esotericism" as a demarcation. Chapter 3 in tandem with other scholars such as Julian Strube, and others therefore questioned: does the concept of the "West" as a comprehensive and all-encompassing category for all esoteric knowledge remain relevant in a world that consistently defines boundaries around complex categories? Should we not also appreciate the perspectives of East and African esoteric voices? The answer to all these questions is in the affirmative. Therefore, since it was established that the study of esotericism (in the Western region) is more prevalent than in other geographical areas.

This chapter also identifies post-theism as historical development owing its heritage to enlightenment thinkers such as François Marie Arouet (Voltaire), Friedrich Nietzsche, Karl Marx, and Sigmund Freud, following the new atheist/atheism movement established by "The Four Horsemen": Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, Christopher Hitchens and Daniel Dennett (et alia) as a Western concept, Here traditional theistic precepts are done away with while moving towards a personalised spirituality under non-theism and eventually post-theism. These concepts possibly owe their origins to 20th century Unitarian/Unitarian-Universalist theologian and philosopher Henry Nelson Wieman, highlighting perspectives by Andy Sanders, Hendrik Johan Adriaanse, Andries van Aarde, John Shelby Spong, Richard Kearney, and Jaco Beyers.

Chapter Three also showcases that there is a greater need for non-Western esotericism currents to (also) be given a voice. It is argued, that to initiate a new phase of research on perceivably non-dominant cultures and practices, that possess a substantial amount of esoteric knowledge, it is imperative to dismantle the colonial influences on, and approaches to esotericism. However, to refrain from proverbially "discarding the baby with the bathwater"; forsaking or demonising "the West" completely, we should rather acknowledge and recognise its deserving accomplishments in establishing esotericism "on the map".

6.4.4 Chapter 4: Esotericism in The East: Discussions On Marginality, Eurocentrism And Colonialism

Chapter Four explored the concepts of Orientalism, Occidentalism, and colonialism, focusing on the division between the East and the West and examining the distinctions between Eastern and Western esotericism. Furthermore, the ideas of selfhood put forth by Gautama Siddhartha, Sun Tzu, Confucius, and Jiddu Krishnamurti were expanded upon to illustrate that the path to selfhood and self-knowledge are considered virtuous endeavour in Eastern philosophy. As such, it was identified that this understanding of "the self" aligns with the moralistic principles of virtue ethics.

This chapter also demonstrated the process by which modern European thought marginalised, stigmatised, and assimilated Eastern wisdom via colonialist interpretations and ideations of the East and its religio-spiritual currents as exotically mystical. According to Edward Said and other orientalist scholars of the late 1900s, the act of defining the East as a distinct and independent geographical boundary, free from Eurocentric assumptions, caused a division in this chapter's attempt at distinguishing East from West. This situation

posed a significant challenge in historiography as the concept of "East" and "Eastern" became a subject of controversy, questioning the specific locations that should be encompassed or excluded. The discussion revealed that the Western fascination with an idealised and mysterious East has led to the prioritisation of specific geographical frameworks over others.

Certain scholars argue that the illusion of the East (particularly India) being the birthplace of ancient mysticism and wisdom was sustained by Western projections and the idealisation of this notion. Several other scholars among whom are Liana Saif and Julian Strube have contended that Eurocentric ideals, when applied to wisdom traditions, have objectified and excessively revered (thereby bastardising) the cultures of the East. The purpose of this chapter was to demonstrate the intricate and uncertain nature of the discourse, without favouring any particular side in the debate. It was identified that Antoine Faivre argued; esotericism is endorsed by numerous eminent scholars as a "form of thought".

Therefore, as these thought streams transcend geographical limitations, no individual can assert exclusive ownership or origins. The exchange of ideas between migratory cultures throughout history adds complexity to the discussion on colonialism as a precept. Nevertheless, cultural traditions identified in Egyptian paganism, Hinduism, and Buddhism, demonstrate that sexuality is regarded as a ritualistic phenomenon that fosters healing, knowledge, and virtue, particularly in Asia, by means of enlightenment. Sexuality as such is ceremonialised in these cultures, through practices such as Egyptian coffin spells, fertility and virility rites, the Vedas, and Tantra, in order to attain concealed self-awareness and enlightenment. As a result, these practices are identified as unique examples of Eastern

esoteric discourse, embodying transgressive ideas and systems in their unique expressions and approaches to eroticism.

6.4.5 Chapter 5: Sexuality and Spirituality In Africana Esotericism: Slavery, Apartheid, Ancestors, Blues, and Ubuntu

This chapter explored prominent African and diasporic religious traditions along with their impact on esoteric discourse in order to establish a geographical path for esotericism in Africa. Additionally, it identified that African esoteric discourse, similar to the East, exhibits a significant Western influence. Which demonstrates that African religion can maintain its esoteric nature independent of Western conceptualisations. As such, this chapter identified the presence of esotericism in African Traditional Religion (ATR), Sufi Islam, and Afro-American Conjure (Supernaturalism) erotic traditions and especially in the case of Afro-American Conjure, locating its origins back to West-Africa. Although these traditions may vary, this chapter identified that they are united by the experience of being marginalised and treated as outsiders due to the influence of colonialism and the erasure of African culture by Europeans.

Hence, this chapter engaged in an implicit post-colonial discourse displaying an attempt to examine the African diaspora and African identity concepts without relying on Eurocentric interpretations. Therefore, they were an essential aspect of comprehending African perspectives on self and identity, particularly in relation to the concept of community. This chapter argues that such a discussion is vital for understanding the African (esoteric) notion of the self, identifying the philosophy of *Ubuntu* as inextricably linked to the African conceptualisation of "the self" as communal inter-dependent construct.

Kwame Gyekye, John Mbiti, Chukwudum Okolo, and Motsamai Molefe were acknowledged as influential African philosophers throughout the continent, due to their significant contributions to the understanding of selfhood and their distinct perspectives on the role of community in shaping the self in what Wouter Hanegraaf identified as *Afrikana Weltanschauungen*, particularly in relation to Africana esotericism. This was identified as relevant due to Western society persistently misinterpreting African identity, and by implication non-hegemonic (i.e. non-colonial) spirituality as "devil worship" or "witchcraft" and categorising it as "demonic," exacerbating the marginalisation of "Africanness" and "Blackness." Furthermore, it was also noted that the enduring presence of the Apartheid-era meta-narrative of the "Satanic panic," the vilification of the Khoisan people, and the appropriation of Afro-American Conjure, rootwork, and alternative spirituality by Western popular culture, are narratives which emerged during the enslavement of African indigenous peoples, persisting into the mid to late 1900's and manifesting as segregationist policies, still apparent today in contemporary society.

Islam is identified here as African religious construct, however similar to the Orientalist portrayal of the mystical East, Islam has been elevated with romanticised assumptions, favouring specific discussions and sects (such as Sufism) to maintain a narrative of the "wise Barbarian" that is rooted in idealised mysticism and exaggerated intellectualism, influenced by Eurocentric comparisons. Despite the arguments made by scholars such as Liana Saif and Simon Sorgenfrei, against the exclusive approach to Sufism in Islamic esoteric discourse, this chapter approached a non-romanticised Sufism as indicative of a uniquely African esoteric discourse.

The intention was, therefore, to avoid perpetuating the mystical embellishment and idealisation of Islam from a Western perspective. Collectively with the other discourses on ATR and Conjure, this comparative and discursive approach appeared to provide a valid reason for the development of Africana esotericism as a distinct branch of esotericism. The preference of Sufism is justified in this chapter by the identification of Sufism standing out due to its uniquely beautiful exploration of sexuality and eroticism *vis-à-vis* spirituality, establishing it as a valuable contribution to a discourse on Islamic esotericism (*al-bāṭiniyya*) and its foundations in Africa.

The discussion in Chapter Five thus revolved around the topic of the developing esoteric field known as "Africana esotericism", identifying it as irreplaceable theme in analysing the religious and spiritual exploration of esotericism, eroticism and the self in religion studies. Thus, it involved the examination of Africa as the origin of esoteric beliefs and erotic occult practices via the perspectives of Nkunzi Zandile Nkabinde (Sangoma) as a "male woman" showcasing how ancestors exercise sexual desire via their hosts in order to maintain the potency; *Rābi'a al-Adawiyya* and *Muhyi' al-Din ibn al-'Arabi* (Sufi mystics) resembling the opposing factions in sexuality in Islamic mysticism, with the former being a famous ascetic and the latter being a prominent hedonist. Finally, along with Marie Laveau infamous for a life of lasciviousness, alleged sex ritualism in addition to blues singer Bessie Smith highlighting a key aspect of Africana esotericism's magickal manifestation in Blues music.

6.5 Discussion of Findings: From Crowley To Laveau Towards Post-Theistic Sexual Self-Spirituality

What does it mean for sex magick to be a post-theistic expression? And how does this relate to esotericism and self-knowledge? While it may seem that post-theism indicates a worldview without god, in Chapter Three, various perspectives on post-theism were incorporated to indicate that it does, in-fact, not refer to a post-god society – well, not in a literal atheistic sense but rather in a traditional sense. It has been identified that certain traditional religious positions (specifically traditional theism) often represent a constrictive and restrictive dogmatism.

This results in little to no space for individual spiritual exploration and/or creativity. For this reason, as has been seen in the arguments by John Shelby Spong and Richard Kearny in Chapter Three: post-theism represents an opportunity for the individual to do away with traditional theistic religion, towards embracing a self-determined narrative journey towards the sacred. Moreover, it should also be noted that unlike Mircea Eliade, there is no more a divide between the sacred and the profane. Post-theism's hospitability to the other, presents an opportunity for the sacred to become profane, and vice versa; as such the body is no longer constrained to traditional dogmatism, but liberated via a secular spirituality in and of the world.

As such, sex magick as exemplary culmination of sacred and the profane, identifies esotericism as suggested paradigm, or avenue rather, for the possibility of a non-traditional spirituality, where a post-theistic spiritual worldview is accommodated. Therefore, in not being restricted to traditional approaches as has been identified with mainstream Christianity, Judaism, and Islam as constitutive of the right-hand path, non-traditional explorations of the

self via the perceived transgressive left-hand path, establishes an opportunity for a customised spirituality of selfhood.

Sex magick is, therefore, one of the most powerful avenues through which this can be attained. As sexuality, in and of itself, cannot be separated from selfhood, and as mentioned elsewhere in this thesis, eroticism is wholly esoteric when approached as a sacred hermeneutic. It is thus the argument of this chapter that there is no spiritual practice that comes quite as close, insofar as its proximity to selfhood, as sex magick. As with sexuality, we are inevitably dealing with the self in its purest and most vulnerable as well as sacred state. As can be seen by the analysis of Michel Foucault in Chapter Two, sexuality only became profane when it was institutionalised by traditional theism.

An a-theistic spirituality is therefore possible through looking inwardly (esoteric), instead of outwardly (exoteric). Liberating oneself from the traditional confines of theism, as seen with the establishment of sex magick in the works of Aleister Crowley and Anton LaVey in the West discussed in Chapter Three, and further exemplified in the East and its relationship between sexual magic and healing in ancient Pharaonic Egypt, as well as the importance associated with pleasure, fertility and virility in the Egyptian afterlife with coffin spells ensuring a continuation of a hedonistic lifestyle after death.

 In addition to this, we see the esoteric represented by eroticism in the Kama and Tantra Yoga in Hinduism and Buddhism, respectively, as avenues for enlightenment which is understood here as the attainment of self-knowledge as discussed in Chapter Four. Furthermore, in Chapter Five, we saw a similar trope in African Traditional Religion (ATR) where sexual desires, especially in same-sex contexts, are exercised by ancestral spirits towards

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maintaining the potency of muti (medicine) and other talents and services provided by the Sangoma in service to the divine. But also the possibility for others' ritual impurity, due to sex and other related events to contaminate the muti of the *Amathwasa* (*bangoma* initiates in training).

In addition, Ibn 'Arabi also displays a post-theistic hermeneutic for the erotic as an al-bāṭin esoteric phenomenon in disregarding traditional Islamic norms of sexuality, employing it as method for attaining self-knowledge, via closeness with Allah through the expression of one's sensuality. In his antinomianist stance, he transcends traditional hierarchies placed within Islamic theology, arguing that humans are the mirror of the divine because of their ability to collectively employ their spiritual, physical, mental and emotional faculties enriching existence, therefore humans are superior to angels. Aside from ibn 'Arabi and his amorous poetry through which he expressed sensual anecdotes on love, *Rābiʻa al-Adawiyya* despite being an ascetic, contributes to post-theistic spirituality in the East both as mystic and famed female Sufi, whose approach to sensuality took a form of what she understood as divine love, characterised by an intimate relationship with Allah, who believed in annihilating oneself in the love of Allah and whose relationship and devotion to Allah is equated to the relationship between the man and the wife in the biblical Wisdom text, Song of Songs.

Finally, we encounter the influence of Marie Laveau, the queen of New Orleans Voodoo and Hoodoo, in which several sex magick rituals ranging from orgies, fertility rituals and spells for keeping lovers loyal towards healing and helping those in need.

Similar to ATR, New Orleans Voodoo/Hoodoo also takes note of the ancestors, but through the use of mojo and sexuality appealed to a pre-colonial West-African heritage, towards harnessing the African identity of femininity (including sexuality) as a form of self-

empowerment expressed in the manifestations of gris-gris in African American blues music. This inspired a later tradition involving graveyard sex magick, offerings to phallic gods like *Papa Legba*. Sexuality thus served as irreplaceable method for African women to root themselves in their identities, liberated from the colonial oppressor and his traditional theism.

6.6 Theoretical and Practical Implications: What Does This Mean For The Field And Society?

These themes collectively showcased and were explored in extreme detail in Chapters Two to Five; a thread of esoteric post-theism rooted in selfhood can be identified in each of these currents, through which we gain perspective of selfhood and self-spirituality beyond traditional theistic parameters via the application of sexuality and eroticism as vehicles encouraging the actualisation of the self via the unlocking secret self-knowledge.

This supports the idea of taking a global perspective on esotericism and promotes the study of lesser-known forms and trends of esotericism in Eastern and African cultures. These forms are not only under-represented but also undervalued and not fully recognised for their contributions to our current understanding of esotericism.

This pioneering comparative study encompasses an extensive exploration of interdisciplinary research fields such as psychology, history, philosophy, linguistics, sociology, anthropology, politics, and religious studies. Its primary objective is to establish a comprehensive discourse that validates marginalised perspectives in the realm of esotericism and academia as a whole. The East and Africa have experienced a tumultuous history in the development of their intellectual heritage and history. The theoretical implications of the above summaries aim to recognise and include diverse perspectives in the global study of esotericism. This helps to challenge Eurocentric notions that associate pre-colonial Eastern mysticism with

preconceived ideas and views pre-colonial Africa and its diaspora as barbaric. Therefore, the process of decolonising esotericism plays a crucial role in influencing colonial discourse and hegemony within the modern study of esotericism.

Furthermore, this study also contributes to the theoretical body of knowledge, through departing from mainly religionist perspectives, via a descriptive and comparative understanding of the syncretic nature of esotericism as inter-cultural exchange. It also showcases the multi-faceted nature of esotericism as a field and its incontrovertible relationship to other fields within the humanities. In addition, it contributes to an understanding of sexuality and how it connects to spirituality, challenging perspectives of traditional theism and dogmatic models, as exclusive frameworks for the manifestation of spirituality. While also attempting to de-stigmatise non-hegemonic forms of thought, often stigmatised for not belonging to the aforementioned normative traditionalist religious expressions.

The practical implication for this research lies in its liberation of the body from the grip of "taboos". This encourages creative exploration and expression of spirituality, as a form of lived religion outside of traditional religious contexts. Moreover, placing spirituality back into the hands of the individual, creates fertile ground for it to be incorporated into novel conceptualisations of sexuality, gender, and identity. These concepts are not set-in-stone and are malleable constructs, which transform esotericism from being a mere theoretical framework to becoming a practical model for self-transformation fit for a post-theistic society. Lastly, this thesis also contributes to the broader rectification of spirituality *vis-à-vis* esotericism in the digital age where social media often dictate perspectives and information on the practical nature of the occult, mysticism, inter alia spirituality to promote conspiracy

theories and muddying the ground towards religious tolerance and diversity. These considerations are not only dangerous, but also present extreme challenges to individuals who identify with new religious movements and alternative spiritualities.

Additionally, while encouraging tolerance and diversity, it also recognises that those who identify as non-religious can enjoy a sacredness that it is neither more nor less valid than the devoutly religious experience of the sacred. Therefore, it allocates spirituality as not just being exclusive to believers in the divine, but also those who find themselves alienated from mainstream religion. Finally, eroticism and the expression thereof are also once again claimed as sacred, where one's body is considered inviolable and subject to one's own will alone. In this way it encourages not only bodily autonomy, but also facilitating discourse on queerness, freedom, and feminism. Therefore. as such it also justifies the relevance of the multiplicity of perspectives encroached.

6.7 Limitations of The Study

Various constraints became apparent as this thesis evolved. Although there were genuine efforts to establish clear geographical boundaries for the West, East, and Africa, this study was unable to provide a complete historical account within each of these geographical frameworks. The precise meanings of "West," "East," and "Africa" vary depending on how individuals interpret these concepts. Some people may understand them in sociological terms, whereas others may consider them in geographical or regional terms.

The interpretive frameworks for such arguments continue to be a subject of debate, and this study acknowledges that this is one of its primary limitations. Another limitation of this study is its reliance on a purely theoretical framework for understanding esotericism and traditions.

This approach is limited because there is a lack of existing literature on these topics. In Chapter Five, it was noted that there is a scarcity of suitable textual sources, particularly in relation to most ATR. This is due to the colonial oppression experienced by numerous indigenous cultures, which hindered their ability to establish a concrete historical record for their traditions. Therefore, numerous customs and the scholarly investigation of their specific methods are limited to verbal transmissions. This study is limited by its exclusively theoretical approach, which may be seen as insincere in representing esoteric currents according to the prevailing standards. Moreover, the exploration of specific traditions within the Western, Eastern, and African realms is constrained by their specificity. There are numerous other cultures that fall within these categories and may exhibit opposing or contradictory ideas. Moreover, the chosen thesis topic can impose limitations as it delves into potentially contentious subjects that may be deemed offensive and unsuitable for scholarly investigation, particularly within the realm of religious studies.

Moreover, when it comes to the subjects of atheism, sexuality, and the occult, these discussions are burdened with social disapproval and consequently receive relatively less attention in academic research. Furthermore, there are additional constraints that can be observed in the subjective nature of the study's overarching theme can lead to additional constraints. This pertains to the varying interpretations of sex magick and its expression as a post-theistic form of spirituality, which can be subject to disagreement among scholars, cultures, and practitioners.

The study's interdisciplinary nature incorporates a wide range of theoretical frameworks, which can result in conflicts and inconsistencies when interpreting sources. Moreover, given that this thesis addresses subjects such as sexuality, it is inherently susceptible to ethical deliberations, particularly regarding matters of authority, agreement, and cultural

misappropriation. Furthermore, the practice of sex magick is not a fixed occurrence and therefore may vary across different periods of time (e.g., from the past to the present). Ultimately, the researcher's personal context and bias, which shape specific perspectives on certain predispositions, can still pose a noteworthy constraint on the study, despite efforts to minimise its influence. Yet, despite these limitations, the study still contributes significantly to the field and discourse on esotericism.

6.8 Directions for Future Research

With the above in mind, several exciting research opportunities arise from the lacunae that this research in and of itself contributes. There are several opportunities for further research and contributions to be made in delineating the scope of West, East, and Africa – including explorations of cultures in Southern and Northern hemispheres. Regarding the East, the esoteric elements present in Slavic cultures in Eurasia were not encroached on, but they might also contribute to a better understanding of the Eastern hemisphere. In addition to this, an analysis of esotericism, mysticism, and sexuality in feudal Japanese Shingon Buddhism and Shinto could be done, as well as esoteric currents such as the Jingak Order in Korean esotericism. Additionally, understanding sexuality and esotericism present in the traditions of other Islamic denominations: Shia, Wahabbi, Alawite, Ibadi, et alia remains a challenge for future research endeavours. In terms of Africana esotericism, several opportunities arise in the exploration of native faiths from other African cultures: such as the initiation rituals of the San, Masai, Himba, and Mursi peoples, which would add to the overall discourse of Africana esotericism as the entire region remains a goldmine for the exploration and expansion of future esoteric studies.

With regard to the Northern hemisphere, there are the native cultures of the Nordic regions (such as the Asatru) as well as the native American tribes in North America and Canada, who also possess exceptional relevance for the exploration of esoteric elements and traditions. In terms of the South, towards a "Southern" esotericism, there remains an incredible opportunity for the study of esotericism and sexuality among the Mayans, Inca, and South American peoples. In the latter case, are the worship of Santa Muerte, and fertility and sexuality rituals among the Incas and Mayans. Notwithstanding there is also the esotericism present in the Afrikaner culture's freemason heritage and later Christianity. Other important chronological contexts for the study of sexuality and spirituality expressions in esotericism (i.e. the Middle Ages and Renaissance) also serve as possible areas for future research.

The field of esotericism in and of itself, is a discourse ripe with opportunities for research and discussion, and as showcased in this study, there is no limit to the discussions and disciplines one can include in this grand conversation. Psychology, anthropology, philosophy, sociology, criminology, geography, linguistics and so forth, are also present opportunities which would not only enrich the field but enhance our understanding of cultures and religious practices across the board.

6.9 Final Reflections

6.9.1 Personal Insights

This study has perhaps been one of the most challenging topics one could endeavour, as the first issue that emerges as a result of this research is: where does one start? How does one navigate such a smorgasbord of topics and find the golden thread that connects them? Additionally, how does one do this in a coherent fashion? These were perhaps some of the most challenging thoughts that persisted throughout the development of this study. Encountering own biases throughout the study and realising how this influenced his

worldview was a remarkable learning curve for the researcher. At the start of this research journey he knew nothing. At the end, the researcher realised that even though he had learned a great deal about himself, he realised that now he knew very little about a very big field and very much about a very small scope. One of the most remarkable thoughts encountered during the study was in Hugh Urban's book *Magia Sexualis* in which he notes "Writing about Sex Magic, or How to Ruin Your Academic Career and Your Sex Life All in One Go" (Urban 2006:ix-x). Admittedly, these thoughts crossed my mind several times, including the memes that indicate: "A PhD is basically just making up a problem and then getting mad at that problem" (The Frustrated Researchers 2024) as well as "getting a PhD is basically just worrying you're wrong while convincing others you're not" (Budryk 2024).

6.9.2 Concluding Remarks: Why God Never Received a PhD

1.   He had only one major publication.

2.   It was in Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek

3.   It had no references and obscure authors

4.   It was not published in a peer-reviewed journal.

5.   Some even doubt he wrote it himself.

6.   It may be true he created the world, but what has he done since then?

7.   His cooperative efforts were quite limited.

8.   The scientific community had a hard time replicating his results.

9.   He never received permission from the ethics committee to use human subjects.

10.   When one experiment went awry, he tried to cover it up by drowning his subjects.

11.   When subjects did not behave as predicted, he deleted them from the sample.

12.   He rarely showed up for class and just told students to read the study guide.

13.   Some say he had his son teach classes.

14.   He expelled his first two students for learning

15.   Even though there were only 10 requirements, most of his students fail his tests.

16.   His office hours were infrequent and usually located on a mountain top.

17.   No proven record of working well with colleagues.

18.   Has been on an eternal sabbatical since the creation of the Universe.

19.   Frequently only cited by politicians, beauty pageants, and social media influencers.

20.   Despite his omnipotence, has skipped conferences since the publication of his magnum opus.

The aforementioned compilation (cf. Neystadt 1995) appears suitable for concluding remarks in a Doctoral thesis in Religion Studies, particularly when aiming to convey a less serious tone. By employing humour to underscore the human aspect of research, this thesis serves its distinct purpose of not only contributing to knowledge, but also enhancing readers' capacity for critical thinking and prompting them to reevaluate their approaches to and comprehension of the numinous.

6.10 Conclusion

Concluding such a lengthy thesis poses a significant challenge: how does one summarise the discussions spanning hundreds of pages? This chapter aimed to accomplish exactly that. By critically analysing the methodologies employed in this chapter and conducting a comprehensive review of each individual chapter and the objectives of this thesis. In addition, considering the theoretical constraints and practical consequences, along with the recommendations for future investigation, it is undeniable to recognise that this thesis effectively produced novel insights and paved the way for further exploration in uncharted territories. To presume that this thesis is the ultimate conclusion and flawless would be an act

of arrogance. There is no "perfect" thesis. The only flawless thesis is one that has been submitted.

Consequently, the objective of this study encourages its readers to recognise the existence of a world that is abundant with esoteric and mystical marvels. Spirituality can and ought to transcend traditional boundaries, allowing individuals to appreciate the beauty of their physical existence and the expression of their desire for one another in whichever form it may manifest. Self-awareness is the most challenging aspect of being alive in a post-theistic society. However, there was no manual or set of instructions available for this purpose before the composition of this study. Nevertheless, the aim of this study is to ignite a sense of curiosity in every reader. There is no such thing as a "taboo". The body is sacred. The body is beautiful and inviolable, subject to your own jurisdiction. Therefore, this study also wishes to motivate and encourage individuals on the outskirts of society, the outcasts. Your voices are being heard.

Gaining self-awareness is essential and accessible to everyone, as it serves as the foundation for personal accountability and harmonious collaboration with others. In our post-theistic society, one of the core principles is to utilise our elusive consciousness to achieve self-actualisation that lies in recognising that we are not isolated individuals. Fortunately, the most effective approach to accomplish this is by engaging in all of what are commonly referred to as "sins", as they all result in physical, mental, and emotional gratification.

This thesis is therefore unique in that it brings together the "transgressive" perspectives of esoteric discourse from the Western, Eastern, and African regions into a unified conversation. Seeking to enhance and broaden the field of esotericism, religion studies, sexuality and spirituality while paying tribute to the ancestors who created these most sacred rites which

have been underscored by this thesis. As such, in honour of those who came before The *Wiccan Rede* (White 2015:159-160) it emphasises the importance of actively participating in all the opportunities and experiences that our own individual divine life presents, appreciating its inherent beauty responsibly and giving back gratuitously:

"Bide the Wiccan Laws we must In Perfect Love and Perfect Trust

Live and let live. Fairly take and fairly give.

Cast the Circle thrice about to keep the evil spirits out.

To bind the spell every time let the spell be spake in rhyme.

Soft of eye and light of touch, Speak little, listen much.

Deosil go by the waxing moon, chanting out the Witches' Rune.

Widdershins go by the waning moon, chanting out the baneful rune.

When the Lady's moon is new, kiss the hand to her, times two.

When the moon rides at her peak, then your heart desire seek.

Heed the North wind's mighty gale, lock the door and drop the sail.

When the wind comes from the South, love will kiss thee on the mouth.

When the wind blows from the West, departed souls will have no rest.

When the wind blows from the East, expect the new and set the feast.

Nine woods in the cauldron go, burn them fast and burn them slow.

Elder be the Lady's tree, burn it not or cursed you'll be.

When the Wheel begins to turn, let the Beltane fires burn.

When the Wheel has turned to Yule, light the log and the Horned One rules.

Heed ye flower, Bush and Tree, by the Lady, blessed be.

Where the rippling waters go, cast a stone and truth you'll know.

When ye have a true need, hearken not to others' greed.

With a fool no season spend, lest ye be counted as his friend.

Merry meet and merry part, bright the cheeks and warm the heart.

Mind the Threefold Law you should, three times bad and three times good.

When misfortune is enow, wear the blue star on thy brow.

True in love ever be, lest thy lover's false to thee.

Eight words the Wiccan Rede fulfill: An' ye harm none, do what ye will.

So mote it be." (see White 2015:142-171).

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