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Eyes on You while Your Eyes Are on God: State Surveillance of Religion in Ghana under the Provisional National Defence Council Regime

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Abstract

This paper discusses Ghana's erstwhile Religious Bodies Registration Law (PNDC Law 221) passed by the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC) in 1989 and the associated bans placed on the Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormon sects. First, the paper analyzes how the state's surveillance moves engendered lateral and anti-surveillance practices. Second, Eric Stoddart's concept of (in)visibility is used as an analytical framework to track how both the surveilling entity (the state and community surveillers) and the surveilled (religious bodies and their members) actively partook in constructing the visibility and invisibility of the surveilled. The paper concludes that the state's theoretical ambition of religious surveillance was not fully matched in practice, as implementation was mediated by a pragmatic blend of "seeing" and "unseeing." Also, the response of the religious sects to the surveillance involved a strategic pursuit of simultaneous visibility and invisibility.

Introduction

In June 1989, the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC)—the military regime in Ghana—passed the *Religious Bodies (Registration) Law*, popularly referred to as PNDC Law 221. The PNDC, led by Jerry John Rawlings, sought to streamline the founding and operation of religious sects in Ghana by demanding that each sect, old or new, register with the regime (Dickson 1995: 265–66; Hackett 2011: 861–62). Before this legislation, religious bodies only had to register their trustees under the *Trustees (Incorporation) Act* 1962. Just before the passing of PNDC Law 221, four Christian sects were banned by the regime for allegedly threatening national and public interests (Hackett 2011). The banned sects included two international churches—the focus of this paper—Jehovah's Witnesses (JW) and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS / Mormons) as well as two local sects—Nyame Sompaa and Jesus Christ of Dzorwulu.

Considering other actions of the PNDC at the time, the surveillance of religion was one dimension of a broader attempt to see and control whatever the regime assessed as sensitive to national interests and regime stability. Such surveillance efforts included the state's intensified monitoring of personal bank accounts (Gyimah-Boadi and Jeffries 2000: 41–42; Biswal 1992: 202; Opoku 2010: 37) and the setting up of community-based pro-regime vigilante groups such as the Workers' Defence Committees, the People's Defence Committees, and the Civil Defence Committees. These committees, founded supposedly to decentralize governance and to help support the implementation of the regime's policies at the community

level, became the eyes and ears of the regime—monitoring mail, telephone calls, conversations, and physical movements (IRBC 1990; Gyimah-Boadi and Jeffries 2000: 45–46).

Although a number of scholarly works have discussed the PNDC regime, especially from the broad perspectives of its economic policies, pseudo-democratic tendencies, and unenviable human rights record, few studies focus specifically on understanding and theorizing the regime as a legibility-seeking and surveillant agent. Consequently, the associated societal support for and resistance to the regime's surveillance is similarly undertheorized. This paper contributes to understandings of the PNDC regime and the society it engaged with in the context of surveillance. To do this, the paper discusses PNDC Law 221 and the banning of the LDS and JW sects in June 1989. Although there had been earlier collisions between the regime and religious bodies from December 1981—when the PNDC came to power through a coup d'état—PNDC Law 221 and the banning of the religious sects in 1989 probably were the definitive summary of the tense state–religion relations during the period.

The research for this paper mainly uses documentary analysis. Secondarily sourced interviews with some LDS members who lived through the ban, the *Religious Bodies (Registration) Law 221*, public pronouncements of state and non-state agents, Ghanaian and international news reports, memoirs, and official records of the United States Department of State, as well as the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, have informed the discussions and conclusions in this paper.

I present here that discrete state and non-state motivations converged and led to the surveillance of religion by the PNDC regime and that the operationalization of the surveillance was informed by pragmatic calculations on the part of the regime as it balanced concerns for supposed national interest and regime security. The regime undertook a calculating surveillance of relatively “low target” churches, as a blanket implementation of the theoretical project could have presented challenges to the stability of the regime. On the other hand, the responses of religious sects showed a calculated sustenance of simultaneous visibility and invisibility.

Although there are a number of works that discuss the often tense relations between various states and the JW or LDS around the world (King 1982: 147; Kaplan 1989; Wah 2002; Wright and Richardson 2011), a dedicated study of the surveillance of these sects in or by African states or regimes is rare. This is not for want of state–religion tensions in Africa involving the LDS and JW sects. Nsereko (1986: 274–75), for example, details a number of African countries that have proscribed the JW. This paper thus aims to inspire further critical analyses of religious surveillance in Africa and as such intentionally has been built on contextual richness. The paper uses Stoddart's (2011, 2014) concept of (in)visibility as an analytical framework to magnify the intricate actor behaviours and motivations toward the construction of visibility and invisibility.

Surveillance and the Concept of (In)visibility

(In)visibility refers to “not only the condition but a skill of managing our [surveillance subjects'] visibility in particular contexts” (Stoddart 2014: 37–38). The bracketed “in” serves to “express [the] fluidity of making ourselves—and crucially being made—more and less visible” (Stoddart 2014: 38). (In)visibility is a socio-relational concept that speaks to the practice where persons being surveilled have a way of regulating how visible they are. The concept also makes room for how a person's visibility and invisibility may be regulated by an external agent. Stoddart asserts that there is “never a dichotomy” between visibility and invisibility, as often a targeted body of surveillance may “be visible in a number of contexts while being invisible in others” (ibid.).

Stoddart's illustrations run the risk of being seen as oversimplification, but their utility particularly resides in their banality, practicality, and realism. In fact, almost every person wears a cloak of (in)visibility as our efforts at hiding or not hiding, or being made more conspicuous or less so by others, are constant and fluid. To Stoddart, the major utility of the concept is how it (potentially) effectively interdicts the over-focusing

on privacy rights as people and groups attempt to resist surveillance. In this sense, the concept of (in)visibility grants the surveilled some agency in the construction of his or her visibility. Stoddart's concept when used alongside others like Foucault's (1977) "Panopticon," Scott's (1998) "simplification and legibility," Lyon's (2003) "social sorting," Clarke's (1988) "dataveillance," and Haggerty and Ericson's (2000) "surveillant assemblage" helps to provide a fuller picture of the existence of agency both on the part of the surveilling agent and the surveilled, the fluidity and dynamism of this double agency, and their implications for the enforcement of surveillance practices and the resistance to them.

Essentially, these other concepts really fare well in explaining how surveillance is carried out and, when considered in a continuum, also show how the *modus operandi* of surveillance has evolved over time. Some of these concepts, to some extent, also point to the role of the surveilled in engendering surveillance practices. Foucault's approach to the power of panopticism, for instance, means that the surveilled in a sense enables the perpetuation of surveillance by bearing responsibility for the discipline that emanates from the thought of being watched. Other constructs such as dataveillance, surveillant assemblage, and social sorting also show how user-generated data are increasingly becoming the lifeblood of contemporary surveillance. On the other hand, Stoddart's concept of (in)visibility does not occupy itself with explaining forms of surveillance. Its utility, however, lies in its contribution to enhancing the analysis of every form of surveillance and anti-surveillance practice. As will be shown later in this paper, (in)visibility aids in mapping out the actions of surveillance agents and subjects and even third-party surveillance agents and how each action or inaction makes surveillance possible, successful, difficult, or unsuccessful. Such a conflation of surveillance actors and forms would also reveal a conflation of—possibly, even conflicting—actor motivations as well as the fluid visible/invisible status of the surveillance subject.

Importantly also, the concept of (in)visibility defies time and space due to the fact that its main idea of fluid movement between being visible and being invisible is elastic and can apply no matter the who, when, where, what, and how of the specific surveillance practice. The only thing that could change is not the principle but the specific tool for the movement across the continuum of (in)visibility. Thus effectively, the other aforementioned concepts of surveillance can be discussed according to their implications for the (in)visibility continuum. Scott's (1998) "legibility" and "simplification" thus, for example, would serve to make the surveilled more visible to the state; "dataveillance" and "social sorting" also make the surveilled more visible not necessarily as a "singular" case but as a body exhibiting the qualities of a certain body profile. The "surveillant assemblage" means the nature of visibility even of the same person can be constructed from different points of surveillance and presented in different forms while "sousveillance" could mean that technology has enabled the surveilled to make themselves or their surveillers more visible.

(In)visibility thus is used in this paper to highlight the subtle and intricate actions and motivations that made the targets of PNDC Law 221 and the bans both more and less visible. As will be shown later in the paper, the simultaneous visibility and invisibility status of the surveillance subjects was contributed to by the regime/state, pro-regime community vigilantes, and sect members, and this was despite the fact that these actors did not necessarily share motivations and objectives.

State–Religion Relations in Ghana

Attempts at the formal separation of church and state in colonial Ghana came through the *Holy Trinity Church, Accra, Ordinance, 1916*. The law vested away from the colonial administration—and in the bishop of the church in Accra and his successors—the control of the (Anglican) Holy Trinity Church (Pobee 2009: 151). The caveat, however, was that the separation of the Church from the Crown was only going to persist if the former was used "for the sole purpose and express purpose of a church" and "to the intent that divine worship according to the use of the Church of England shall therein be performed and carried on in the church aforesaid in accordance with the rites and ceremonies of the Church of England" (ibid.). Effectively, the ordinance of 1916 mirrored the persisting reality that the theoretical church–state separation rarely means the loss of state interest in religious actions and pursuits.

Succeeding post-colonial governments in Ghana have thus kept some eye on religion, with varying focal intensity. A major and early reason for the governmental interest in and monitoring of the activities of religious bodies in Ghana was the active participation of religion in mainstream national politics. For example, in the two earliest national elections—legislative elections in 1954 and 1956—the Muslim Association Party (MAP) contested as a political party (Ahmed-Rufai 2002) against the then dominant Kwame Nkrumah-led Convention Peoples’ Party (CPP). Logically, at least for political ends, CPP monitored the activities of MAP’s Muslim leaders. The leaders of the Gold Coast Muslim Association (GCMA) and MAP “lost some rights and privileges” including the deportation of some of their leaders (NRC 2005: 419). Eventually, the Chief Imam was removed from office, and the incumbent CPP government used a new law, the *Preventive Detention Act* to intimidate members of MAP and GCMA (ibid.). The *Preventive Detention Act* permitted the state to jail without trial actors deemed as threats to national security. In August 1962, the Anglican Bishop of Accra, Reginald Roseveare, was also deported for openly opposing Nkrumah’s formation of the Young Pioneer Movement (NRC 2005: 426). Vincent Damuah, a Catholic bishop, was briefly detained for criticizing the deportation of Roseveare (ibid.). Andrew van den Bronk, another Catholic bishop, was also deported for being anti-government (NRC 2005: 432).

The relationship between religion and the state in Ghana under the PNDC was similarly thorny but contrasts adversely with that seen under the CPP in terms of the accompanying violence. The physical violence against the church under the PNDC was unprecedented. Even before the passing of PNDC Law 221 and the banning of the churches, there had been a bloody altercation between soldiers and members of “The Lord is My Shepherd” church in Kumasi. The incident, which reportedly led to the deaths of seventy-five church members, was started when a military officer disrupted a religious service to get the church members to join in a pothole-filling exercise (IRBC 1990: 617). The altercation led to the death of the military officer and, in a reprisal attack, soldiers “burnt and destroyed everything in the church and went round burning the homes of members of the church...Church members were beaten up, tortured and detained” while the leader of the church, Prophet Asare, was shot dead and his body burnt (NRC 2005:74).

Also, in December 1985, the PNDC government banned the *Catholic Standard* newspaper for “unpatriotic reporting”—more appropriately, the ban was for constant anti-government criticisms (Gadzekpo 2005: 41). The *Catholic Standard*’s pro-social justice critique was as strong even during the days of the CPP (Jallow 2014). While the editor of the *Catholic Standard* at the time, a Catholic priest, was being tracked down by the PNDC regime, soldiers murdered a different priest, mistaken for the editor (Index on Censorship 1987: 20). For the same excuse of “unpatriotic reporting,” another Christian newspaper, *The Believer*, was banned (Ankomah 1986: 34).

Positively, Ghana’s transition to democratic governance in 1992 came with a constitution that explicitly assures in its Article 21(1c): the “freedom to practice any religion and to manifest such practice.” The persistence of this constitution and the improving democratic credentials of the Ghanaian state institutions and civil society bodies—especially the Christian Council of Ghana, Catholic Bishops’ Conference, and Pentecostal Council—have engendered a relatively benign relationship between the state and religion.

Overview of PNDC Law 221 and the Banning of Religious Sects

PNDC Law 221 provided that:

- (1) Notwithstanding any law to the contrary, no person shall found or establish any association of persons or body for a religious purpose . . . unless it is in accordance with the provisions of this Law.
- (2) Any person who desires to establish or found a religious body shall in the first instance apply in writing to the Religious Affairs Committee established under section 5 of this Law for a provisional approval.
- (3) A provisional approval granted under subsection (2) of this Law shall be for a period not exceeding three months and may be granted subject to such other conditions as the Committee may determine. (PNDC Law 221 1989: 1)

The *Religious Bodies (Registration) Law* allowed the state to regulate the formation and activities of religious sects. For religious bodies that were already in existence, the law made provisions in its Article 3 obliging them to register within three months of commencement of the law. Procedurally, a person or group of persons intending to operate a religious sect by the law had to first apply to the Religious Affairs Committee (RAC). Applicants were to submit the following:

- (a) A copy of the constitution of the religious body, which shall specify its objects, rules and regulations;
- (b) The names, occupation and addresses of the trustees;
- (c) Emoluments or other benefits of the principal officers of the body;
- (d) The location and the address of the headquarters of the body;
- (e) Evidence of the numerical strength of its male and female membership in the country;
- (f) Particulars indicating that the places of worship or activity are suitable for the purpose;
- (g) A declaration that the places and mode of worship do not constitute a health or environmental hazard to the members of the body or to the public in general;
- (h) The social and community work programme other than evangelistic or religious programme, if any, of the body; and
- (i) The financial statement and intended source of funds to the body. (PNDC Law 221 1989: 2–3)

If the nine-member RAC was satisfied with an application, it would grant provisional approval and make a positive recommendation to the National Commission on Culture (NCC). The NCC would then issue an approval certificate with which the applicant would proceed to the Registrar-General's Department for final registration. Any religious sect that operated without registration was infringing the law; likewise any registered sect that operated in a manner that contravened the "conditions of a provisional approval" (PNDC Law 221 1989: 1). For infringing the law, a religious sect was subject to criminal prosecution, a ban by the NCC, and assets confiscation. Thus essentially, the decision that a body could and was operating as a religious one was the sole prerogative of the NCC.

Although the legislation did not explicitly provide a section stating its specific purpose(s), one can possibly draw its purposes from the provisions under Article 13 (PNDC Law 221 1989: 2), which detailed the bases upon which an application for a certificate of approval could be denied. Re-formulating the given reasons in positive language, the purposes of the law was to prevent "civil disobedience" and "nuisance to the general public;" promote "public order, public interest or morality," "good health of the members or the community as a whole," "decency," and the "safety for members or the general public." These reasons could be considered comprehensive or overbearing depending on how the person conceives what should be the ideal nature of state–religion relations. The elasticity of the interpretation of the bill, however, was stretched to dangerous lengths as additionally there was a very vague provision that an application could be denied or an approval revoked, if the NCC had "any other reasonable grounds for doing so" (PNDC Law 221 1989: 5). Additionally, the law provided in Article 10 that the Chairman of the Commission had the right to take actions "as he deems necessary" to implement the law. As the legislation also made no room for appeals against the decisions of the NCC, the state basically would determine who could start a religious body and what form of worship was allowed. If, per the provisions of the law, the state was not only supervising the initiation of a religious body but also deciding whether a religious body could continue to function, then it meant the law was to serve a surveillance function, and surveillance of religious bodies by the state was the only way to ensure the implementation of the law.

Although the announcement of the ban of the churches came before the passing of the law, the law took retrospective effect from the time the ban was placed. The statement announcing the banning of the LDS and JW read: "despite repeated warnings, the two sects have continued to conduct themselves in a manner which does not only undermine the sovereignty of Ghana, but it is also not conducive to public order. The government has therefore directed that the meeting places of the Mormons and the Jehovah's Witnesses should remain closed throughout the country" (Fagg 1989).

Foreign missionaries working with the two churches were given a one-week ultimatum to leave Ghana. Additionally, church publications such as the JW's *Awake* and *Watchtower* were banned. Although how exactly the two churches were undermining Ghana's sovereignty and harming public order was not officially communicated, Nagaishi (2014: 7) mentions that the efforts by the PNDC to surveil the LDS in particular may have been due to the suspicion that "the LDS Church was secretly operating under the direction of the United States government, or, more specifically, the CIA." In 2015, Jerry John Rawlings, leader of the PNDC, commented on the ban: "As the Head of State and leader I was not unaware of the aspirations and sensibilities of our people. When somebody wants to replace our culture with another then it better be good and better than what we have but in the name of freedom of worship and expression all manner of foolish things are allowed" (Office of Former President Rawlings 2015).

Although the foregoing Rawlings quote frames the ban as a move to quell adverse attacks on Ghanaian culture, it remains unclear how the LDS undermined Ghanaian culture. On the other hand, JW teachings tend to be viewed as undermining citizen commitment to the state. In essence, while two local churches—Nyame Sompa and Jesus Christ of Dzorwulu—were banned due to safety concerns and the victimization of their female members, the bans placed on the JW and LDS were more politically or ideologically inclined.

State Surveillance, Lateral Surveillance, and Anti-Surveillance

In this section, two tasks are undertaken. The first is to construct PNDC Law 221 and the bans on the churches, as well as the support and resistance both garnered, in the context of state surveillance, lateral surveillance, and anti-surveillance. The second task is an attempt to use Stoddart's analytical framework of (in)visibility to draw deeper meanings from the case study. As Stoddart (2014: 40) notes: "(in)visibility can be used to interrogate and evaluate specific surveillance strategies. We can observe the politics of visibility that are themselves influenced, if not underpinned, by ideologies circulating largely unexamined within our diverse contexts."

State Surveillance

As Scott (1998) shows, the value of a legible society to state-making, state capacity, and the exercise of regime authority is high. Along similar lines, PNDC Law 221 was enacted to improve the legibility to the state of religious doctrines, practices, and practitioners in Ghana. The application materials detailed in Article 2(6) of the legislation provide a strong indication of how much the state sought to know about religious sects. To summarize, when submitted, a complete application provided the state with information about the beliefs and objectives of the sect, who its trustees were, where the trustees worked and lived, and their exact entitlements. Additionally, the state would know exactly how many men and women were members of the sect, the extent of the physical presence of the sect across the country, the community and social work of the sect, as well as the financial account details of the sect and its intended sources of fund. If the law were to be followed through, in the end there would be little left that the state would not know about religious bodies.

In its Article 2(8), the law granted the state the powers to undertake "regular inspection of places of worship" even after the registration. What "inspection" specifically meant in this context was not clear. It could however be argued that such an inspection would be for the purposes of the law. What "regular" meant was also left unexplained. Such vagueness could easily provide the state with a legal cover to monitor the activities of religious sects however it wished to. The natural complementary was in Article 2(13), which permitted the state to cancel the registration of a sect if it deemed that fit. The possible reasons for such annulment were an interesting mix of safety, political, and ideological concerns.

Another important way of furthering the state's surveillance of religion came in the wake of the bans. To implement the ban, the state locked up all JW and LDS buildings and stationed guards at them to ensure that the ban was not violated. Importantly, the ban was potentially symbolic of the extent the state was ready to go to control religious activities and this possibly accounted for the large number of mainly small churches that subsequently registered under PNDC Law 221.

Lateral Surveillance

The implementation of PNDC Law 221 and the ban on the churches in turn instigated lateral surveillance—“not the top down monitoring of citizens by the state, but rather peer to peer surveillance” (Andrejevic 2002: 481). Lateral surveillance “covers (but is not limited to) three main categories: romantic interests, family, and friends or acquaintances” (ibid.: 488). In this paper, lateral surveillance is operationalized in the context of how community acquaintances monitored the activities of members of the LDS and JW sects. The motivation of such individual monitors was either simply a commitment to the PNDC regime and its decisions or borne out of a disagreement with the teachings of the two sects. In Ghana, there was a general belief on the part of members of the JW and LDS sects that the ban they suffered resulted from misunderstandings of their teachings by certain individuals in society who subsequently relayed their doubts to the government (Nkansah 1990; LDS 2016).

Opposition to the teachings of the LDS and JW was expressed in various newspapers that supported the ban (Ephson 1989: 1,068). One state newspaper is reported to have praised the ban because “the teachings and activities of these two [banned] sects” were deemed “nauseating” and that the two churches had “scandalized Christianity and must not get away with it” (*Deseret News* 1989). Such support of the ban in the media makes it unsurprising that at the community level there were individuals who spied on the activities of JW and LDS members.

Persons in their private capacity did not only monitor but also harassed and intimidated members of the two sects who tried to find a way around the ban to commune (Osei-Frimpong 2005; LDS 2016). For attempting to commune despite the ban, some neighbours reported LDS and JW members to the police (Nkansah 1990; LDS 2016). Such lateral surveillance not only led to police detentions but even to alleged instances of physical assault (Osei-Frimpong 2005). While some local vigilantes were simply pro-regime and actively serving as the PNDC’s eyes and ears, others had doctrinal difficulties with the JW and LDS. If the cultural and state sovereignty concerns of the regime are also anything to go by, then the state’s efforts to surveil the two sects fertilized and were fertilized by different actor motivations.

Anti-Surveillance

The law and the ban also led to anti-surveillance practices by members of the JW and LDS. The anti-surveillance practices of members of the LDS church, for example, are detailed in video interviews. The interviewees reveal how they simply decided to conduct Bible study and worship services in their homes (LDS 2016). An interviewee expressed that the “living room became the sacrament hall . . . the home became the sanctuary” (ibid.). For these home services, LDS members still “dressed their Sunday best as though they were going to the church.” Another interviewee adds that their temples could be closed but “you cannot close their homes” and that “if you close [their] mouth, you cannot close [their] heart” (ibid.). Communing at a private residence became a way of navigating the ban—simultaneously respecting it and disregarding it. JW members, aside from meeting in their private homes, also communed on their farms. As a JW member recollected:

I remember those silent days when we woke up early in the morning, wore dirty clothing and pretended we were going to farm.

We took our cutlasses, hoes and baskets concealing our Bibles and study materials and took to the thickets where no one could bother us. (Osei-Frimpong 2005)

This was their way of escaping the gaze of lateral surveillers and, by extension, the state. Interestingly, the lateral surveillers soon also adopted the tactic of hiding in bushes and appearing when such clandestine church meetings began (ibid.). Such attempts to spy on and harass worshippers and the threat of being consequently reported to the political authorities may have had its own adverse implications for the continuation of this anti-surveillance practice. In the next section, the episode is discussed through the lens of Stoddart’s (in)visibility framework. The essence is to show the fluid and dialectical construction of visibility and invisibility of the banned churches and their members.

(In)visibility of Surveillance Subjects

Agency		Condition A	Condition B
1	Self (making one's self)	Visible	Invisible
2	Other (being made by another)	Visible	Invisible

Table 1: (In)visibility Framework

The table above represents what this author believes to be the most important components of Stoddart's (in)visibility framework: agency and condition of visibility. Surveillance subjects could be placed at the same time on different locations of the continuum depending on who is looking and how surveillance is being enabled or resisted. Practically, the conditions of the surveilled may best be framed as more visible or less visible, as the existence of the condition of visibility may make a simultaneous condition of invisibility less feasible. The other important component of the concept is the nature of agency. As can be seen from the table, agency lies with both the surveiller (other) and the surveilled (self) in terms of how visible or not the surveilled is. In the following, the Ghana case for this paper is discussed in the context of this table. In the present case, the chief "other" is the state represented by the PNDC regime as the makers and implementers of the surveillance law and the ban; the lateral surveillers are also categorized as "other." Here, the surveilled body/self are religious bodies as subjects of law, and the JW and LDS are targets of the ban.

With the foregoing in mind, the following conclusions can be made. By making the law, the state sought to make the religious bodies visible (2A on the table). By imposing the ban, the state also spotlighted the JW and LDS and their members, and this invariably presented its own form of visibility—akin to the kind of visibility that bad press fosters. However, the ultimate goal of the ban on the JW and LDS and their publications ideally was the perpetual invisibility of these churches. It is when the churches, their messages, and activities are completely not visible to the public that one can be confident that society is insulated from the purported ills that the churches come with. Thus, PNDC Law 221 and the bans meant that the state was simultaneously promoting both the visibility and invisibility of the banned churches. It is important to note that successful surveillance practices may require moves by the surveilling agents to make the surveillance subject simultaneously visible and invisible. Spotlighting by surveillance laws and policies and actual surveillance foster visibility and invisibility of the surveilled.

It must also be noted that in the context of lateral surveillance, the same conditions may have resulted for surveillance subjects. As neighbours and other pro-regime groups monitored the activities of the JW and LDS members and even proceeded to report their activities to the state, such non-state actors were contributing to making the members of these churches and their activities more visible to the state. On the other hand, the trend of having neighbours spy would naturally contribute to the worshippers themselves scheming toward less visibility. This, for example, could be seen in the practice of worshippers sneaking to their farms to commune. The banned churches' strategic agreement to the ban and decision not to use their temples or do open missionary work were efforts on their part to be invisible to the state. Communing in a fellow's home was similarly an act of invisibility. However, both the LDS and JW amidst their general regard for the ban also submitted their applications to the Religious Affairs Committee in an attempt to register with the state. However, until the ban was lifted, the applications of the two churches were rejected as they were considered not qualified to apply due to their "frozen" status (IRBC 1990).

Notwithstanding this rejection, as PNDC Law 221 required churches to submit details of their operations before certification, the pursuit of certification inevitably meant that the two churches were also making themselves visible to the state. Thus, again, the banned churches were generating their contemporaneous

conditions of visibility and invisibility. However, it is important to note that the churches represented by the Catholic Bishops' Conference and the Christian Council of Ghana did not register or attempt to register with the state yet continued to operate openly (Nkansah 1990; Baehr 1994: 225; Dovlo 2005: 646). In spite of this, the PNDC did not ban these big orthodox churches. For a military regime, the PNDC's decision to allow these churches to operate in the face of their blatant disregard for the law seems intriguing, especially as the Catholic Bishops' Conference and the Christian Council of Ghana were the harshest and most brazen opponents of PNDC Law 221. By failing to register, these big churches were openly indicating their unwillingness to be visible to the state while by worshipping and openly challenging the law, they were simultaneously sustaining their visibility as a form of resistance. Also, the PNDC regime's decision to condone the non-registration of the orthodox churches, their open worship, and general calls for amendments to the law could be seen as participation in the construction of both the visibility and invisibility of such churches.

When the concept of (in)visibility reveals such complicities, it presents a foundation in considering what accounts for the fluid actor behaviours in the dialectical construction of the visibility and invisibility of surveillance subjects. As evident in the present case, factors such as political power, ideology, and interests often would shape specific actor moves. The PNDC had the political power to promulgate and implement a law and also to ban churches. However, it should also be reasonable that the PNDC regime would turn a blind eye to the Catholic Bishops' Conference and the Christian Council of Ghana because of the sheer socio-political clout of these big religious bodies. The two bodies likely represent the largest portion of the religious population in Ghana and likely had some senior PNDC officials as members. Avoiding them was a pragmatic move by the PNDC regime to prevent possible popular disaffection toward the regime. The Catholic Bishops' Conference and the Christian Council of Ghana, aware of their clout, were in a position to flex their muscles unlike the JW and the LDS.

Ideology also influenced how actors chose to affect the visibility or otherwise of the surveilled. The PNDC's conception of religion was one accountable to the state and even that its activities should be complementary to those of government. As expressed by an official of the PNDC, "The government [sought to] ensure that the religious bodies like other associations subordinate themselves to the state" (IRBC 1990: 2,124). The then Interior Minister, Nii Okaija Adamafo, also argued that it was "absolutely inexcusable for a responsible government to stand by and stare on the lame pretext that religious worship is a private matter" (Human Rights Watch 1990). On the other hand, the Catholic Bishops' Conference and the Christian Council of Ghana argued for safeguarding democratic rights especially the freedom of religion (Dovlo 2005: 629). The lateral surveillers on their part were typically people supportive of the ideology of the PNDC government and also members of some other Christian sects who were strongly suspicious of and even opposed to the beliefs of the LDS and JW.

Lastly, actor interests also affected construction of the visibility and invisibility of the surveilled. The PNDC placed a premium on patriotism and popular support and, as such, were highly pragmatic in many of their decisions to ensure the stability of their regime and the attainment of their governance objectives. Thus, it was not surprising that they sought legibility of religious bodies and ensured that religion was not used as a platform to foster anti-government tendencies. But it is not surprising that the PNDC would unsee the resistance of the big religious groups and only crack the whip strategically. Cracking the whip had symbolic utility though, as it made the government's threats look real. However, at a point when the US government intervened on behalf of the JW and LDS, the political dynamics immediately transformed (ADST, n.d.: 238–39). If this intervention contributed to the removal of the ban in November 1990, then it was likely because of the pragmatic calculations on the part of the PNDC, especially in terms of the associated reputational and material risks that came with the matter being framed as the Ghanaian government witch-hunting American non-governmental organizations.

For the banned churches, it was in their interest to show openness—more like clean hands—by attempting to register with the state, as they could feasibly not have survived a head-on collision with the military regime at the time. But it was in the interest of the JW and LDS to circumvent the ban and find ways to

commune and worship, as such was really needed to keep the church going. The Catholic Bishops' Conference and the Christian Council of Ghana saw it as being in their short and long term interest to not be subdued by the state by allowing it to exercise the power to determine who gets to practice a religion and how. Thus, the management of the visibility of the surveilled has very instrumental motivations and calculations underlying it, on the part of both the monitor and the monitored.

Conclusion

What are the implications of this episode in Ghanaian history for understanding the surveillance of religious bodies? First, a state's choice of which sect to openly surveil is likely to be informed by some calculations that take particular cognizance of relative levels of adversity for the regime. If such backlash and disaffection are deemed as troubling for the regime, especially in terms of its stability or other interests, it is very likely that the government will not openly surveil a religious sect. In this sense, a regime's ideology on religion may come second to instrumental calculations of the possible consequences of the implementation of religious surveillance even for a non-democratic regime. In the Ghanaian case, the intervention of the US government immediately changed the dynamics regarding the ban.

Second, the response of religious sects to state surveillance especially in the context of young/weak/non-democracies is likely relative to the political clout of the sect. Religious sects with relatively weak socio-political clout are bound to be very limited in their response to state surveillance.

Third, a religious sect in response to surveillance is likely to pursue simultaneous visibility and invisibility. If the religious sect cannot viably challenge the government, it needs to be invisible enough to present a supposed regard for the state's decision—possibly as a way of giving itself a chance to be heard by the state—yet also remain visible enough to congregants and even to the state to give itself a chance to survive a ban or surveillance.

Fourth, while a regime may have its peculiar reasons for surveilling religion, the practical success of such surveillance also has to do with the extent to which non-state actors are moved to embrace lateral surveillance. State surveillance of religion is more effective if people in local communities choose to localize the state's objectives even if they share different motivations.

In sum, state surveillance of religion, even when originating from ideological concerns, is practically shaped by the material interest calculations of the state while the response to surveillance by religious bodies reflects the level of their context-specific socio-political clout and this in turn is reflected in how religious sects would simultaneously construct their visibility and invisibility in response to surveillance.

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