INTERFACING NATURE OF FAITH AND THE MARGINALIZATION OF AFRICAN RELIGION IN A GLOBALIZED RELIGIOUS SPACE

Moses Ezeudu (Ph.D)
Chidinma Precious Ukeachusim(Ph.D)
Stella Chinweudo Ekwueme (Ph.D)
Ekene Michael Mokwenye(Ph.D)
Department of Religion and Cultural Studies
University of NigeriaNsukka
Enugu State

Abstract
That humans rely on a higherbeinggreater than themselves is no longer a subject of academic inquiry. Humandependence on God whois the maker of the universe and all therein has through centuries taken different dimensions thus bringing about diversified names of different religions found in the world today. There exists a unifying factor among all organizations that expresses the existence of a superior being and that lies in the fact they share a credo that God is the maker of heaven and earth. The irony however manifest in the reality that some religions claim superiority over others, a pitiable situation African Traditional Religion finds itself today. This work investigated the Interfacing Nature of Faith and the marginalization of African Religion in a Globalized Religious World. A purely phenomenological research method was adopted. 25 key informants were interviewed and the result shows that African Traditional Religion has all the credentials of a religion albeit, it is often relegated, neglected and place in the same plane with the continent.

Keywords: Faith, Marginalization, African Religion, Religious Space

BACKGROUND

Prior to European colonization, Africans thrived for millennia, maintaining their independence and cultural identities without relying on external influences or experiencing religious conflicts. Despite linguistic and cultural differences, various ethnic groups shared a common understanding of a single supreme being, which they believed could only be accessed through intermediaries, such as divinities, ancestors, and spirits. This diversity of beliefs and practices coexisted harmoniously, as the similarities in their values and worship practices outweighed their differences. However, the legacy of colonialism and the enslavement of Africans led to the introduction of a distorted and biased form of Christianity, which was designed to serve the interests of the dominant group rather than promote the kingdom of God. This resulted in the misrepresentation and stigmatization of traditional African beliefs and practices, which were unfairly labeled as "fetishism," "idolatry," and "heathenism."Thus, Africans were left with inter and intra denominational conflicts, fighting over theology, doctrines and other man made rules without recourse to

the life given principles of the kingdom of God. In contrast, the Indians who also received the same civilization as the Africans, did not allow it to destroy their culture and religion, thus Hinduism today is one of the recognized religions of the world, while Africans are marginalized in a globalized religious world. This misnomer distorted their values, with regards to personal and interpersonal relationships, thus were looked upon with contempt and condescension. In the views of Beattie (1969) and Mbiti (1991) this wrong perception of Black people and blackness globally have not only resulted in the refusal to acknowledge their humanity and unique cultural contributions, but also have led to the formations of a combating and countering movements.

The limitations of traditional approaches to studying religion have led many researchers like Turner (1967), Setiloane (1976), Van (1985) and Magesa (1997) to adopt a more nuanced and pluralistic methodology. This shift has prompted new questions about the nature of religious traditions, including African Traditional Religion. For instance, given the similarities between African conceptions of a supreme being and those found in Western and Eastern religions, researchers are asking whether the African understanding of God is comparable to the Western concept. They are also exploring whether concepts like sin and righteousness hold the same meaning and value in African and Western cultures. Furthermore, researchers are questioning whether religion is a universal phenomenon that transcends cultural and racial boundaries. Can God, who is often understood as impartial and principle-based, be said to prefer one racial, cultural, or religious group over another? The pursuit of objective answers to these questions has revealed the errors and misconceptions that have often characterized the study of African Traditional Religion. It is now recognized that different cultures and societies may employ distinct methods to achieve similar goals, but the underlying principles remain the same. Therefore, when interpreting the religious beliefs of any group, it is essential to consider not only the value attached to those beliefs in the present but also their historical origins, evolution, and potential distortions in interpretation. By adopting this more contextual and nuanced approach, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of African Traditional Religion and its place within the broader landscape of global religious traditions.

Nevertheless, despite the uncompromising position of the dissidents against the African entrenched traditional belief system, despite the attitudes towards the phenomenon as well as its rejection by people from all other religious beliefs, including the African converts themselves, the spectra keep haunting the conscious and unconscious minds of the Africans wherever they are. Thus, there are many African churches in all parts of the world where Africans are found in large numbers. However, the introduced and re-enforcedforeign religion and culture have paralyzed the true picture of the elements of African traditional beliefs and practices in the globe. For example, all the rich cultural menu of the Africans especially those aimed at conservation and protection of the environment like; totems, evil forest, entertainments like masquerade etc. were wrongly misrepresented in the English and Arabic languages thus the need for this study.

THE ADVENT OF CHRISTIANITY IN NIGERIA

The advent of western religions changed the faith expression of Africans; a faith that has already instilled respect for both the spiritual and temporal. Europeans started examining the potentiality of conquering Africa through exchange, and indoctrination by all means and endeavors Zahan (1979). The initial efforts started along the West Coast of Africa in the 15th century. The Portuguese are reckoned to have been the first to make this *novus* move through the building up of strong relationship with cities like Benin Kingdom and Lagos which are located along the coast(Terwase 1994).

This coming of Christianity into Nigeria took place in the fifteenth century, when Roman Catholicism was introduced by the Portuguese missionaries. These efforts aimed at evangelization was not initially successful as a result of restrictions and avarices exhibited in their search for gold, and ill-health occasioned by malaria borne mosquitoes. The 3Gs also contributed. The three Gs associated with colonialism are:

Gold: Representing economic exploitation, where colonial powers extracted natural resources, including gold, from colonized territories for their own benefit.

Gospel: Symbolizing the imposition of Christianity, where colonial powers forced their own religious beliefs on indigenous populations, often suppressing native spiritual practices.

Glory: Embodying the pursuit of power, prestige, and national pride, where colonial powers sought to expand their empires, spread their influence, and assert their dominance over (see colonized peoples. Rodney (1972), Frank (1978), Comaroff&Comaroff (1991), Ranger (1995), Hobson (1902) and Lenin (1917))

The leaders of Nigerian kingdoms became carried away by the promises of the provision of weapons promised to them by the king. Having laid the foundation, subsequent missionaries had a near-fertile ground to plant Christianity in the Kingdoms of Benin and Itsekiri Kingdom. However, as a people rooted in African culture, the people of Benin Kingdom resisted the gospel once again. On the other hand, the mission to Itsekiri Kingdom demonstrated to be more successful. The primary and most notable conversion in Ijaw soil was that of the child of the Olu of Warri. They sanctified and baptized him with water thus Christening him Sebastian. Sabatine as heir to the throne inherited his father's position as the *Olu* of Warri and he demonstrated to be an ardent Christian (Johnson 1994). The enthronement of the new king gave strong impetus to the planting of Christianity in Nigeria, however the missionaries while spreading to other parts of the country through massive conversions were faced with massive challenged occasioned by the malaria pandemic, Killing of some of the missionaries and business greed.

RELIGIOUS CONFLICTS IN NIGERIA: INTRAAND INTER.

The advent of Christianity and Islamic religions made things to fall apart in the words of Achebe(1958) parents and children began to divide against themselves Matthew (10:34-36). The region that enjoyed peace apart from occasional boundary disputes now added religious crises as part of what they have to contend with. The argument above suggests that religious conflicts emanated as a result of the presence of foreign religions in a

region that has already identified God experientially. The current marginalization and crises is anchored on the fact that one religion fight the other, if its not between Christianity and Islam it will be a case of any of the duo fighting African Traditional Religion's adherents whom they often describe as pagans. The invasion of Jihadist group in Northern Nigeria brought Islamic religion in that part of Nigeria earlier than Christian Missionaries that later captured the Southern Nigeria and introduced Christianity. Notably, the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Nigeria in 1914 brought together the two religions demarcated by ethnicity".**(**Ezeibe 2010**).**

Faith-based crises started in Nigeria as far back as 1953. The Igbo massacre of 1966 triggered a massive and major case of killings in the country which led to counter-coup of the same year had as a double cause the Igbo officers' overthrow and pre-existing (partisan) pressures between the Igbos and the neighborhood Muslims culminating to a major civil war.

The end of the civil war in 1970 did not put an end to religiously motivated crises though the war was declared no "vanquished no victor"() but today people around Southern Kaduna, parts of Benue state to mention but a few are facing diversified forms of crises. In the opinion of Blier the present crises bedeviling the nation are as a result of the advent of foreign religions in into Nigeria.

Religious crises in Nigeria can be said to be a perennial dilemma between the Christians and Muslims in particular while adherents of African Traditional Religion who are now fewer as a result of the massive conversion surf the brunt. One of the key informants told these researchers in Southern Kaduna Nigeria that there is a psychologically enshrined and sworn enmity between the adherents of the two major religions whose parent religion is Judaism

In Nigeria, as elsewhere, individuals who identify with a particular religion often do so with varying degrees of devotion, ranging from moderate to fanatical. According to Ukeachusim (2013:102), religious conflicts and violence are frequently perpetrated by fanatics seeking to defend their beliefs. In Nigeria, Islamic and Christian extremists often engage in violent clashes to assert their faith, principles, and interests, while adherents of African Traditional Religion are often caught in the crossfire. The high level of intolerance between Islam and Christianity, both foreign religions in Africa, has led to frequent outbreaks of violence and hindered Nigeria's development efforts. Fanatical religious adherents often disregard the rule of law, engaging in illicit activities to promote their faith. Furthermore, foreign religions in Africa have increasingly disregarded constitutional considerations, prioritizing their own interests over the well-being of the nation Abimbola (1976).

According to the 1999 section 38(1) constitution as amended:
"Every person shall be entitled to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, including freedom to change his religion or belief"

By further elucidation this provides that nobody is entitled to impose his/her religious credo on another. The provision of this law has not given any diminution the high spate of recurrence of religious conflicts. The presence of Islam and Christianity in negligence to African Traditional Religion has helped in increasing the quest for domination of one over another. 80% of our respondents believe that adherents of Islam are more prone to forceful conversion. As noted by Sampson (2012) "…conflicts between Nigerian Christians and Muslims have often manifested in violent inter-religious violence (Sampson 2012).It was in this regard that Awolalu (1976) elaborately stated that; … the indigenous religion of the Africans is a religion that has been handed down from generation to generation by the forebears of the present generation of Africans. It is not a fossil religion (a thing of the past) but a religion that Africans today have made theirs by living it and practicing it. This is a religion that has no written literature, yet it is "written" everywhere for those who care to see and read. It is largely written in the people's myths and folklores, in their songs and dances, in their liturgies and shrines and in their proverbs and pith sayings. It is a religion whose historical founder is neither known nor worshipped, it is a religion that has no zeal for membership drive, yet it offers persistent fascination for Africans, young or old, (P. 275)"

GOD AND HIS DIVINITIES IN AFRICAN RELIGION

In the hierarchical order of divinities, God the almighty stands at the peak, followed by lower spirits/deities and ancestors. The divinities stand in a unique relationship with God. Contrary to the teaching of Christianity and Islam that the divinities are the agent of the devil and therefore the rivals of God, the African Traditional Religion teaches that the divinities are the servant of God. According to Idowu (1973: 169)., "...it will be correct to say that the divinities were brought into being, or that they came into being in the nature of things with regard to the divine ordering of the universe".According to Ugwu and Ugwueye (2004:98), divinity has the attributes or qualities of Supreme God, and was created as an offspring of God, and was created for a definite purpose which is to do the will of God in theocratic government of the world. These divinities are ministers with various portfolios in Deity's monarchical government.

In African Traditional Religion, divinities are believed to possess both positive and negative qualities, and can be invoked to inflict harm or suffering on others. According to Awolalu and Dopamu (1979:77), these divinities are "ambidextrous" and can embody both good and evil simultaneously. There are various categories of divinities, including the primordial or arch divinities, who are believed to have originated from the Supreme Being and participated in the creation of the universe. These divinities are seen as authoritative figures, deriving their power from the Supreme Being. African people are deeply rooted in their religious traditions, and their faith is an integral part of their daily lives. As Ugwu (2014:69) notes, the Igbo people, for example, are a deeply religious community, and their existence is inextricably linked to their faith. The introduction of foreign religions has posed a significant challenge to African spirituality, but the African people remain steadfast in their devotion to their traditional beliefs. As Mbiti (1969:1) observes, Africans are notoriously religious, and their faith is deeply ingrained in their social and cultural

practices. Opoku (1978:11) further emphasizes that religion is an integral part of African culture, and Mndende (2006:161) notes that religion is impossible to isolate from social life. In essence, African Traditional Religion is a vital component of African identity and culture.

NEGLECT AND RELEGATION OF AFRICAN RELIGION IN THE GLOBES RELIGIOUS SPACE:

The real nature of African spirituality is such that the God and his pantheon of gods, the forebears originally encountered is still the same God that the Africans of all generations worship. It is the same Supreme who revealed himself to the African ancestors that their children were made to recognize and believe in. It is thus very pathetic that African Religion has been described as fetishshism, idolatry, heathens' religion(Idowu,1973). African Traditional Religion has suffered a decline in values such as sincerity and security, and is often misrepresented as animism. Despite this, indigenous religions continue to face bias from other faiths, with converts to Islam and Christianity labeling African religions as agnosticism. However, Hackett argues that African religions are experiencing a resurgence through globalization, modernization, politicization, commercialization, and individualization. There are several reasons why African religions have a promising future. Firstly, they provide a framework for profound quality of life, supporting what Laurenti Magesa calls "the ethical conventions of inexhaustible life." Secondly, African religions have historically influenced the selection and installation of royalty and their systems of governance. Thirdly, traditional celebrations and customs will continue to keep African religions alive. Fourthly, the need for healing and spiritual guidance will ensure the survival of African religions. Lastly, the resilience of African religions in the diaspora community is a testament to their enduring significance. In African culture, every aspect of life is considered sacred and under divine authority. As a result, religion and spirituality permeate all spheres of life, from birth to death. This comprehensive and integral approach to spirituality has led Mbiti (1969:1) to observe that "Africans are notoriously religious," and that religion is deeply embedded in every department of life. Africans carry their spirituality with them wherever they go, incorporating it into their daily activities such as farming, trading, and hunting. This all-encompassing nature of African spirituality underscores its enduring importance in the lives of African people.

According to Chidester, (2009:97) a “world-view is not simply a way of seeing, or a way of thinking, but a multidimensional network of strategies for negotiating person and place in a world of discourse, practice and association.” From the following definition, we can see the important characteristics of religion, as a system of beliefs and practices, the sense of sacredness and its function as a unifying agent, but the inadequacy of the definition surfaces when all the features of religion pointed out here rested on the church. From the foregoing, Durkheim's definition of Christianity appears plausible.

BETWEEN CONTINUITY AND CHANGE OF AFRICAN RELIGIOUS OUTLOOKS

In African culture, life is deeply intertwined with spirituality, with every aspect of existence considered to be under divine guidance. As a result, religion and spirituality play a pervasive role in African life, influencing all stages of life, from conception to death and beyond. This comprehensive integration of spirituality into daily life led scholar John Mbiti to note that Africans are deeply religious, with faith permeating every aspect of life to the point where it is often impossible to separate from other aspects of culture. Wherever Africans go, their spirituality accompanies them, infusing their daily activities, such as farming, trading, and hunting, with a deep sense of connection to the divine. This all-encompassing nature of African spirituality underscores its profound significance in African lifeLambek (1981).

African spirituality is communalistic in nature, this is clearly seen as one observes the socio-cultural life of the people and the society in its entirety. Every clan, kindred or family has its special shrine as well as special deity. Thus, one finds shrines here and there, at the center of every clan, at kindred squares as well as in those of families, compounds. The family or household deities are given daily veneration by the people's priest while the clan or kindred deities receive occasional veneration. This notion according to Idowu (1994) is expressed thus;The belief that God instills the soul and vital force in humans, making them living beings, underscores God's absolute control over the world and humanity. This idea is closely tied to the concept of God as the determiner of destiny, solidifying God's claim on humanity and the world. All beings derive their power and authority from God, making Him the ultimate source of all power, authority, and sanctions for orderly human relations. The encounter between Europe and Africa sparked intense debates and arguments, including those related to human dignity and the equation of Africans with animals. Although these debates seem to have subsided in recent years, some religions continue to intimidate African Traditional Religion, prompting the need for research. In the context of global spirituality, certain areas require reemphasis, such as the universality of morality. European scholars have been criticized for denigrating African morality, dismissing practices like ancestral worship, burial rites, and ritual sacrifices as inferior. However, Okechukwu (KII) argues that moral systems and cultures are built on a people's specific beliefs and history. While Western ideology emphasizes scripture, African Traditional Religion relies on ancestral morality passed down through generations and rooted in African deity. In the African ethical system, the value for human life is paramount. Humans are considered the most vulnerable and valuable creation of God. However, the transatlantic slave trade, forced labor, and other forms of exploitation have led to a decline in the value placed on human life. Despite these historical injustices, African Traditional Religion continues to uphold the sanctity of human life and promote a morality rooted in ancestral wisdom.

Sincerity: the aboriginal Africans believed so much in the act of truth. Truth is said to be immutable, one and indivisible and in the presence of the ancestors and gods, no African is guilty of falsehood.

Security system: African in the real African village an society had her security system

embedded in her culture and religion. The village hunters were not only charged with the provision of games for the society but also to hunt evil beingsbothspiritual and temporal.
Thus, it was difficult for any strange face to commit any atrocity setting. The hunters and traditional rulers know every new face in the society. Harmony and peace reigned in such setting. Everyone in the society saw the neighbor as a good brother and could not imagine harming him.
The advent of foreign technologies and religions have placed the security status of Africans on a scale of perpetual decline. ()
African ethics is deeply rooted in her religion. The Africans think religion in their affairs while cooking, farming etc. thus they are discussed as notoriously religious (Mbiti) This connection between man and divinity forms the centrality of African ethics as the good or bad of any situation is defined within religion.
The activities of man are guided by the subconscious awareness that the divinities such as the ancestors, gods and spirits and the almighty God are becoming monitoring lights on the individual. There exists in Africa culture a thick mystical being force that helps moderate behavior and attitude of Africans.

CONCLUSION

The interfacing nature of faith in a globalized religious space has led to the marginalization of African Religion, perpetuating a narrative of inferiority and obscurity. Despite its rich cultural heritage and philosophical depth, African Religion continues to be relegated to the periphery of global religious discourse. However, this research has demonstrated that African Religion possesses a unique epistemological framework that offers valuable insights into the human condition, community, and the cosmos. By acknowledging and respecting the diversity of religious experiences and traditions, we can work towards a more inclusive and equitable global religious space. Ultimately, the recognition and valorization of African Religion are essential for promoting interreligious dialogue, understanding, and cooperation. As we move forward in an increasingly interconnected world, it is imperative that we challenge dominant narratives and create spaces for marginalized voices to be heard. By doing so, we can foster a more just, peaceful, and harmonious world, where diverse religious traditions are celebrated and respected.

References

Abimbola, Wande. *Ifá: An Exposition of Ifá Literary Corpus.* Ibadan: Oxford University Press Nigeria, 1976.
Achebe, C. (1958). *Things Fall Apart*. London: Heinemann.

Bascom, W. *Ifa Divination: Communication Between Gods and Men in West Africa*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969. Reprint, 1991.

Beattie, John, and John Middleton, eds. *Spirit Mediumship and Society in Africa.* London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969.

Blier S.P. *The Anatomy of Architecture: Ontology and Metaphor in Batammaliba Architectural Expression.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994.

Blier, Suzanne Preston. *African Vodun: Art, Psychology, and Power.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.

Boddy, Janice. *Wombs and Alien Spirits: Women and Men in the Zar Cult in Northern Sudan.* Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989.

Buxton, Jean. *Religion and Healing in Mandari.* Oxford: Clarendon, 1973.
Comaroff, J., &Comaroff, J. L. (1991). Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism, and Consciousness in South Africa. University of Chicago Press.

Comaroff, Jean. *Body of Power, Spirit of Resistance: The Culture and History of a South African People.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985.

Development in Nigeria in Professor Bassey Andah Journal of Cultural Studies Vol. 6(Calabar: Professor Bassey Andah Journal of Cultural Studies University of Calabar, 2013), pp.102-118

Evans-Pritchard, E. E. *Nuer Religion.* Oxford: Clarendon, 1956.
Ezeibe C.C *Inter-Religious Conflicts And Crisis Of Development In Nigeria: Who Benefits?*. Available from: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/281624956_Inter-Religious_Conflicts_And_Crisis_Of_Development_In_Nigeria_Who_Benefits [accessed Sep 04 2020].

Fortes, Meyer. *Religion, Morality, and the Person: Essays on Tallensi Religion.* Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1987.
Frank, A. G. (1978). Dependent Accumulation and Underdevelopment. Macmillan.
Gospel: -

Griaule, Marcel. *Conversations with Ogotemmeli: An Introduction to Dogon Religious Ideas.* London: Oxford University Press, 1965.

Hackett, Rosalind I. J. *Art and Religion in Africa.* London: Cassell, 1996.
Hobson, J. A. (1902). Imperialism: A Study. James Pott & Company.

Idowu, B.E *Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief.* New York: Wazobia, 1994.

Idowu, E. Bolaji. *African Traditional Religion: A Definition.* Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1973.

Johnson, Douglas. *Nuer Prophets: A History of Prophecy from the Upper Nile in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries.* Oxford: Clarendon, 1994.

Lambek, Michael. *Human Spirits: A Cultural Account of Trance in Mayotte.* Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1981.

Lawal, Babatunde. *The Gèlèdé Spectacle: Art, Gender, and Social Harmony in an African Culture.* Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1996.

Lenin, V. I. (1917). Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism. International Publishers.

Lienhardt, R. Godfrey. *Divinity and Experience: The Religion of the Dinka.* Oxford: Clarendon, 1961.

Magesa, Laurenti. *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life.* Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1997.

Mbiti, John. *Introduction to African Religion.* Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann, 1991.

Middleton, John. *Lugbara Religion: Ritual and Authority among an East African People.* Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1987.

Ranger, T. (1995). Are We Not Also Men?: The Samkange Family and African Politics in Zimbabwe 1920-64. Baobab Books. Glory:

Ranger, Terence, and I. N. Kimambo, eds. *The Historical Study of African Religion.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972.

Rodney, W. (1972). How Europe Underdeveloped Africa. Bogle-L'Ouverture Publications.

Setiloane, Gabriel. *The Image of God among the Sotho-Tswana.* Rotterdam, Netherlands: Balkema, 1976.

Smith, Edwin. *African Ideas of God.* London: Edinburgh House, 1950.

Terwase, I S. Religious violence in Nigeria. Causal diagnoses and strategic recommendations to the state and religious communities https://www.accord.org.za/ajcr-issues/religious-violence-in-nigeria/ accessed 28-08-2020.

Thompson, Robert Farris. *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy.* New York: Vintage, 1984.

Turner, Victor. *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual.* Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1967.

Ukeachusim Chidinma P, Okoli A.O & Solomon, E. Religious Riots and its Effects on sustainable

Vivian falae History of how Christianity came to Nigeria Read more: https://www.legit.ng/1145690-history-christianity-nigeria.html

Zahan, Dominique. *The Religion, Spirituality, and Thought of Traditional Africa.* Translated by Kate Ezra Martin and Lawrence Martin. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979