

Global Perspective of African Traditional Religion and Culture in the Modern Era

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Abstract

There is abundant evidence in literature that African Traditional Religion (ATR) and culture have faced numerous challenges globally, including by the Africans themselves. The destruction inflicted on African traditions by colonial authorities and even by the African fanatical and overzealous Christians cannot be over emphasized. The producers of Nollywood movies and their defacement of African traditions in their various scripts is another destructive phase of African Traditional Religion and culture. ATR has therefore, been marginalized from the emergence of colonialism and other world religions especially Christianity and Islam. It must be stated that ATR encompasses a wide range of beliefs and practices specific to different ethnic groups and these beliefs and practices are deeply intertwined with cultural practices that promote harmonious coexistence with man, nature and the spiritual realm. Today, there is an apparent resurgence of global interest in ATR and acceptance of its cultural significance. Using this as a springboard, this qualitative research, drawing from extensive documented evidence and firsthand accounts attempts to unveil the global perspective on African Traditional Religion and culture in the modern time focusing on some global efforts, including by Africans themselves to showcase the enviable values of African Traditional Religion and culture that enthrone sustainable development even in the modern world. The paper also demonstrates the shift in the global perspective on African Traditional Religion and culture in the recent time. It also raises some challenges facing the eradication of the observed anomaly on the global perspective of ATR. It further examines the relevance of traditional beliefs and practices amidst the forces of modernity, and the influence of other religious systems. The paper concludes with some possible recommendations which include the development of educational channels in championing the true narrative of African Traditional Religion and culture.

Keywords: Global Perspectives; African Traditional Religion; Culture; Modern Era

Introduction

Derived from the word ‘globe’, literally meaning ‘world’, global is an adjective used to describe the entire earth or something that is not provincial in scope. Globalization is a noun derivation from globe. According to Igboamalu (2003) globalization entails, amongst others, crossing national boundaries and achieving international relevance through communication and information technologies geared towards creating a single world of homogenized, globally shared reality and relevance. He observes that globalization describes some key aspects of the recent transformation of world economic activities involving international policies on economic and value distributions. There is therefore an exchange on equal and unequal terms depending on the forces of demand and supply both on economic, political, cultural and other value considerations. The entire project of globalization is geared towards making the world a global village where there would be a homogenized culture of relevance both in economic and non-economic matters. This is achieved through the process of assimilation, integration and acculturation wherein there is exchange of ideas, beliefs and culture among various civilizations. Oftentimes, there may not be a fair share of relevance amongst these cultures and civilizations, and there may be intentional and otherwise misrepresentation and misinformation about other cultures.

African Traditional Religion (ATR) and culture have been one of those phenomenal civilizations that have experienced gross misrepresentation in the global map. Beginning from the colonial era, African Traditional Religion and culture have been wrongly painted. It is worrisome that the misrepresentation and the attribution of derogatory terms were later fostered by Africans themselves. The destructive representation of African Traditional Religion and Culture by colonial authorities, fanatical and overzealous African Christians and Nollywood movies producers cannot be over emphasized. African Traditional Religion has, therefore, been marginalized from the emergence of colonialism and other world religions, especially Christianity and Islam. Despite the fact that it encompasses a wide range of beliefs and practices specific to different ethnic groups, these African traditional beliefs and practices are deeply intertwined with cultural practices that promote harmonious coexistence with man, nature and the spiritual realm.

Happily, there is currently a seeming resurgence of global interest in ATR and acceptance of its cultural values. These renewed global perspectives and interest of ATR and its cultural significance have relatively not received sufficient scholarly attention and so, have created a gap in literature. This present study therefore, using the qualitative method of inquiry, attempts to unveil the global perspective on African Traditional Religion and culture in the modern time. In other words, what is the current global perception of ATR and its cultural significance? What are the indexes of the observed current perception?

What other challenges are still facing the ATR and culture in the global community? What are the possible strategic choices for achieving maximum global acceptance? These questions require answers, hence the need for this present work. Therefore, this study identifies the current global perception of ATR and its cultural significance. It further discusses the indexes of the observed current perception and some challenges facing the ATR and culture in the global community. It finally suggests some possible strategic choices for achieving maximum global acceptance.

African Traditional Religion and Culture

Iroegbu (1994) identified Africa as:

The geo-political and socio-cultural entity englobed by the continent of Africa: North, middle and south. It includes the old Afro-Islamic Egypt. Sub-saharan black central as well as white South Africa are all included in this geographical definition. Equally included are the historically African-originated Afro-American and Afro-Asian peoples whose roots are Africa. (p. 116).

This is to say that all who live in Africa or who by history of origin are tied to Africa are part and parcel of the African world and reality. The African people like every other live in a society where their definition of reality is culturally derived. This entails their definition and appreciation of the supernatural viz-a-viz their humanity. It also involves their appreciation of the biodiversity and the human environment that includes animals, trees and seen and unseen realities in relation to the life of man. Religion and culture are therefore a product and definition of this relationship. This derivation, however, is not particular to Africa. It is a universal phenomenon.

Available literature and scholarship indicate that the phenomenon of religion has a universal appeal and is not an exclusivity of any people. Madu (1997) holds that during the thousands of years of mankind's history, man's search for God has led him to so many pathways resulting to diversity of religious expressions. Thus, the concept of religion is an elusive one. Religion as a natural quest of every human to realign with his or her creator (*religere*) is a desire to fill the void in man. Ekeke and Ekeopara (2010) identified fear, magic and priestly class as some of the opinions on the origin of religion. According to them:

Some see religion as originating from fear. People saw the vastness of the universe and the rumblings of thunder and lightning and the vastness of the sea and so many other things that caused them fear and so developed faith in something that will shield them from what they feared. Others see religion as originating from magic while others see religion as a creation of the priestly class. (p. 210).

They observed other views of the origin of religion in Africa to include man's reflection on the vastness and sustenance of the universe, man's realization of his limitations, and the contemplation on the observed forces of nature. It could be observed that these concerns are not exclusive to any culture or people. Thus, religion develops and naturally acquires a cultural coloration as every people interpret the supernatural reality through their cultural lenses and parameters.

Heb. 1:1 is very apt that God's revelation to the world has both cultural and time bound appeal, wherein God continues to reveal himself to different people at different times and ways. This enables the manifestation of the divinity in various religions; Jewish, Islam, Christianity, African Traditional Religion, Hinduism, etc., and in the vagaries of his manifestation. In each of these encounters, he is seen and appreciated in their unique cultural environment. This is where the symbolic manifestations vary as God can only be interpreted by the people in the language and phenomena that are original to them. To the Jews he appears in the voice of Abraham, the beloved, to Moses the leader, to the Kings, and through the sacramental species of bread and wine. To the Muslims, he appeared through his messenger Muhammed in Mecca. To the Africans, God manifests through the natural environment and is premised through the sacrifices and libations as interpreted through the ministry of priests and various *dibia*.

The Africa sees the world as cyclic in an eternal exchange between the living and the dead ancestors, where karma is real. Libations are therefore poured to the eternal memory and intercession is made of them for the cleansing and salvation of their living family members. Offerings and prayers are made to the deities and ancestors whose role it is to mediate between man and God in what can best be described as African economy of salvation. This enhances the belief in reincarnation where the memories of cherished ancestors are never lost but rather ancestors are believed to return to life by being born into the family again as new born babies.

The African world is a spiritual world, and as Mbiti would say, Africans are 'notoriously religious'. This entails that the Africa from birth to death and even beyond the physical world is celebrated religiously. The child is born with rituals; eats, drinks, baths, marries, farms, harvests, goes into adolescent or adulthood, dies and is buried religiously, even sexual relationships between married couples have religious underpinnings. The African world is a religious world where evil is abhorred and the good promoted, where there are taboos (*aru*) and sanctions made to keep the society sacred and in synch with the spiritual world and any violation of same is met with sanctions and at times ostracization to avoid the entire community being punished by the gods for the offence of one person. The saying in Igbo is that *ofu aka rutammaduo zuendiozo* (when one finger gets soiled by oil, it spreads to the rest of the fingers). Every effort is therefore made to bring the entire

community to the same cultural, political and religious standard. Children are trained to imbibe the values of the community which according to Onwubiko (1991) includes sense of community life, sense of good human relations, sense of the sacredness of life, sense of hospitality, sense of the sacred and of religion, sense of time, sense of respect for authority and elders, sense of language and proverbs, etc. African religion and culture are one and the same devoid of any dichotomy. Consequently, the society determines the model of religious worship as religion sanctions offenders.

A good understanding of the African religion entails that one has good knowledge of African cosmology and environment. This is the reason the early missionaries and expatriates derogatorily term African religion as animism, which is the belief in the supernatural power that organizes and animates the material universe. Animism, one of the oldest systems of religious belief for indigenous people, according to Cassar (2023) is the belief that all things – from rocks and trees to animals and humans, air, wind, earth and fire – possess a spiritual essence or soul. Indeed, according to him, animism focuses on the interconnectedness between all things in nature. Some of the key concepts around the ideology of animism are spirit, ancestors, natural forces and rituals. This is the reason why African Traditional Religion and culture thrives in its symbolism as derived from its natural environment.

Every religion is appreciated through its peculiar symbolic objects or sacraments which are frames of interpretation of and interaction with the supernatural reality. Catholic theology describes sacrament as an outward sign of inward grace by which grace is given to the soul. Described as heirophany by Martos (1982), sacraments serve as media of communication with the invisible reality. Thus, any object, space, person, moment or action that serves this mediatory role is considered a sacrament or said to be sacramental. Every religion possesses this sacred and symbolic mediation model. Sacrament comes from the Latin *sacramentum* which is a symbol, event, person or time of or in a history that mediates or makes God present to human consciousness. A symbol is that through which something other than itself is made present to the beholder. Every culture and civilization therefore possess these unique symbolic objects, persons and ceremonies that mediate the divine to mortals. This is the reason St Augustine (in Martos, 1982) observes that the number of sacraments were infinite, as according to him, everything in creation was a reflection of God. He opines that sacrament is a sign of sacred reality. St. Augustine went further to distinguish between sacraments of the word such as sermons, prayers, reading of the scriptures; and sacraments of action such as water and wine, blessing and other rituals. He observes that these were sacraments as they help to make the divine present to everyone that understands the signs. Note that according to St Augustine, the appreciation and effectiveness of the sacrament is relative to those who understand them.

Thus, symbolic elements and phenomena, otherwise called, sacraments can be said to be subjective or culture relative.

One can then appreciate why the Roman Pontiff, John Paul II (cited in Mbefo, 2001) rightly called on Africa as he called to Europe to return to her roots and recall her origins which he recognised as authentic and veritable. The Pope is underscoring the authenticity of nations and their cultures. It is dramatic, recalling how the pontiff described himself: “I, John Paul, a son of the Polish nation, which has always, on account of its origins, its traditions, its culture and its crucial connections, considered itself European – Slavs...” (Mbefo, 2001, p.6). Subsequently he enjoined Africa as he invited Europe to “return to yourself, be yourself again, recall your origins, let your roots have new life” (Ecclesia in Africa, 33).

Much as the Pontiff was not inviting Africa to go into what Western religious scholars call idolatry, it is instructive to note that every return to African root has to involve appreciating those peculiar cultural symbols and symbolism that distinguishes Africa from the others, and through which the Africa appreciates her world in relation to the supernatural. It is therefore wrong to derogatorily tag any religion as fetish or idolatrous. If Africa having sacramental or paraphernalia of worship that is unique to her is considered idolatry, then, at least every religion is idolatrous, as God speaks to every culture in their respective cultural milieu, structures and symbolic phenomena. This is because every religion employs the media of sacred objects, time, space, and persons to mediate between themselves and the divine. St. Augustine (cited in Martos, 1943) insists that “people cannot be united in any religion... unless they are brought together through a common sharing of some visible signs or sacraments” (p. 9). It was therefore strange for any uninformed person to derogatorily tag African Traditional Religion as idolatry or to deny Africa the capacity to evolve a religion of their own.

The Battered Image of African Traditional Religion and Culture

Due to the wrong narrative associated with the African Traditional Religion, with its attendant balkanization of the African culture and civilization by Western powers and colonial masters, what followed was a sort of inferiority complex and a preference for a euro-centric life style, ranging from foreign food, clothing, buildings, household items, and all the indicators of culture including religion. Africa was painted as a continent without the knowledge of God. The pundits have always asked like Emil Ludwig; ‘how can the untutored Africa conceive God’. The impatience and ignorance of the earliest writers on African religion was the greatest undoing on the African culture and religion. Some overzealous Christians have further aided this onslaught by promoting the desecration and destruction of various ritual/symbolic objects and places of worship

belonging to the African traditionalists, even while this action constitute an infringement on the fundamental rights of these traditional worshippers. It is evident that these fanatics in their self-righteousness believe they are fighting a battle for God. Nollywood and other African script writers did not spare the African nation the wrong narrative, as many scripts presented the religion and culture as demonic and a structure that must be pulled down.

Resurgence of Global Interest in African Traditional Religion and Culture

Today, there is a renewed global interest in Africa. The renewed interest in Africa did not stem from her vast mineral, landed and human resources – these have been there even at the time when the missionaries considered Africans as primitive and incapable of appreciating spiritual realities. The new global interest in Africa today lies in her non-material resources in terms of culture and traditional values, African herbs and roots (medicine), biodiversity, arts and music, fashion, film industry, *etc.* According to the permanent observer mission of the African Union to the United Nations (2021), Africa is the mother continent and first inhabited region on earth with unique identity. They continued that Africa is characterized by vast lands and one of the largest populations on the planet with rich human heritage and cultural diversity. The report continued that the culture of each ethnic group holds together the authentic social fabric of traditional practices and rites, art, music, and oral literature through which identities are built. Africa's rich history and culture is so diverse that it varies from one country or region to another. For instance, Nigeria is blessed with over 450 cultural languages and many dialects. The uniqueness of this language phenomenon is such that in the farming community of Ubang village in southern Nigeria, Buzz Staff (2024) reports that men and women speak languages different from each other. Nestled between two mountains in Obudu Local Government Area, Cross River State, Unah (2014), reports further that Ubang is a community where the female and their male inhabitants speak separate languages and they understand themselves. The people of Ubang are extremely proud of this uniqueness and consider this difference as a blessing from their God. Other frames of cultural manifestation exist that make the African culture both unique and a phenomenon of global attraction currently. African culture and religion have today received global attention in its tourist's attraction as well as being seen as an authentic solution towards auto transcendence and the attainment of man's spiritual height in relation to the supernatural. There is therefore the need to use Africa's legacy of cultural resources to trigger the development and economic transformation of the continent. Value is defined as the regard that something is held to deserve, the importance, worth or usefulness of something.

African religion and culture stand tall among many other global cultures to offer her autochthonous riches in human and non-human values to the world. Human values involve those values that are anchored around behavioral attitude of man like respect for the elderly and parents, dignity in labor, respect for life, sense of sacred, sense of communalism and community cohesion, team work, live and let live philosophy, kindness, moral probity and behavioral patterns acceptable to the society. The African sense of industry and hard work exemplified in the Igbo apprenticeship model “igbaboyi” has been adopted by Harvard Business School. This internationally and globally recognized Igbo apprenticeship model is the reason why the poverty index of the South Eastern states of Nigeria is very low compared with the other regions of the country, as it has the capacity to raise venture capitals for young traders and entrepreneurs. This is why traditionally begging is alien to Igbo culture and the possession of wealth whose source is unknown is most unwelcome to the Igbo.

Though in Igbo culture, marriage is essentially polygamous, moral probity in terms of sexual relationship was a cherished value as young men and women were religiously guided to family life devoid of promiscuity. Marriage ceremonies, which according to Nze Oturulikpo-Ofo (personal communication, 8/9/23) was merely *ime-ego nwanyị* (paying of bride prize), was very religious and not flamboyant, thus limiting the profligacy and luxuries associated with marriages today; many of whom also have broken down shortly after their flamboyant celebrations.

The Igbo concept of *ndubuisi* (life is supreme) underscores Igbo appreciation of life as supreme to every other thing. The Igbo values life and so prays *ndummirinduazu* (let the water flow and fish live), *egbebereugobere*, *nkesiibeyaebenankukwaaya* (let the kite perch and the eagle perch, should anyone deny the other the right to perch, let its wing break). Consequently, murder and abortion are tabooed in Igbo culture. In extreme cases, the community may choose to sanction an offender by ostracizing the persons who committed certain abominations to prevent them from infesting the community with infamy and curses from the gods. Due to the African Traditional Religious love for life and longevity, polygamy is accepted as more wives mean more children for the cultivation of more food to serve the family and for the rest of the society. Polygamy was therefore a valuable culture as it ensures also that most young ladies were married and absorbed into the family. It should be noted that aboriginal cultures were polygamous. Polygamy gave no room for the apparent marginalization of women in the society, as virtually every woman was a wife and mother cherished and valued by her husband, children and the society. It should be said that feminism evolved partly as women who remained unmarried due to monogamy began seeking for relevance in the society where they belong. This quest for relevance led feminism outside the natural roles of the sexes to begin to seek for

alternative roles and relevance in the society. We are of the opinion that both feminism and LGBTQ (Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender queer) are thwarted ideologies that are disingenuous to the promotion of life and the human species and consequently are strange to Africa Traditional Religion and culture.

Africa also places enormous value on nature and the environmental protection. According to Wikipedia.com (3023), environmental protection is the practice of protecting the natural environment with the objectives to conserve natural resources and the existing natural environment and, where it is possible, to repair damages and reverse trends. O'Connor (2023) observed the interconnectedness of human beings and the planet on which they live, and the dependence of human well-being on a healthy environment as enablers for the realization of the set objectives of the sustainable Development Goal (SDG)'s objectives. African Traditional Religion and culture stands out to defend the natural habitat and biodiversity. Iwu (2014) holds that "one increasingly important aspect of the African worldview is the belief that human beings cannot be separated from nature. There is, therefore, no overwhelming desire to conquer the natural world or dominate it" (p. 367). Kalu (1998) posits that Africans idolizes nature and consequently "indigenous worldviews purvey an ideology which is at once more eco-sensitive, eco-musical and devoid of the harsh flutes of those who see nature as a challenge to be conquered, exploited and ruled". In Igbo religious and cultural worldview, animals and plant alike all share the same economy of environment and must therefore be preserved and not exploited.

Consequently, there are sanctions against indiscriminate fishing in some streams, killing of certain animals and felling of trees in some forests. It is a taboo to enter some forests at sometimes. Trees with fruits or pregnant animals are guarded under pain of sacrilege as it believed that *anaghiegbunwanyináfoime* (it is an abomination to kills a pregnant woman/animal or fruiting tree under any excuse). These trees and animals as well as human beings must be allowed to deliver the offspring they bear to the world. So African worldview and religion is anti-abortion and is prolife both to man and other living beings. Though this is meant to serve some religious ideology, it becomes a framework upon which Igbo preserved the animals and crops in nature, many of whom are medicinal and in much demand today. It saves these animals and plants from extinction. Another area of global attraction is African medicine and healing as exemplified in ethno medicine.

While decrying that the colonial healthcare system left a legacy of marginalizing and downgrading traditional medicine, Adodo (2012) observed that:

In the race to meet the Millennium Development Goals, combat increasing drug resistance and tackle new diseases, traditional medicine is making a comeback! Government, drug companies, researchers and international aid organizations

increasingly recognize the value of traditional medicine and its practitioners (P.ix).

Adodo observes further that:

Natural medicine is not just about the physical wellbeing of the person. It is rather, a call to a total liberation of the person; body, mind and soul. It is a call to resist the systematic exploitation of the poor by the rich, to create for the Cosmos, and protect it against pollution and destruction. (p. 6).

The identification of the urgency of natural medicine has given rise to many national and international discussions and deliberations on African medicine, one of which being the workshop which according to Adodo (2012) was attended by herbalists, nurses, midwives, farmers and housewives attending from different parts of the world like Germany, France, Switzerland and Nigeria. This workshop was held in the remote village of Ikposogye in Obi LGA of Nassarawa State, in 1999. There have been other conferences on phyto and natural medicines. There are international conferences taking place today in many cities of the world. According to Iwu (2014), sub-saharan Africa is home to over 50,000 distinct species of plant resources; The Plant List was produced in 2010 by an international collaboration led by the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew (United Kingdom) and the Missouri Botanical Garden. These attempts and several others highlight the most cherished biodiversity in the African environment.

Also according to the permanent observer mission of the African Union to the United Nations (2021), Music and fashion are good examples of the global impact African culture tend to have. While many modern icons in the music industry have incorporated African instrumentation, ideas, and ideals into their music, modern fashion industry often borrows very heavily from African culture in the design of the latest fashion trends.

Pons (2024) writes that the African music scene is at the forefront of music consumption in terms of market consumption and spotify streaming, citing such great African names like Nigerian Burna Boy, Asake, Davido, and Omay Lay, South African DJ Black Coffee. Indeed, African music has arrived on the global scene. There has also been collaboration between African and international artists. Consequently, the distinct African rhythm and musical patterns are evolving and mingling with other global musical genre. These can be seen in the music of such musicians like Fela Anikulapo Kuti, Wizkid, Burna Boy, Davido, Flavour and others. The Steam Revolution (2024) observes that the growth of African music in recent years has been nothing short of astonishing. Earlier Dukor (2007) had observed that “in the area of Arts and Aesthetics in general, it is hard to deny that Africa has an indestructible reservoir of which she

contributed to the world civilization by way of globalizing African Arts and sculptor” (p. x).

Aided by advancements in technology and social media, artists from the continent are increasingly finding their way into the global spotlight, reshaping the musical landscape with their vibrant rhythms and unique cultural influences. The permanent observer mission of the African Union to the United Nations (2021) reports therefore with great excitement and evidence that the rich culture of Africa has not only contributed but also continues to sustain development in many industries in modern societies. Such industry so impacted includes world-class music studios and engineers, arts journalists, graphic designers, screen/digital printers, creative entrepreneurs, etc. African art and music have therefore been a world class image maker for the African continent bringing in its trail enormous foreign exchange for the macro-economic growth of the continent, while offering values in entertainment and recreation to the global community with its hybrid African music and unique dance steps.

Aided by advancement in technology, the African cultural values have impacted enormously on the global community. It must be noted also that the African culture has not been without exchange and influence with neighboring cultures and civilizations. No gainsaying the fact that culture is a product of constant relationship and interaction between people and their world including interaction with one another, the natural environment, neighboring cultures, with seen and unseen realities; which has evolved over time around some cognitive mappings. This is the reason more African scholars and researchers have continued to write in defense of the authenticity of the African story. The people’s culture which is domiciled in their arts, fashion and music as its source gives them their unique identity. Religion being a component of culture and a manifestation of same showcases a people’s interaction with the real but invisible supernatural world.

The Roma Pontiff, Francis, in his Post-Synodal exultation, *Laudato Si*, invites humanity to a new dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet and calls for a new and universal solidarity and corporation to redress the damage caused by human abuse of God’s creation (No. 14). The Roman Pontiff observed that “the earth’s resources are also being plundered because of short-sighted approaches to the economy, commerce and production. The loss of forests and woodlands entails the loss of species which may constitute extremely important resources in the future, not only for food but also for curing diseases and other uses. Different species contain genes which could be key resources in years ahead for meeting human needs and regulating environmental problems” (No. 32). He laments that thousands of plants and animals species disappear yearly as a result of the excesses of human activities and therefore call for restraint. This aligns with the traditional African worldview and belief that the world is composed of

man, spiritual beings, animals and the environment each correlating in a symbiotic balance that must not be disrupted. Wild-life preservation improves biodiversity and has positive impact on the ecosystem. Today the world is facing the challenges of climate change. It is an emergency that requires the derivation of both local and international solution as already championed by Conservation International, Wildlife Conservation Society, United Nations and other relevant organizations.

In this modern era bedeviled by industrial and internet revolution and its attendant noise pollution observed both in the churches and on the streets, African Traditional Religion and culture stands out as it promotes a life of solitude and introspection away from the noisy and busy world. It stands out again in its search for holistic healing of the human person who has been bruised mentally, psychologically and spiritually. This aligns with the desire of World Health Organization that health be not merely the treatment of the diseased material body but the holistic attention to the material, spiritual, social as well as psychological and mental life of the human person. In African religion and culture, the *dibia* (traditional Igbo-African doctor) is endowed by his vocation, with enormous capacity to bring holistic healing to the human person through his divination, counsels, prayers, sacrifices and herbs.

Today it has become increasingly evident that the renaissance movements of African forebears like the Negritude of Leopold Senghor, consciencism of Nkruma is beginning to yield fruits. Nkruma's ideology of consciencism is a philosophy and ideology of decolonization According to Wikipedia.com (2024), Nkrumah defined his belief system as "the ideology of a New Africa, independent and absolutely free from imperialism, organized on a continental scale, founded upon the conception of one and united Africa, drawing its strength from modern science and technology and from the traditional African belief that the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all. The 21st century internet revolution has further opened the frontiers for young generation of Africans to the global indexes and trajectories of human civilization. This enlightenment has awoken the entire African youth into self-discovery.

The permanent observer mission of the African Union to the United Nations (2021) noted that the first step to harnessing the potential of Africa's culture is to create global economic opportunities and raise awareness of Africa's massive contribution to modern life and global culture. It is interesting to observe how passionately young Africans today celebrate and promote the African religion, culture and civilization on their various social media handles. The patronage to the African traditional Religion has consequently grown astronomically. Many socio-cultural groups today both home and in Diaspora celebrate the African culture bringing its beautiful values to the global audience. Africans have been encouraged to take pride in their heritage, and to take charge of their lives.

According to Evaldsson and Wessels (2023) the African Renaissance promotes pride in Africa's history, languages, cultures and traditions. Post-colonial African researchers have therefore made frantic efforts and spent their scholarship trying to project the correct African narrative before the global audience. This became necessary as Africa ravaged by the trans-atlantic slave trade, colonialism and missionary enterprise struggles to recover her identity and personhood from the shackles of the invaders.

The Challenges Still Facing African Development and Global Relevance

Marking the end of colonialism in Africa, 32 African countries met in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, and formed the Organization of African Union on 25th May 1963. The purpose of the organization according to Oguz (2024) was to promote unity and solidarity amongst African states and to rid the continent of the remaining vestiges of colonization and apartheid. 61years after, that dream is apparently mere wishes as Africa remain a stronghold of colonial powers, preventing rapid African development. We note that sadly after these years, African's ambitious goals for the future have remained largely unrealized, and statistically Africa is behind most other regions of the world in all the indices of development.

Colonial legacies, neo-colonialism coupled with the unimaginable corruption and lack of vision of African leaders who became the colonial master's stooges have spelt woes for the continent. Farah, Kiamba, and Mazongo, K. (2011) reviewing the economic situation in Africa observed that the economic effects of colonialism can be viewed as a progressive integration of Africa into the world capitalist system within which Africa functioned primarily as a source of raw materials for western industrial production. The colonial economy also caused agriculture to be diverted towards the production of primary products and cash crops, a situation that contributed to hunger and starvation in Africa. Africa concentrated on producing more of what was needed less for unfair trade exchange, and produced less of what was needed most. Thus, there is hunger and poverty, high illiteracy in the continent. The wrong policies of African leaders and the intimidating policies of the west as well as the multinationals were deliberately made to undermine the growth of African economy, culture and civilization. This failed expectation of Africans from their regional blocks apparently led Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger to withdraw from ECOWAS. The trio cited their reasons as loss of faith in the regional administration. According to Asadu (2024), the juntas of Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso said that instead of helping their countries fight the security threats facing them, ECOWAS imposed illegitimate, inhumane and irresponsible sanctions on them; when they staged the coups to take their destiny into their own hands. The three countries accused ECOWAS of derailing from its founding principles, and the spirit of pan-Africanism and of helping

member states and their citizens. It could be recalled that the three Sahel coup-hit nations have been struggling to contain insurgencies linked to al Qaeda and Islamic State. Wong (2024) noted that according to the three countries, ECOWAS, under the influence of foreign powers, betraying its founding principles, has become a threat to member states and peoples, adding that the bloc had failed to help them tackle the jihadist violence in their countries. It is also a known fact that Africa is a goldmine of natural resources, but the looting by her leaders and international conspiracies of an unimaginable proportion has raped her of corresponding relevance, making her only good for aid and charity from western countries who now dictate and impose their values on Africa. African governments have also failed to generate a home-grown school curriculum as well as indigenous solutions to attend to the need of the African environment and solve African intractable problems.

Solving the Intractable Problems of Africa

Chinua Achebe's famous book, *The Problem with Nigeria* was therefore right to have tried to locate the problem as purely and squarely leadership deficit. By extension, these writers are convinced that the same leadership deficit, the failure of vision among the first post-independence generation of leaders, the sit-tight syndrome of African leaders, endemic corruption and looting that has characterized African leadership since the withdrawal of the colonial masters is alarming. Reviewing the problems around the recent withdrawal of the three African countries of Burkina Faso, Mali and Chad from ECOWAS, one would need to demand a minimum of goodwill and servant-leadership from African leaders and the regional block, ECOWAS. African leadership must be geared towards serving the interest of Africa and the intentions of the founding fathers of Africa. African institutions must reflect and serve African concerns and interests, especially as it concerns infrastructural development and the promotion of the African brand.

The young generations of Africans are today more in tune with the ideals of the founding fathers of African liberation and pan-Africanism than the leaders, most of who are old and have refused to quit the stage for inspired and visionary leadership. The enlightenment and renaissance taking the center stage in Africa currently has equipped the younger generation of African with the zest to promote the African brand. With the availability of information through researches and scholarship, ethnocentrism has enabled these young Africans have good appreciation for the African religion and culture and to begin to jettison some wrong and obsolete narratives which had hitherto enveloped the African story. However, more investment is needed in the area of research and development in African culture and religion. It must be observed that due

to non-availability of written literatures and documents before the arrival of the Europeans, the religion and culture was bastardized and wrong narrative held sway. This research and development has become very necessary as even among the proponents of the African religion and culture, there are a lot of adulteration of the tradition and culture with many strange and un-orthodox practices. There should be effort to encourage more indigenous writers on African religion and culture to enable more documentation.

Traditional rulers have serious roles to play especially as it concerns the immediate stoppage to the desecration and balkanization of the traditional religious sites and the respect to the right of the traditional religion adherents to their mode of worship. The overzealous activities of fanatical pastors and churches who take pride in destroying traditional places of worship, sacred items and relics of the traditional religion must be stopped by the government. At best, there should be museums dedicated to the storage of these items by those who no longer wish to be adherents of the traditional religion. School curricula and policies should be made to incorporate, as a matter of urgency, the teaching of African religion beginning from the basic schools to the post basic schools to enable young Africans have the adequate information and also the freedom to have a religion of their choice considering that there is a United Nations Charter on freedom of worship.

It was not by accident that the *dibia* was called the master of wisdom (*di* – master, and *abia* – wisdom), as he remains the repository of the traditional knowledge and wisdom. Effort should therefore be made to return the *dibia* institution to its former glory and the wisdom of the *dibia* be harnessed. Studies have also shown that information about African religion and culture can be gotten from both oral and non-oral sources. Some of these oral sources include myths, proverbs, pithy sayings, liturgy, songs and music, etc and non-oral sources include art works, artefacts, ornaments, symbolic objects, cultic objects, masks, arts, poetry, sculptures, totems, feasts, festivals, ornaments, rituals, etc. These richly encapsulate the African worldview, religion and ideology. These should also be explored to add to the body of knowledge available to African scholarship.

Conclusion

In spite of the fact that globalization, Christian and Islamic religions as well as western education have largely bullied and tried to emasculate the African religion and culture, African traditional religion and culture have remained resilient or merely went on retreat, necessitating the current resurgence of same among modern day Africans. This age has witnessed many testimonies on the fertile African world in terms of music and arts, fashion, religion and culture, medicine and healing, etc. Africa is no longer considered a pariah state. The world will be *greater* with the positive appreciation and exploration of the rich African values and the contribution of same to the global community.

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