

## **TRIMINGHAM'S SHATTERED MICROCOSM AND HORTON'S INTELLECTUALIST EXPLANATION ON RELIGIOUS CHANGE IN AFRICA: A CASE OF MIGRATION**

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### **Abstract**

*The phenomenal increase in religious change found in Africa in the last seventy to eighty years reached an alarming stage that even the gods are ready to make a welcome back. The religious change which may be inform of adhesion or conversion that swept through Africa accompanied with it, many things which influenced the practice of African traditional religion and its world views. Many theories or explanations on religious change have been given by many scholars from different point of view. But the researcher choosed Trimingham's shattered microcosm and Horton's intellectualist explanation on religious change to show how it came about, through migration process especially to Africa. The researcher wants to expose also how migration process which involves relocation or movement of human person and ideas from one place to another helped in religious change in Africa through explanatory views of the above two scholars. Through the course of the write up, the two views of the above scholars will be explained and how the two explanations resemble each other. The meaning of migration will be explained as to how it helped in religious change found in Africa today. With this write-up, one finds out that the religious change that took place in Africa as explained by Trimingham and Horton took place through the process of migration of ideas and human person. And how it re-shaped African society in general.*

### **Introduction**

African is caught up knowingly and unknowingly by religious change that came with two immigrant religions (Christianity and Islam) that are in vogue in African now. Unknowingly, in the sense that the two world religions caused unexpected revolution in Africa which was so dynamic that it almost got out of human control as Mbiti (1969) described it. This religious change from African traditional religion to either Christianity or Islam grew or increased rapidly and successfully that many scholars painted the image that nothing is left of African traditional religion, that it is a matter of time all will be over for the traditional religion. According to Metuh (1985) majority of Africans abandoned the traditional gods of their ancestors, beliefs, values to embrace either of the two immigrant religions. Metuh (1985) painted the picture as follows

Shrines have been left to crumble and sacred grooves destroyed. Many traditional rituals have fallen into disuse and various cult objects and symbols cast away in the wake of conversion. And more fundamentally, the traditional attitudes and value systems of African societies are being eroded and modified as result of the cross-cultural currents sweeping through Africa. (p.134).

There are many changes that occurred or experienced in Africa traditional religion, the causes which are seen as religious and non religious factors. Religious factors refers to missionary activities, proselytism, teaching of doctrine and way of life of a religious persons, Non-religious factors include urbanization, education, socio-structural factors, historical factor and many others. Equally, one notices that these factors religious and non religious often over lap, that is there is no dividing line between them.

It is these factors that hit the core of African traditional religion which have no dividing line between its religion and social life. Everything is intertwined. Hence the cries of many researchers or scholars that it is matter of time, African traditional religion will go into extinction or the persisting traditional beliefs and practices will be purged away. Indeed some theories or explanations like the dualistic typology theories, unilineal evolutionary theories, socio-functionalist theories, and many others, see religious change in Africa simply as the displacement of the subdued, primitive, passive religion.

The above observation may be right, when judged or viewed from physical point of view or when viewed from the past years, what traditional religion used to be, a strong and formidable force in African setting. For example, many things about African traditional religion has been lost or changed so much, that one hardly recognizes them. The values, beliefs, festivals are thrown away, or played down that they meant nothing now, artifacts are destroyed or lost. Even some aspects of cultures, languages are being forgotten with the influence or factors of religious and non religious change.

As we must have noticed, the different explanations of religious change tend to emphasize either the discontinuity or continuity of African traditional religion depending on their thought frame work. Theories like symbolists, intellectualist and culture lag theories on the other hand seem to see the continuity of African and cultures. Metuh (1985) emphasizes that religion as a system of beliefs die

hard. African world views have an adaptive potential which respond to the impulses of change and yet hold their own features. The view of Metuh above bring to our mind the issue of what has changed and what has remained unchanged or what has been modified. This is important because it helps to correct the impression of some authors who attributed the total collapse of African traditional religions. Again, the African traditional religion in its bid to survive the onslaught of modernization coming its way, started changing. As we know, change is one thing that is constant or can we say that in a bid to respond to change coming its way, many scholars concluded that African traditional religion is going into extinction, for up till this present age, African traditional religion is still surviving in different forms not only in the shores of Africa but projecting itself into the whole world.

### **Trimingham's shattered Microcosm**

It is a known fact that African traditional society is so bound up with all spheres of their lives, that its religion cannot be separated from its real life or social life. Hence, anything about African is a religious affair. It is so bound up with their social structures, economic structures, political structures, cultural structures that any collapse in any of the structures go a long way to precipitate the collapse of its religious life. So the sudden impact or force of globalization in the form of colonial subjugation and domination as Metuh (1985) will put it, brought in a lot of changes. With this upset, the effects were noticed or seen in decay and disruption of religious life of the Africans. Hence Trimingham (cited by Metuh, 1987) in his study of religious change that took place in Africa concluded that:

The indigenous religions, being primarily local and ethnic, have no future in their organized forms, and the religious future of the African today lies between Christianity and Islam, on the one hand, and secularism on the other. His choice is between religions which lay claim to universality, whether positive or negative in their approach to live values. (p.12).

Trimingham from the above quotation concluded that African traditional religion could not with stand the force or pressure of the two world religions hence, it sought its survival in anchoring itself in either of the two religions. He may have concluded such in the years past, for the force of the two world religions overtook the African society then. For the African traditional religion's grip on the people and its value was heavily and brutally confronted and subdued. With this apparent subjugation, of the two world religions, though

with other factors as Trimingham suggested, the traditional religion suddenly and progressively dwindled into minority religion in the contemporally society. That is why many of its values were lost including the good ones. The bad ones like human sacrifice, killing of twins, injustices meted out for widows and other beliefs were stopped. While the above is going on, mass drift from African traditional religion to world religion is taking place because Africans are gradually becoming dissatisfied with their traditional religion. Not only that mass movement from African traditional religion is taking place, most African traditional systems and values began to acquire different and many meanings. Things are being redefined in the African circle, with the old values and systems loosing its values and loosing grip in the contemporally society.

Hence the abandonment of African traditional cults, shrines and symbols started. Though non-material aspect of culture or religion at this point, were heavily still retained, among the African people. With material aspect of religion being lost, Trimingham (cited in Metuh, 1987) concluded that:

Village religion is serviceable only within the circumscribed bounds of village life. When horizons were widened, its limitations were felt, and this led many to adopt either Islam or Christianity parallel to those aspects of the old religions which are still serviceable. (p.12).

Man generally being a cultural and religious being cannot in one day destroy or throw away its old culture or religion because of the new ones, even when the forces of religious change are much. It has to be through a process, and this process most times comes slowly but steady. Again in this process, there bound to be rejection and acceptance of new aspects of cultural or religious change, for something must be retained during the process of change. Based on the above Trimingham (cited in Metuh, 1987) argued that the proliferation of Afro-Christian churches found in Africa today was due to the intolerance of missionary Christianity, and the tendency of new converts to introduce elements of their traditional religion into Christianity. Islam on its own part was more tolerant in syncretic practices than Christianity.

Christianity in its own tenet rejected or does not easily mix its doctrine with other practices. This led to the formation of breakaway groups who tried to mix African traditional religion with the tenets of Christianity.

From all we have seen above, Trimingham has tried to show that the rapid or sudden social change that took place in Africa shattered the structures of African traditional societies which sustained the African traditional religion.

### **Horton's Intellectual Explanation**

Horton's view was that the religious change that took place in Africa from African traditional religion to the two main world religions was due to the development of the traditional African cosmology in response to the features of the modern situation, that is modernization process and activities of the missionaries it found itself on. Horton (cited in Metuh, 1985) did not actually study the religious change as it concerned Africans in general, but he studied a religious movement among the Yoruba people (Aladura), where he gave an intellectualist explanation of the religious movement. Horton used traditional Yoruba cosmology to explain, predict events which took place in African traditional religion.

The typical traditional African cosmology, according to Horton, is characterized by two tier arrangements, while other scholars like Uchendu (1965) based theirs at three tier arrangements. For Horton, the first tier are the lesser spirits, concerned with the community and its environment (microcosm). This is the phase where man is located. Man is found at the bottom of this arrangement (microcosm) according to Madu (1997), yet he is the centre piece of all the activities going on in the world. That is why Nze (1986) affirmed that man is the container as well as the content of the gods or spirits. The above assertions are true, for all the religious change that took place in Africa happened with reference to man who is at the control of the experience of the religious change. Okolo (1993) on the above avers that

Man rightly claims a central and strategic position in the hierarchy of beings since the interactions and intercommunications between the visible created order and the invisible world of God, spirits, ancestors are only possible through him. He is therefore the ontological means between beings existing above and below him. In this respect, man (human beings) in the African world view is the centre of creation with intimate and personal relationships with beings above and below him. (pp. 22-23).

The above quotation is still a proof that the religious change that took place in Africa is within the domain of microcosm, as Horton argued.

The second tier, (the macrocosm) is the Supreme Being which is concerned with the whole world. Some scholars argued that the idea about the Supreme Being were not known, due to the fact that the early African man lived out his life in the microcosm as we said earlier. Supporting the above, Mbaegbu (2012) confirmed that the Supreme Being (God) is the ultimate explanation of the genesis and continued existence and dependence of all beings below (microcosm). God is totally removed from the rest of other beings. Uchendu (1965) affirmed the above issue, that the Igbo high god is a withdrawn god. "He is a god who had finished all active works of creation and keeps watch over his creatures from a distance" (p. 94). From the above explanations, it seemed that some scholars agreed with Horton that the influence of God in Africa is purely theoretical and has no marked influence on their lives and characters. Though this is highly and heavily in contention among the African scholars.

Having seen that all the activities of religious change took place at the level of microcosm, Horton suggested a thought pattern or experiment where he confronted African traditional religion with the modernization, globalization, without Christian or missionary activities. He did this to show that Christianity and Islam played the role of catalyst, stimulators or accelerators towards any change that took place in Africa. Horton believed that the beliefs and practices of the so called world religions are only accepted where they happen to coincide with the response of African traditional cosmology. This in a way confirmed the rejection of Christianity in some parts of Africa and acceptance of Islam in some parts of Africa. This also affirmed the argument of some scholars that the gods are on retreat in the sense that African World view in trying to respond to world religion or view that challenged its situation, developed the concept of Supreme Being which was latent before now as argued by Horton, focused less attention to the microcosm which is its domain. Through this way, the boundaries of microcosm, started weakening and dissolving widely and rapidly. Just like Trimmingham, Horton also explained how the proliferation of independent churches came about in Africa. Islam has accepted the role of catalysts as Metuh (1987) will put it, by allowing the individual to make his own selection of doctrines, while Christian missionaries have never been content to play the catalyst role in religious change. Christian religion insisted that its doctrine will be accepted without removing any part of its doctrine, though lately it has started dialogue with other cultures in the form of inculturation. This led to many Christian churches to emerge with different cults and teachings.

According to Kalu (1985), two factors must be noted in Horton's approach to religious change in Africa:

Firstly, his revamped intellectualist model assumes that there is a degree of rationality in African traditional cosmology comparable to western scientific thinking. He dispenses with Levi-Straus's distinction between mythical thinking among primitives and rational thinking in science. This is a remarkable shift from the racist notion that African beliefs are a mere aggregation of irrational reactions to natural phenomena and environment. To Horton African thinking is not scientific but both Africans and Westerner; start from a theoretical framework which they then correlate with empirical situations. Secondly, Horton does not explain change by a monocausal reference to external change-agent. He virtually argues that change was caused by the internal factors, for instance the potential within the traditional cosmology for a Supreme Being to cater for the Macrocosm. (pp. 5-6).

From the above, Horton has to be applauded and appreciated for elevating African traditional religion with other world religions and even comparing it with them, unlike some scholars or researchers who kept relegating African traditional religion to background as irrational and spiritually dark religion. Finally, the incorporation of African traditional religion into a larger macrocosm as most researchers believed is the persuasive factor for conversion to world religions. The notion of the shattered microcosm as introduced by Trimingham and elaborated by Horton intellectualist theory emphasized more on the sudden impact of western colonial powers and globalization, leading to the collapse of African Traditional political, social, economical structures in turn causing the disruption of ethnic and local religion. Infact this disruption, allegedly created a conducive situation for the expansion of the two world religions that is Islam and Christianity.

### **Migration as a Process in Religious Change**

African traditional religion as we have seen from elaboration or explanation of Trimingham and Hortons' idea of religious change, has within itself a considerable potentials for adaptation to the changing circumstance in our modern or globalized society. This is the reason African traditional religion persists as a living faith among the Africans as Ejizu (2003) suggested. That is

also the reason many scholars today refer some Africans as active mixers. These are African people who are ostensibly converted to Islam or Christianity, but in effect maintain a dual religious allegiance. According to Ejizu (2003), they have one leg in Islam or Christian church and the other leg in the African traditional religion. In effect, there are a lot of syncretic practices found in African beliefs and practices, also found among Islam and Christian beliefs and practices because each borrow from one another.

All these changes found in African traditional religion, caused by religious and non religious factors, which led to total rout, discontinuity or continuity, syncretic practices, active mixing came through a process which can be called migration. This process of migration may be in form of modernization or globalization, developments, technology. All of the above, involves a process in which human ideas or human beings are transferred from one place to another electronically, scientifically or physically. In all these, there is a process of movement whether seen or unseen, human or non human. And in each case of the movement, there is always an effect or change that will occur or takes place either visibly or invisibly.

There are many definitions of migration, but each depends on the subject matter concerned. Again there are many reasons why migration occurs or takes place, depending on who or what is involved in the process of migration. According to Caplow (1954)

Migration is a change of residence with one occupational shift of one kind to another. The principal directions of migration are mainly from rural areas towards the cities, from areas of stable population to the centre of urban commercial opportunities, from densely settled countries, center of cities to their suburbs.  
(p. 70).

Caplow's definition involves a change or search for better living which is the current movement today in the world. One notices the movement of Africans to other part of the world for better living. Unlike the movement in the past years or centuries ago, that involved moving from good area to bad area either in search of raw materials, making discoveries, or to evangelize other continents. Though the work of evangelization still continues but not like as it used to be. For Obielosi (2018) migration could be immigration or emigration, out-migration, in-migration. Again it could be international or intra-national. Migration



involves movements or transition, changing of place of abode permanently or temporally. This movement while it is going on involves transmission of ideas, culture, religion, and other factors imbedded in human person for his or her survival. One can say that theoretically, migration involves a type of residential change that connotes a complete change and readjustment of the individual or people.

However, Elisha (2018) gave three types of migration namely internal, external migration and seasonal migration. These migrations may not be only through physical or human movement but more now by ideas through scientific and technological means. Again with the world becoming more connected or rather global village, the movement of people and ideas have increased significantly, through medium of different kinds.

Internal migration involves movement of people within one common place. The internal migration may be voluntary or forced migration depending on the reason for the migration. The reason that may lead to voluntary internal migration may include search for better education or the pursuit of better economic opportunities in another area. The external migration involves or generally refers to movement of people outside of ones home country. This may also be voluntary or forced migration. For example improvement of life, education and economic prospects, these include external voluntary migration. National disasters and civil unrests can trigger off forced migration. Politics also play a huge part or role in causing people to migrate to other countries. For instance, the movement of refugees into a neighbouring country or nation, due to unsafe or civil war in their country. This also involves forced migration.

Seasonal migration according to Elisha (2018) is the movement of people from one area to another with each season in pursuit of better conditions for themselves and their livestock. It is normally carried out by nomadic farmers around the world. It also involves seasonal movement of animals from one region to another for better living. From these migrations whether voluntary, seasonal or forced, there is an encounter and a change which takes place rapidly or slowly as the case may be.

### **Migration and Religious Change: The Meeting Point**

Without movement of human persons or ideas, for whatever purpose, religious change or change itself may be too difficult. Religious change whether for

continuity or discontinuity, enhancement or disruption occurred through the process of migration or movement of human beings or human ideas. African traditional religion was able to undergo changes because it involves an encounter from external agents with or without intention to do so. The structure of African traditional religion shattered or starting crumbling with the coming of structures of Christian and Islamic religion. This process is possible because there was human encounter with his ideas, the ideas which dominated the other. This migration process helped to bring about change.

The early missionaries when they visited Africa initially rightly saw the traditional religious structures especially in eastern part of Nigeria as the main source of opposition in delivering their gospel message. According to Kalu (2002), "religion suffused other culture cultural forms and underpinned them. Therefore, the missionaries set out to wipe them out and glory in various degrees of success" (p. 351). This showed that when they came to Africa with their ideas, changes started taking place in African society. Through the school system and charitable institutions and other strategies, missionaries were able to introduce their religion in the already existed African traditional religion. They tried by all means to seek out elements of traditional religion which could be baptized into evangelical tools. They introduced many things like education, new economy, politics, to suppress our religion and culture. Through education, books containing their culture and religion were taught in the school. This rapidly displaced our unwritten and passed on orally culture and religion. The school system according to Adiele (1981) as a process of religious change dealt severe blows on African traditional religion and culture, not only because it was the instrument through which a large fraction of the younger generations of Igbo men were introduced against the society and its values. The school system also withdrew many physically from participation in those celebrations and social processes by which the values of the group are transmitted from generation to next.

Economically, the school system or education was seen as a passport for getting involved in the civil service, European trade and in Christian religion, which offered a new status symbol the society. According to Adiele (1981)

The main economic innovation of British colonialism was the opportunity it offered for a man who had no land, or decided to ignore his holdings in land, to earn a living through securing salaried employment. The salaried servant who neither farmed nor traded was a new kind of economic and social animal in Igbo

experience and was appropriately named *onye oru bekee*. This phrase has a triple meaning which has not always been recognized. The salaried worker... was *onye oru bekee* because firstly he worked for the white man who paid him; secondly he did the same kind of work as the white man and thirdly like the white man he depended for his livelihood on salaries rather than on farming, trading or the manufacturing and marketing of household, farm and decorative wares. (p.347).

Whether this is positive or negative influence, there is an encounter which led to change through the process of migration of human ideas and human person. In our contemporarily and globalized society today, religious change takes place more now through migration of human ideas electronically. This is even applicable to non religious factors. For no country or society is an Island any more, what happens in one part of the world affects the other, even strongly. When there was economic melt-down, which affected most economies of the world negatively, African continent was affected greatly even though the problem started from far away. Africans are now experiencing clashes among religious bodies, herdsmen killing people, lives are being lost on daily basis because some people migrated into new areas. These are consequences of migration of people, ideas physically or electronically as the case may be, and these are having many serious effects in the society.

The emergence of migration of ideas through the internet, global news networks which has the capacity of putting information across the world in a flash of second influences the world or people easily. Thus from all parts of the world, one can follow or join in programmes going on far from him/her through a television set or through other devices. Many religious bodies in Africa join their members or founders in worship any day from far away Europe or America. And they comply with the message being giving to them all the way from other continents of the world. Most people even worship from their homes on Sunday basis especially the sick ones or those in transit. The Christians in Africa especially the Catholics follow religiously in the events of elections of new popes even though they were not in the Vatican city. Apart from religion, young football lovers in Africa, follow the various football league played around the world religiously. They are not in those stadia but you see them displaying their logo, wearing their colors, arguing about the different teams and even vetting on the outcome of league matches. This in effect is bringing a change in them, plus

the pleasure it gives, the wealth it can bring to an individual who succeeds in playing the game, and of course the popularity the individual player will receive from it.

From the above, we can understand the place of migration in the religious change that took place in Africa and which is still going on, in a controlled but steadily manner. This in no small measure affected the identity of African man. It is true that our identity continues to change with encounter with other spheres of life like culture, economics, and politics. This sudden religious change affected greatly African world view. It led to many crisis or conflicts in African person of whom he/she is before, and what he/she is trying to be and what he/she is now. According to Kanu (2015) the African human person coming to the world cannot be understood within the Western category which sees the human person in mechanistic terms. Going further Kanu states categorically that:

The human person in Africa world view has a purpose and mission to fulfill; he/she comes into the world as a force amidst forces and interacting with forces. Good status, good health and prosperity are signs of the well being of a person's life force and human beings struggle to preserve it through an appropriate relationship with the spiritual forces around him/her. (p.118).

This shows that human person in African society is not an island or just an individual person but one who lives in a community, who is in constant communication with others in a community. But today due to religious change which took place in Africa, many tend to live as an individual person. This is noticed greatly, when the economy of the western world started having upper hands among Africans with salary being paid to them and emergence of internet world. The issue of separating oneself from being a member of clan or kindred started appearing which is leading to individualism which is contrary to African sense of communalism. No one is against change taking place, but the manner and the aim of the change is where the problem lies. This of course, is the reason why there is conflict of ideas among the Africans, regarding rejection of certain things which they imbibed initially from foreign cultures without knowing its effects and what to retain.

## **Conclusion**

The religious change that took place in Africa as explained by Trimingham and Horton from socio structural point of view, only showed how weak African socio structural pattern was before the world religions migrated into Africa. The two world religions, though, dominated African traditional religion, but this did not show its down fall, rather its weakness was felt and its foundation shaken. But again it showed its strength through the response it gave by its adaptive features. This shows that African traditional religion is strong and one of the world religions because of its capacity to accept influences from external factors, and integrated it and then created a new better and useful ways of maintaining the stability of African society. Trimingham and Horton have only helped to show how migration process in the form of religious change disrupted African traditional religion. The religious change also affected the identity of African man for better adaptation in the contemporally society and towards developing solidified African traditional religion like other world religions.

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