

AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION IN A WORLD OF CHANGE

Iheanacho Ambrose O. J. Ph.D.

*Department of Religion & Cultural Studies
University of Nigeria, Nsukka
ambrose.iheanacho@unn.edu.ng*

Abstract

All things undergo the impact of change which manifests itself in such action words as progression, growth, transition and transformation. All physical phenomena undergo one form of change or the other in its life journey. Perception of physical change is derived from our observation of metabolic actions in physical realities. Human species, animals and vegetation transit from one form of change (size) to the other. Apart from physical growth, there is also change or progress in meta-physical areas of human existence as in culture, religion, politics, ideas, choices and interests. Change which is the universal key of progress and transition affected African indigenous religion in many ways especially in its conception and interpretation of reality around it. Agents of transformation such as education and religion were able to induce foreign ideas about life and the world into Africans. The result is seen in the emergence of new world view, socialization and indoctrination of foreign ideas as replacements for local paradigms. This work found out that the change in African traditional religion in the contemporary area ensued from infractions on our world view which hitherto was the valid mechanism of interpretation through which we gauged and directed African life and experiences there-in. It also found out that the African personality is at the cross-fire of change. It suggests that intellectuals and African leaders of thought should as a matter of priority and necessity redirect our attention and altitudes to the positive attributes of African religion and its interpretative world view.

Key words – Impact of change, African Traditional Religion, world-view, Contemporary era.

Introduction

Change as the cosmic law that influences everything in the universe also affects African traditional religion in variety of ways. The pervasive and constant Law of natural things does not limit its operations to only physical realities as humanity, climate, weather ozone layer and vegetation. Its law of governance captures human activities in politics, economics, social relations, science and technology, law formulation, customs and other areas of human multiple activities. The process of change is embedded in the nature of things as its ordering principle. This innate wisdom in things is responsible for the physical change we wonder at. Plants for instance exhibit this adherence to internal process in itself. It counts from the time of planting to the time of germination, growth and the time of fruiting. All these stages in the life of plants and vegetables are expressions of change in physical sight. Humanity expresses wonder at these stages of the development of the plants and vegetables.

Mammals undergo the process of generation similar to that of plants. Each physical reality shows that it has an eternal mechanism responsible for producing and reproducing its own kind. Mankind interprets the eternal order and re-ordering of natural phenomena as change. Man cannot see the invisible time of these processes. To Maduegbuna (2005:4) Time as we know is an abstract element which could neither be seen nor held as a solid object. It is necessary to note that time is a valuable resource. If we reflect on the impact of change on African traditional religion from the time of colonial rule to the present time of self-rule, what will guide us among other things is the time spent to notice this movement or process of change. An important question may arise as to what undermined or challenged the practice of African traditional religion in our present experience.

Until recently, African worldview was basically religious in nature, scope and operation. The era of African religious tenacity which penetrated the economic, political, social cum cultural spheres was the period of our revered ancestors and ancestresses. That period in African/Igbo life was the emergent age just like other cultures and civilization of the world. It was a period where the relationship between the mundane and supra-mundane was robust and cordial. Tin line separated the two worlds of the invisible and the visible. It was a period where African deities and ancestors could look down from their magnificent abodes in the shrines

and temples and instruct Africans on what to do regarding any dangerous life situation. This level of relationship was possible because it was on the basis of master/servant relationship. The big boss (the deities) decided the fate of men on earth. It was the period of African religious mentality that Mbiti categorized as being religiously saturated, eloquent and celebrated.

African/Igbo period of religious sagacity as it were lasted while modernism came on board to challenge African perception of reality around them. The elements in the kitty of modernity included among other things: education, foreign rule, new religions -Islam and Christianity, new economic frontier (business economy) and new strand of socialization, globalization among other things. Modernism postulates a modern approach to doings things, a new or modern interpretation of values, a total departure from old conventions and or construction of social structures in the wake of new ideas or issues. The modern or contemporary approach, categorization and re-evaluation of African values did wreak havoc on the foundation and structure of African Igbo perception of reality around them. This state of affairs which influenced the Igbo race in particular and African peoples in general is captured by Ekwuru (1999: preface) thus:

The tragedy as well as the apparent tragicomedy of the present Igbo socio-cultural world, almost embarrassing and equally ridiculous in the combination to both its puerile misadventure and unadorned sinile wisdom, are veritable indices of the sordid state of present alienated Igbo socio-cultural world. Within the present Igbo cultural matrix, we perceive a wide-spread anthropological ignorance; outright cultural apostasy, bizarre and misplacement of values.

To Ekwuru, therefore, the greatest misadventure of the Igbo regarding protecting her functional word view is the misplacement of inherent values and alienation of our culture which led to apostasy. Ekwuru is worried that even the aged could not see this visible deteriorating effect of modernism on African/Igbo worldview.

Historical, sociological and phenomenological theories are employed to explore, analyse and explain matters discussed in this study. The views of scholars in this field will guide us in the comprehension of issues herein. Igbo society is used as an example of the effect of charge in this piece

Brief definitions of African religion and worldview

Let us briefly explain what African traditional religion is. In the presentation of Ajayi (1981:17) African Traditional Religion is, the religious beliefs and practices of the Africans. These religious beliefs and practices had been in existence from time immemorial and still adhered to today by many Africans. It is the indigenous religion of the Africans which has been handed down from generation to generation by the forebears of the present generation of Africans.

Ajayi recognizes African traditional religion as one that originated from African ancestors and then transferred to us the present heirs. Despite the push by foreign religions and modernization, Africans, have kept faith with this religion and its values. Onyeidu (1999) agrees with the explanation of Ajayi (1981) that the present crop of adherents of African traditional religion is a direct inheritance from ancestors and ancestresses. He explained that in African traditional religion, people were born, nurtured and grew in it. Onyeidu harped on the tolerant nature of African religions as non-missionary inclination or zeal. There is no proselytism in its mode or operation. This leaves its fold with no proselytes or converts. Anyika (1998) had earlier on reflected that African indigenous religion is a moderate religion which harbours no sentiment of hatred or opposition to any other religion in its own yard but can react on opposition. Awolalu and Dopamu (1979) underscored the absence of any written literature in favour of African traditional religion. There was however the presence and use of oral literature to express communication, philosophy of life, social cohesion and public governance. He opined that the African communicative system was carried out successfully in generations though myths, folklores, songs, dances, proverbs, and idioms. To Ekwunife (1990) African traditional religion incorporates those institutionalized beliefs and practices of indigenous religion of Africans which are rooted in the past African religious culture, transmitted to the present votaries by successive African forebears namely through oral tradition.

There is clear historical similarity between African religion and other religions. The parallelism here is revelation. African traditional religion is revealed like other religions such as Christianity, Islam, Judaism and others. It is however dissimilar with those religions named above on the ground of historicity. This fact can be anchored on the ground that African religion has no historical date of origin. Its origin is lost in ambiguity because of time space between the time of its emergence and

historians date of recording. Ajayi (1981) draws our attention to important facts surrounding the origin and practice of African Indigenous religion. He says:

Certain essential facts must be known while speaking of African traditional religion. First, African traditional is a revealed religion. It has no historical founder like Christianity, Islam and Buddhism. The religion is revealed because it came into existence like any other religion as a result of human experience of the mystery of the universe. It is an attempt to solve the riddle of the meaning of the universe, men everywhere have asked questions and searched for answers to the questions. Man has come to the inevitable conclusion that there must be a supernatural power behind the universe. Since ours is a universe not a multi-verse, we must assert that this type of experience is equally true of the forebears of Africa.

The essential features of African traditional religion as enumerated above underscored revelation as a consequence of cosmological events that threatened African forefathers. Revelation of a way out of threatening situation led our wise ancestors to proffer a solution in founding African indigenous religion. Judaism of Israel came on board as a result of similar existential threat from Pharaoh King of Egypt against Jews residing in his domain.

The emergence of a religion from African soil as a matter of fact solved some challenging temporal problems. This is evident in the establishment of shrines of deities, priestly cult and progressive rich liturgies to mention but a few.

Definitions of world view

It is germane at this juncture to briefly look at various definitions of worldview as this exercise will give us a broader, elaborate, clearer and comprehensive exposition of the concept. (Naugle 2004) understands worldviews as “a vision of God, the universe, our world, and ourselves rooted and grounded in the embodied human heart as the seat and source of our worship and spirituality, ideas and beliefs, love, affections, decisions and actions”. Naugle understands worldview as vision of God and the universe in humans as seat of consciousness through which humanity develops its spirituality, religiosity, ideas, affection and decision for everyday activity. Naugle made the human heart have power

of introspection, judgment and reverence for God. it is clear that Naugle combined the intellectual, spiritual or psychic powers in humans to articulate the world and its functionality. The world as a vision of God in the view of Naugle, made God a necessary object in his concept of the world. Naugle also understood worldview as lenses through which we look at the world. World perception is a lense or mirrow through which individuals and groups gauge reality, the world, events and phenomena around them. Worldview or perception embody a working intelligence or theory of knowledge gotten out of experience.

Palmer (1996) saw worldview as “the fundamental cognitive orientation of an individual or society encompassing the entirety of individual’s or society’s knowledge or point of view. A worldview can include natural philosophy, fundamental, existential and normative postulates or themes, values, emotions and ethics (p. 114). Hiebert (2008) aligned his perception of the worldview to the earlier definition. Palmer (1996): He postulates that a worldview can be expressed as the fundamental cognitive, affective, and evaluative presuppositions a group of people make about the nature of things, and which they use to order their lives. Palmer and Hiebert evaluated worldview as a rational theory of knowledge which aids humanity in the coherent understanding and working mechanisms in nature. The epistemological function of worldview on collective or personal lives is seen in evaluative standard it makes on the people and nature itself. To Wikipedia encyclopedia then the term worldview denotes a comprehensive set of opinions seen as an organic unity about the world as the mechanism and exercise of human existence. Worldview serves as a framework for generating various dimensions of human perception and experience like knowledge, politics, economics, religion, culture, science and ethics.

African/Igbo worldview and interaction of beings.

Understanding a particular concept, idea, statement or theory connotes some appreciable level of knowledge, interest and desire to realize some sense in something. To Hornby (2000:1302). It can also be taken as process of discovering the meaning of something or why it happens in the first place. Apart from these observations made by Hornby and other authorities, “understanding as a term draws our inquisitive minds to begin an inquiry into African/Igbo worldview especially as it is now confronted by modernity and contemporary re-interpretations of realities

around us, Hornby explains understanding as a process of knowing somebody, character and how they feel the way they behave, and the way things are done. He posits further that understanding refers to thinking or belief that something is true because of earlier opinions or teachings concerning a particular concept. It is from this angle that this contemporary investigation into Africa/Igbo Religion is based on.

African worldview is the totality of assumptions, beliefs, philosophies and life interpretations of the African peoples which incorporates various interpretations of reality from its many culture areas and which in essence say the same thing. It is the summary of our core existential assumptions, interpretations and traits in which religion plays a significant and impactful role. Metuh (1981) earlier on defined African worldview as the complex of their beliefs and attitudes concerning the origin, nature, structure of the universe and the interaction of its beings with particular reference to man.

This definition agrees with opinion of this author that African worldview or perception is complex that is, it is a totality of assumptions neatly formulated to serve certain needs of the Africans. The idea of its structure is a rational creation of man because it concerns him. By applying the existence of structure in analyzing our universe, our African ancestors wanted as a matter of fact to form a theory of knowledge for its comprehension and defence in case of doubt. The formulation of its structure creates the existence and function for its varied beings, elements and structures. The role/function of the created beings in African/Igbo worldview will among other things applaud the creative prowess of chi (God) and carry out his orders and as well as animate, the human cosmos with divine rules of conduct. Divine rules of conduct for created beings include also interactions of beings to their own kind and by extension others who as a matter of fact share in the same ecosystem. This interaction is of two strands. The first is the ontological interaction and the second is the conventional or social interaction of beings. Ontological interaction of beings is the cosmic movement of beings from their natural position towards other things in matter of reciprocity. Created beings obey God's law in their natures, essences or powers. It is referred to as natural law. Everything acts, moves, reacts in line with its eternal mandate. Each is to act in reciprocity.

Interaction of beings is responsible for their fulfilment and advancement. Let's take some instances. Rain water's the earth and the earth produces crops which feeds man. By way of this process, there is interaction of beings. Man gives God praise and adoration because he is the primary cause of natural events. Rain affects the earth. Weather condition affects man and other animals. Man makes use of good weather for his needs. Second, the sun shines to make crops grow. Animals are feed when vegetation grows. Man relates with the divinities and vice versa. This level of relationship is ontological. Man gives back to God his worship in total dependency. Man is subservient to supernatural beings by various liturgical rites, acts of obedience to commandments or instructions etc. The super natural relate to man by granting prosperity to human works, defence in times of attack and long life as an added blessing to virtuous life. In socialcum conventional interactions of beings. Man makes up nature's deficiency in many areas such as health care. Man provides cure for deformed humanity like bad sight, in-born infections, paralysis conjoined twins etc.

The social cum conventional interaction of beings cuts across human social engineering where we develop social networks, social groups, laws and conventions or interact with one another in community celebrations, new yam festivals, burial rites, marriage ceremonies cultural dances, inter-cultural activities belong to this categorization. The interaction of beings as portrayed in Madu (1981) rests on the theories of complementality, reciprocity and commonality visible in African/Igbo social consciousness.

Madu (2004: 27) underscores the primacy of the divinity in human/divine connection. He opines that.

The basic cosmological ideas of the Igbo are necessary to be starched here. For it is from this that we can appreciate the power of the spirit in the mechanics of Igbo life. The Igbo have the sense of the enhancement of human life, for human life is believed to be the prime value and everything is expected to serve its realization against this background, one can understand the traditional Igbo attitude to the gods and deities which is more or less that of manipulation and loyalty as the case may be. Sacrifices of petitions can be made to them to make the sick healthy. Thus man's existence, his welfare and destiny are totally caught up with the general behaviour of the forces above and around him (p.75).

Madu's interpretation suggests the supreme influence over man by the spirit forces and the concomitant response to this influence by human beings. Serious cases of ill health, spiritual malevolence, infertility and in all spheres of Igbo life make the African/Igbo person to anchor his trust, reliance and future in the infinite power of the spirits. Hence African pre-civilization worldview was heavily tied to the control and manipulation of higher forces above Africans.

The infraction on the thick wall of the Igbo/African worldview however, occurred from the emergency of modernism, at the wake of colonization, foreign trade, slave trade and entrance of foreign religions. Thus, a new definition and approach to life situation of the average Igbo came to be applied. This scenario was captured by Achebe (1958) in "Things Fall Apart" as Obierika one of the major characters in the novel cried out in dismay against the white missionary. "Now, he has won our brothers, and our clan no longer acts like one, spoke like one, he has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart".

Achebe created a scene in Igbo society that was confronted by new religion commandeered by the white missionary. The effect was so devastating that Obierika cried foul. To him, the missionary incursion on Igbo religion had a direct effect on the clan's unity, communality and social life. A new social understanding seems to be emerging as members of Igbo families in Umuofia. Mbanta and environs found themselves new friends in the new Igbo evangelists and white missionaries. Nwoye Okonkwo's first son was among the early converts to Christianity.

The observation by Ekwuru that there is a crack in Igbo/African worldview and style of living now is corroborated in the story of Achebe in the things fall apart. Achebe's things fall apart can be said to be prophetic and foresightful in comparison to present Igbo religious psyche which can be said to be infiltrated by agents of modernism. The drift occurred first in our religion, political institution, then in social conventions that established rules of conduct and relationships. The attack on African worldview to some extent gave rise to religious pluralism in present African societies. The effect can be seen especially in African/Igbo concept of education that was basically practical or technical. The shift has made it heavily theoretical or class room model. African/Igbo world operated on a serene religious atmosphere before the advent of foreign religions on African continent. This distortion on

African religious psyche or wholeness is captured by Ibrahim (1990:10). He opines that the presence of oriental religions in Nigeria thrust a discordant note into this serene religious atmosphere. Throughout the history of their developments Islam and Christianity have co-existed in mutual hostility. Though emerging from the same roots with almost identical literature and tenets, their strides for proselytism have often been marked by violence and intolerance.

The safe religious climate of the African Igbo was able to enhance social ties, political systems and economic vibrancy of the region. Foreign religions as noted above by Ibrahim were able to initiate discordant rhythms that disorganized our collective interests, customs and traditions. Kukah (2011) was not different in his analysis of the negative incursion of foreign religions on African society that was controlled and managed by religious tenacity. He says:

The emergence of universal religions such as Christianity and Islam largely account for what is now known as religious problems. These universal religions taught to compel outsiders to enter the tents or the fortresses. This is the story of the crusades and Jihads. Today, the roots of conflict between Islam and Christianity are based on historical memories of alleged injustice, wars and conflict. (p. 28).

The crusades of the Christians and Jihads of the Muslims in search of members, authority and relevance disturbed the ontological peace in African universe. This ontological disbalance is reflected in conflicts, wars, mutual antagonisms, social unrests and economic underdevelopment that are prevalent in the continent of Africa today. The Amalgamation of Northern Nigeria and southern Nigeria for political and economic gain of Britain can account for series of communal clashes, civil war, hate speeches and other social vices trending in Nigeria of today. Rwardan crises of (1994) cannot be divorced from the fusion of former hostile communities into one. It is a common belief of the Igbo of Eastern Nigeria and other Africans societies that there is the presence of moral consciousness in African traditional religion. This moral authority becomes the moral arbiter of human actions in all human interactions. Metuh (1981) explains this foundational belief this way. Igbo morality is linked with the ontological order set up by God and any infringement of the moral precepts disturbs the ontological order. The balance must then be restituted by appropriate rituals, otherwise punishment will inevitably follow. This belief gives the Igbo morality a legalistic outwork.

Metu's observation explained the operative belief code of the African/Igbo before the infiltration of agents of social change. Now, this paper shall make an attempt at explaining stand of African Traditional Religion in a world in a world of change.

Contemporary African/Igbo religion and its challenges

Contemporary African religious expression is the modern understanding, explanation, interpretation and analysis of life situations surrounding the average Igbo man in particular and African in general. It is a reflection on the contemporary wellbeing of the Igbo in contrast to present realities. The prevailing understanding cum interpretation is anchored on the changing tides in religion, education, economic wellbeing, socialization, science and technology among other human factors. The modern interpretation of reality confronting the African/Igbo is not the same our patriarchs and matriarchs conceived and practiced. The religious mind-set of our forefather and foremothers was restricted to what they considered culturally trending then. It was majorly interpreted via religious lens. Now, African/Igbo religious circumscription and introspection have expanded to include not only religion differences but also, politics, formal education, globalization, science and technology among other external factors. The following observations have been considered as significant sign posts of change in the religious character of the average African/Igbo man.

The religious pluralism

The founders of Igbo society in particular and Africa in general had what could be described as a restricted, unchangeable and inelastic religion. It was devoid of any form of challenge or disturbance by any social agent. This religious peace lasted for centuries until the Islam and Christianity advanced the African continent. Christian infiltration started around 14th century A.D. Islamic advance happened much later around southern parts of present day Nigeria. New religious thought came in through new religions. The situation was further strengthened through Islamic Jihads and indoctrination in the north and missionary churches activities in the southern and eastern parts of Nigeria. Religious differentiation in Igbo society which occurred as a result of infraction on her religious mood, led to the practice of different faiths, denominations and systems of worship visible in Igbo land. In the present Nsukka culture area of Enugu state,

there are native Muslims in Igbo-eze North, Udenu, and Isiuzo and Nsukka Local Governments. Similar religious shifts have been recorded in some Northern cities and Western parts of Nigeria where traditional Muslims have become Christians since independence of 1960 onwards. In Awka axis there is a similar existence. Apart from this, there is the practice of inter marriage and social cohesion among members of different faiths in Igbo society. Iheanacho (2016) explained the historical foundation to the presence of other faith in Igbo religious consciousness. He says:

In the old Igbo society, medicine men, herbalists and priests played significant roles. The crop of present Christian religious leaders where virtually absent. The advent of missionary activities by earliest missionaries however gave a signal of possible emergence of new religion among the Igbo. The missionaries introduced a new and foreign religion called “Christianity into Igbo society. Within months and years new religious insight began with young Igbo men and women (p 48).

The presence of foreign religions meant variant shades of interpreting reality, opinion, religious experience and life in general. it means creating or re-structuring African or Igbo religious mind-set or understanding. The end product is a new philosophy of life, a new people and new norms and values. The new religion in Igbo land produced as it were new men and women of integrity who are presently recognized as among leaders of complex Igbo society. Iheanacho states further that:

The social change in Igbo land as a result of missionary activity made church men leaders in Igbo society to some extent. This can be explained given their wide and far influence on their members who now make up more than 70% of Igbo population. In the present situation, certain community issues boarding on well-being, education and justice are positively influenced by them (p. 46)

Education: Education everywhere is a social agent responsible for positive and negative socialization of people, cultural interface, emancipation and communication. It is a serious agent of change in rationalization, social justice, science and technology, politics, economics and law. It impacts positively on the overall perception and analytic index of people. It is therefore the process of education that brings about questions or interpretations people have regarding certain events or situations in their lives. It was rationalization and inquisitive thought that made the sophists to question the position Greek gods occupy in the lives or affair of

ordinary people of Athens in the pre-scientific Europe. The influence education made on some educated Africans led them to understand the importance of interpreting African universe in order to provide cognitive experience of our assumptions. Education as a social agent of change is responsible for providing scholars the necessary and impulsive intelligence that redefined African concept of the world around them. Education given its advantages and scope is universal in character. The scope of education can be identified as an aspect of globalization. It is global in character and outlook because it is an objective and universal good. It encourages liberalization of thought and global social and cultural interdependence. Ezeh and Okonta (2017) described globalization as, ... An effort to universalize the surviving ideology of a superpower. It is the phenomenon of increasing integrating nation-states through economic exchanges, political re-configurations, technical advances and cultural influence (p:225).

Education is a vehicle for “cultural influences”. Even before the intense clamour for globalization around 1990 when Soviet Union fell, colonizing nations around the world have used education to globalize their vassal states. Examples include ancient Egypt, Israel, Babylon, Rome, Greece, Assyria, Philistine and Persia. All these states used education to force the conquered peoples to learn their cultures, languages, social life and philosophy. They established economic and political links for decades as far as their captives could last and as far the conquered peoples could tolerate foreign rule or domination. In the modern epoch, Britain used same process of education to globalize her political and economic policies over her colonies. Now, America and her western allies are using globalization for the same purpose. Cultural influence is one of the programmes in the kitty of globalization in which there is a move in the direction for a unitary culture globe wise. If it happens as postulated, it may mean discarding African/Igbo religious ideas and replacing it with western ideologies. Iheanacho (2014) observes that, there is the possibility of degradation of moral or ethical values, disappearances of specie languages, customs, religion and traditions of people as a result of globalization (p11). He is not alone in this line of thought. According to Arnett (2002) as cited in Obiajulu (2003), in globalization, there is visible culture influence and diffusion because of contact over a period of time. Globalization has existed for many centuries as a process by which cultures influence one another (p 774). Globalization in this piece is

understood as a new worldview conflict existing African religious ideas especially in creating new injurious religious perception.

Political structure: As stated earlier, African/Igbo worldview was a comprehensive or united view of reality in which religion was the bedrock of all social, economic and political structures. In the political realm, religion was able to install credible, god fearing and people oriented leadership. Political leadership then was seen a service to the community and obedience to the dictates of the deities and ancestors. Igbo political structure was affected by the force of colonialism. Emergence of new political structure that did not take orders and dictates from chief priests of oracles was a resultant effect from imposition of warrant chiefs by the colonial administration. The force of change that is constant in nature and human society created a new and compelling political space in the entire Igbo society. The push within is captured by Nwankwo (1991:3-4) he explains that,

The dimensional kinetics of relative ordering stipulates that society, as a matter in motion, must sub-serve, under environmental pressure to shifts or mutations across time and space. Matters sensitive to rotational motion underlies and confirms the cyclical theory of development, whereby the behavioural inclinations of a people mature, decline and fall in accordance with changes in the material environment which procreates and sustains such attitudes. In other words, the socio-economic and political behaviour of a people, is a direct output of the environment in which the people find themselves.

Nwankwo's perspective on a society in motion could explain the socio-political situation of the Igbo under British influence. The attack was from within and made more forceful through the appointment of non-titled holders as community leaders. The struggle was intense which created a bi-polar political stance. The bi-polar political stance did not stay to long as British forces with advanced military hardware overran Igbo warriors. From the time of the creation of district heads, attention and political authority shifted to district heads from village and traditional political heads. This was impactful on the religion and Igbo worldview as such infraction created a new way of looking a reality, a new horizon of understanding of the world around them. It was like our gods and ancestors have been beaten to a retreat by a supposedly foreign superior force. Ola and Tonwe (2005) had earlier deliberated on this issue. They explained that,

The colonial masters ruled the people through their chiefs and tactically introduced their principles and objectives of coming to Africa. This deliberate aim arising out of expediency of the situation was to rule through the chiefs in doing this, the idea was to give the chiefs both political and administrative education. (p. 43).

The new Judicial structure

Igbo concept of law is directly tied to her moral principles which have the gods and ancestors as supreme arbiters. The supreme judges convey their rulings through the processes of divination and revelation. The ambassadors of the divine justice are the Eze Mmuo (chief priests) who are the custodians of laws of their land. The ancestral courts of justice come into the picture when law courts of justice in Igbo communities fail to administer effective and proper justice to issues in dispute. Aladimma for instance, that is native customary court is practiced in Mbaise, Owerri, Mbanjo, Obowo and other communities in Igbo land. In other places it is called native court (Amala). The main aim is to administer justice to issues relating to the culture and tradition, inheritance and conflicts of various dimensions. Igbo judicial process is handled by experts in the culture and tradition of the local peoples. Ruling of cases are however predicated on prevailing customary laws and conventions. Tied to this, is the fact that rulings must conform with ancestral mandate for justice to be served and dispensed. Though juridical matters are treated under clear and unambiguous logic, evaluation of matters presented by opposing sides, are critically scrutinized. The judges however operate from the ancestral insight of punitive action against any fraudulent judge. Metu (1981) confirms this stance as he links the over bearing influence of the gods of the land in matters of justice and fairness. To the critical and average Igbo, morality guides public service. This position is given more clarity by Metu. He asserts that:

Igbo morality is linked with the ontological order setup by the gods and any infringement of the moral precepts disturbs the ontological order. The balance must be restored by appropriate rituals; otherwise punishment will inevitably follow. This belief gives Igbo morality a legalistic outlook. Sin is conceived primarily though not exclusively as an infringement on natural law. Sin also includes the idea of an offense against a deity and a sense of the distortion of the moral rectitude which should exist in man. (p: 135).

That was partly African/Igbo concept of justice and morality when Igbo world perception was tied to the apron of religion. The religious practice was able to establish sound moral or ethical rules and considerations for proper functioning of the society and its citizens. Judicial structure was therefore effective and standardized because of the perceived near presence of deities at local tribunals. Justice then rested on what the gods of the land can give.

There was a new concept of justice and procedure at the emergence of colonialism and church mainstreaming. The moral influence exerted by religion on justice at local tribunals was removed and long procedure of justice began at the courts established by the imperial masters. There was the emergence of legal advocates to argue for or against their clients at the new dawn of justice. Ruling now rests on who among the advocates pushes for more convincing argument. At the end, the wronged may not get justice and vindicated. Besides this, to get true justice costs a fortune. Igbo judicial system was less costly and more trusting. Igbo religious practice offered justice for all. The world that is ruled and controlled by the penalty of the African gods and ancestors appear safer and protective than modern system of justice that not only delays administration of justice but may through technical advocacy acquit a criminal or the Vilian. Onu (2017) insist that,

The system of maintaining social harmony and co-existence incorporates elements of contemporary notions preventive diplomacy, peace-making and peace building. Igbo traditional society is governed by a system in which members of the community can present their views on a particular issue with a council of elders acting as moderators. In the past, community centres- such as the village square, market or community shrines-served as venues for Igbo dispute resolutions processes. More recently, modern systems of governance inherited from British colonialism, namely the state and national governments, introduced the notion of palace courts” in some states of Igbo Land (pp 2000-2011).

The pre-colonial Igbo judicial system was a process that began with the head of the nuclear family to that of the kindred. From here, it moves to council of elders or village court. In the modern time, cases end in the palace of the king with his council of elders who help him to judge cases. Despite the creation of the office of Eze in all Igbo communities now, serious cases are referred to deities. It is hoped that justice denied at customary courts can be regained at the court of the gods. The traditional

judicial process is not restricted to the Igbo alone. The Yoruba society has similar tradition. According to Ajayi et al (2014) Yoruba peoples indigenous law derives from customs and traditions which were primarily unwritten. These laws were however preserved through oral tradition. The traditional system of justice presents a conducive atmosphere for lasting performance. The Yoruba people therefore tap into the wisdom of the ancestors in conflict resolution and adjudication. To Olaoba, therefore, the elders sit under a tree and discuss important issues before agreeing or giving consent. The act of sitting together sets commitment to do justice for the concerned.

African personality in the cross-fire of change

Change is an intrusive movement that takes in its wake displacements, dislodgements, shake-ups, uploads, downloads, aggregations and segregations. Cross-fire in military terms or warfare is direct exchange of bullets or weapons of destruction from one opposing group to the other. But cross-fire in this paper discusses the effects of change on the African person in respect to African traditional religion. The movement of change affects everything in the universe. The subject most affected is man. Man is at the centre of African traditional religion. Man responds to God, and to other co-existing entities in the universe. The infraction on African religion or its world view by agents of social change was basically on African man or African world. What happens outside of man or his environment is a consequence from what man has accepted to be. Nwofia and Okpara (2014) defines personality as: What makes a person distinctively himself. It is equivalent then to individuality. The concept of individuality relates to the understanding of a human being in terms both his similarities to other human beings and his differences (p. 172).

Personality here measures a person's or group's character similarities or differences in relation to others. It tries to access some common characteristics in the individual in relation to others around him or her. In another work, Ifeagwazi and Nwofia (2011) understood personality as the sum total of all the biological, innate dispositions, impulse, tendencies, appetites and instincts of the individual and the acquired disposition and tendencies by reason of experience. African personality can be extracted from his responses to issues around his vicinity, his self-esteem and dispositions to maintain old tendencies or to change to new and compelling ideology. By reason of communality, the African is altruistic

and at the same time adopts to be in line with the rest of the folk lest or she be termed dissident or unpatriotic. African personality can be said to be built on personal effort and communality. More often than not the community has an overriding influence on the African communal experience, Onyecha (1998:85-101) upholds that in African thought the individual affirms himself or herself, not by isolating himself or herself from others, but constantly relating and exchanging with them. The individual exists because the group exists. Thus it is through being routed in an ongoing community that the individual ultimately comes to realize himself or herself as a person.

The African personality underwent serious change in response to reality around him when it came in contact with western ideology. Lassitters (2000) asserts that culturally, it is as if the traditional African script of submit to family and community authority and immerse yourself in and partake of all groups values and norms was rewritten during the colonial period. Through force, Western education and missionary proselytization, the colonialist subordinated African authority and the values and norms of African communism.

Nyasani (1997:96) had earlier on reflected on the invasion of Western mind on traditional African personality and standard. He asserts that, this new anti-African script remains deeply imbedded in the minds of contemporary Africans to the point that they have adopted and assimilated whole sale whatever the West has to offer. The end result is not just a cultural betrayal but a serious case of self-dehumanization and outright self-subversion both in terms of dignity and esteem. Indeed, there is no race on earth that abhors its own culture and is so easily prepare to abdicate it and flirt with experimental ideas which promise no more than vanity, to a large extent like African race.

The psychological nature and disposition of Africans as benign docility and open friendship created the in-road for western acculturation. African friendliness to visiting European and Arabic traders, missionaries and explorers gave her away for all manner of religious and political infiltrations. At the cross-road of all social, religious and political manoeuvres was the African person. The cross-fire affected him in several ways that he/she had to embrace new ideas and prospects about life presented by emerging foreign ideas.

Prospects for new African personality

There is a great prospect for the emergence of a new and vibrant African personality. The impact of change on Africa, religion, worldview, social and traditional structures was basically targeted at the African person. African indigenes at the wake of colonialism therefore accepted western indoctrination. The influence is either ways. At some point it is benefactorious and at other point it is not benefactorious. When positively considered, the African person is educated, more rational economically more viable, scientific inclined and technologically driven. There are other areas the African personhood benefitted from its contact with Arab and Western minds. The negative aspect is what the African personality cries aloud about. The anti-African personality programmes and policies included slave trade, economic exploitation, colonization, apartheid, and others.

Now, a new generation has emerged from the two common experiences of the African person. The new African personality should extract-to full capacity the positive values from its contact with foreign religions, cultures, science and technology, foreign administrative structure and education. Osei (1971:62-63) believes that Africa should chart its future from her rich traditions adopt and adapt only those aspects of non-African cultures that are compatible with African need, goals, and circumstances-namely, a scientific perspective and western educational practices. Thairu (1975:168-169) believes that African personality can shake off its negative colonial influence on the people and begin to go futuristic by undertaking among themselves greater regional integration through the channels of education and cultural exchanges within and between African nations.

Gyekye (1996) does not favour any discussion that will tie African Cotemporary development to African ancestors. Instead, he is of the view that Africa should progress in science and technology which is the modern key to full development. He however wants the incorporation of some African cultural values and practices that are relevant in the process of development. Mugambi (1988) adopts pragmatic approaches to African socio-cultural realities. To him African should understand the presence of new African persons with new mindsets. This new realization will lead Africa tackle present issues affecting her citizens. Present socio-political, technological and education issues should be at the front burner.

Conclusion

Our brief treatise centred on African traditional religion in a world of change. This work agrees with the observations of the organizers of this conference that change has occurred in the perception and practice of African indigenous religion from the time of western colonization and foreign religious infiltration. African worldview and African personality are the worst places hit by the wave of change. Change in African independent religion accounts for drift, re-definition mutilation of its basic foundation namely worldview, religious tenacity and African personality. This change however became inevitable because of the overbearing influence law of motion or change which penetrates and shifts physical elements and social structures in human societies.

This work however asks Africans not to worry so much about the change as there are some positive sides from this change. The most visible sign of positive in the creative of a new African person which incorporates good aspects of African religious and cultural values and good values from foreign rules and foreign religion. This work concludes that a new African person has arisen from the cross-fire of change and African traditional religion.

References

- Achebe C. (1958) *Things fall apart* London: Heinemann
- Adejimola A.S. (2009). Language and communication. In *Conflict resolution journal* resolution journal of law and conflict resolution No. 1 Vol. 1.
- Ajayi A.T. and Buhari. (2014) *Methods of conflict resolution in African traditional experience*. In *African research review*. An international multidisciplinary journal. Ethiopia vol. 8(2) serial no 33 (pp 38-157).
- Awolalu, J.O. & Dopamu P.A. (1979). *West African Traditional Religion*. Ibadan: Omibonoje Press Ltd
- Ekwunife A.N.O. (1990) *Conservation in Igbo traditional religion*: Enugu: Snaap Press Ltd.
- Ekwuru. E.G. (1999). *The pangs of an African culture travial Owerri*: Totan publishers ltd.
- Ezeh P.J. and Okonta P.O. (2017) *Globalization and African institution*: In A.O. Onu (Ed). In *social science. Perspectives to peace and conflict* Vol 2. Enugu Parakletos.

- Gyekye, K. (1988). *The unexamined life: Philosophy and the African experience*: Accra; Ghana University press.
- Heibert P. G. (2008). *Transforming worldviews: An anthropological understanding of how people change*. In card rapids. Michigan: Baker academic.
- Hornby S.A. (2000). *Advanced learner's dictionary*. Oxford: Oxford press.
- Ibenwa C.N. (2014) *Religion and social change in contemporary African society*. In *peace and conflict studies* (ed). Vol 1 pp 47-82.
- Ibrahim M.A. (1990) *Peace and stability in Nigeria: the role of the church* in *Bulletin of Ecumenical theology* 2 (2) 52-53.
- Ifeagwazi, M. C. & Nwofia J.E. (2011). *Personality, group identity and conflict in Africa*. In Nnadozie O.U. (d) *Social dynamics of African states: Issues, Problems and Prospects*. Nsukka: Rek books.
- Iheanacho A.O. J. (2016) *character trait of the Igbo people: An investigation into critical elements in Igbo society*. Nsukka University of Nigeria press
- Kukah M. (2011). *The Janus face of religion*. In CC Ikoku (Ed) *In Nigeria half a century of progress and challenges* (pp. 25-37) Abuja. Time expression press.
- Lassiter, J.E. (2000) *African culture and personality: Bad Science, Effective social activism or a call for reinvent ethnology?* *African studies quarterly* I volume 3, Issues, <http://www.africa.uff.edu/9sq/v3/v3iza.pdf>.
- Madu J.E. (2004): *Honest to African cultural heutage*. Onitsha: Costan associates.
- Maduegbu, A.N. (2005). *Management of Time*. Enugu: Fins and associates.
- Makgoba M.W. (1997). *Mokoko, the makgoba affair: A reflection on transformation*: Florida hills: vivlia publications and booksellers.
- Metuh (1981) *God and man in African religion*. Enugu snap
- Mugambi, M.S. (1998). *Forget your past, thank colonialism: The People's digest* January 23-2-9.
- Naugle D. *Worldview definitions. History and importance of concept*. www.bell-edu/Nagule/pdf/worldview. downloaded 16/8/2017. University of Texas press.
- Nwankwo A. (1993) *The Igbo nation and the Nigeria state*. Enugu: forth dimension
- Nwofia & Okpara (2014) *Psychology: concepts and applications*. In *social sciences in peace and conflict studies* Vol. I. (Ed). Enugu: San Press Ltd pp 145-186.

- Obiajudu A. O. (2003). The role of globalization in Hegemomization of social life in Nigeria (Ed) in readings in humanities Enugu. John Jacobs.
- Ola R.F. and Tonwe D.A. (2005) Local administration and local government in Nigeria Lagos: Amfi top books
- Onu A.O. (2017) Conflict resolution in traditional African society. In social science perspectives to peace and conflict Vol. 2 (Ed) pp 192-232.
- Onyeidu S.O. (1998) African Traditional religion: The Problem of definitions Nsukka Easy quality press.
- Onyeocha (1998) Towards an African Christian anthropology. In West African Journal of Philosophical Studies Vol. No. I September pp 85-101.
- Osei, G.K. (1971). The African of Life London: The African Publication agency.