The Re-emergence of African Spiritualities: Prospects and Challenges

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Abstract
Indigenous spiritualities among Africans, both in Africa and in the diaspora, are flourishing. In Lagos, Nigeria, for example, shrines compete with churches and mosques in adherents and positions. Beyond Africa, the rise of African spiritualities has become conspicuous. Reasons range from Afrocentrism to anti-religious tendencies to the popular religions, from racial animosity to politico-economic ideologies, yet insufficient attention is being paid to this new Afro-spiritualities. Can this renaissance in African spirituality bring forth or support a renaissance in Africa? Africa arguably domesticates the future of humanity. From ecological perspectives to the productivity of offspring, from economic potentials to viable youths for the future, Africa must become progressively discursive in the global platform. A good way to indulge in this would be to understand the spirit of Africa, in the traditional spiritualities that constructed orientations and worldviews of the people. Understanding and addressing African spiritualities constitute an important key in understanding the African identity.

Introduction

Contrary to the prognostication of some theories of secularization that religious decline was imminent and inevitable, religion has rather survived, and more than that, it is rising strongly in different forms. Within the Western world itself, religion and religiosities have assumed an ambiguous character, taking the new forms in conformity with the secularized environment. One finds examples in the so-called immanent religions, modern and ancient spiritualities, feminist and ecological spiritualities, New-age spiritualities and eclectic meditations, Wicca, Druid, Gaianism, Shamanism and so on, many of which have Asian backgrounds. However, of special pertinence is the increasing re-emergence of African spiritualities in Africa and the recreated forms of African spiritualities

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developed and practiced all over the world from South American countries to Europe. So we now have Macumba, Umbanda, Candomblé (Brazil), Vodun/Voodoo (Haiti, New Orleans), Santeriá (Puerto Rico, Cuba), Obeah and Myal (Jamaica), Hoodoo (USA), etc. These spiritualities of indigenous Africans, despite their spread, seem to be undermined when compared with the Asian spiritualities.

Against the general tendency to disregard the impact and significance of indigenous religions, the foremost scholar of comparative religion Jacob Olupona (2004: xv) maintains that these indigenous religions play a critical role in the modernity project. We understood indigenous religions/spiritualities in this context as those that originally belong to a pre-slavery/colonial African people or/and those that were created after slavery and colonization as replicas or continuation of these ancestral spiritualities in or outside Africa. According to Olupona, these 'indigenous traditions and cultures continue to play important roles in forming and refashioning world cultures, beliefs, and identities of the modern nation-state' (2004: xv).

Quite surprising is the fact that what is supposed to be a recent anthology of religious traditions, namely Roger W. Stump's *The Geography of Religion: Faith, Place and Space* (2008), paid no single attention to African and Afro-Caribbean religions. Often African religious traditions are treated as specialized forms of religion that do not align with the popular 'world religions', while Afro-Caribbean spiritualities, as recreated expressions of African spiritual heritage, are treated mostly in the context of the history of slavery or in the political context of South America. In other words, fewer academic works address these spiritualities in and of themselves in spite of the historical or political circumstances that originally saw their emergence.

It is necessary to make clear at the onset that the Afro-Caribbean spiritualities are not considered as new African spiritualities, but rather as diaspora forms of African spiritualities. This article is not about new African spiritualities, but rather about the revival of interests, engagements and relevance of the African indigenous ancestral spiritualities to the contemporary person. Whether these are the spiritualities in Africa or the post-slavery recreated forms of Afro-Caribbean context, it is important to note that there are renewed interests in them for various reasons. These interests range from drama/cinematography to academics and politics (Rediker, 2013: 213).

This article intends to thematize the re-emergence of African spiritualities in Africa and the South American countries in the global interest. It intends to address the implications of this revival in prospects and challenges. Then it concludes by suggesting the model of mutual enrichment to help balance this new development in the face of dominant foreign religions in the Africa of today. We start with an attempt to define what we mean by African spiritualities.

What Is African Spirituality?

The discussion over the differences between religion and spirituality is ongoing. With the challenges posited by a general concept of religion which neither considers the structural difference among religions nor the Western influence in conceptualizing religion (Griffiths, 2001: 1), there is a growing tendency to avoid the usage of the word 'religion', especially in referring to non-popular world religions. Generally, 'religion is often associated with "negative" qualities (e.g., it is dogmatic and may lead to fundamentalist behaviours), whereas spirituality is more positively connoted (e.g., it may lead to expanded self-awareness)' (Rinallo et al., 2013: 3). The term 'spirituality' seems less rigid and compatible with progressive understandings.

This quality of flexibility expresses the religious-spiritual commitments of Africans since time immemorial. Among the Igbos, for example, there are as many deities as there are villages in the southern part of Nigeria (Uchendu, 1965: 101). Personal gods, 'chi', with their shrines at each compound, are consulted, reported to and worshipped by the head of the family. Each family or

village creates its own deity that protects and blesses them. They give it any name they want and they establish a *quid pro quo* relationship with the deity. Given such religious settings and practices, it is therefore simplistic to reduce the many spiritual approaches found in the African continent to a specific singular concept, 'African Spirituality'.

Interestingly, while the deities themselves may be different from one another, these similarities are found in the rituals and devotions which constitute the 'spiritualities'. The reduction of these varied practices to the singular concept of African spirituality is partly explained by the fact that the Christian missionaries, who pitched these spiritualities as rivals to Christianity, perceived them as representing only one thing, severally described as paganism, animism or fetishism. There was no effort to study the rich religious heritage of Africans beyond the oversimplification that came with disdain by the missionaries. However, to those at home with these deities, their differences are not just in their names.

> Some writers perhaps do not appreciate how jarring it could be to the ear of an Igbo to refer to the deities or the *Arusi*, nature spirits, as gods. Understandably, the claim of God's unicity becomes very perplexing when one considers the large numbers of these *Arusi* . . . But this presents no difficulty to the Igbo. (Metuh, 1981: 33)

It would appear that the same tendency to oversimplify Africa's religious identity is equally reflected in many other areas. Often, unconsciously and with no ill-will, there is a tendency to homogenize Africa, from little things like talking about going on a trip to Africa, eating African food, dating an African, helping a child in Africa, to huge issues of ignoring the plurality in Africa within academic circles. Through Afro-simplification, exemplified in bundling an entire continent into a single box, a degrading, irrelevant undertone erodes the richness and importance of African cultures and peoples. It is, however, important to remark that, beyond the continent, clarifications on the plurality of Africa remain pertinent even to the development of African spiritualities in the non-African world.

Spirituality could be understood in a broader sense where it becomes a formless attitude or consciousness of freedom, accommodative of different religions; an *animus* that enlivens religions. A Christian, for example, can be emphatic of his African spirituality in his forms of worship and devotion to Christ (Park, 2013: 129–130). The argument of this article builds on an understanding of African spirituality as a quasi-religion on its own outside Christianity or Islam, that is, a specific form of mundane-transcendent relationship of African origin, part of which historically emerged and thrives outside Africa. Typical characteristics of such an African spirituality according to its adherents would include the following:

1. Belief in one almighty creator and usage of a medium through deities, persons or objects.
2. It is not as logocentric as Christianity or Islam, that is, transmitted through written texts. It is rather a spirituality that is orally transmitted in the hearts and minds of people.
3. It provides a spiritual and emotional alternative framework to the Western scientific and rationalistic framework.
4. It frees the spirit and the self from the religious dictates of other religions.
5. It strengthens community structure and appreciates the continuity of the sacred-secular relationship (Alvarado, 2016: 337–350).

On the other hand, we cannot fully subscribe to 'African religion' either, just for almost the same reason we use 'African Spirituality' only with caution. Despite the commonality in thought and observances that exists among these spiritualities as Peter J. Paris (1995), Adama and Naomi

Doumbia (2004) would argue, there is no single systematicity among these variable religious approaches of a whole continent to support any attempt to refer to all of them as a single religion. They are as vast as they are rich, as diversified as they are exclusive.

> Traditional religions are not universal: they are tribal or national. Each religion is bound and limited to the people among whom it has evolved. Traditional religions have no missionaries to propagate them; and one individual does not preach his religion to another . . . there is no conversion from one traditional religion to another. (Mbiti, 1969: 4)

So, while we use 'African Spiritualities' as a generic term, we shall try to address each spirituality under consideration here as specific as possible.

The Transition of African Spiritualities

The European domination of the world by the end of the 15th and the beginning of the 16th century brought about a new phase in world history. Europe set out to conquer the world. In the words of Chinweizu (1975), it was indeed the West and the rest of us. However, this age of conquest and expansion was especially negative for the continent of Africa. With Portugal kicking off the Atlantic voyage and slave race, other European nations dived right into the bloody pool of the 'worst crime ever perpetrated against humanity' (Emmer, 2005: 4). Having subdued and expelled the Moors from the Iberian Peninsula in 1415 at the battle of Ceuta in North Africa, Portugal, Spain and their sister nations could believe that it was the springtime of European conquest and domination, without the threat of sickness, poverty and especially, the invasion of the Moors. This was the era that closed the 'Middle Ages' and ushered in the 'modern age' with scientific knowledge, trade and commerce. Europe was on top of the world, but its feet were directly on the head of Africa (Suranyi, 2015: 24).

Christianity was one of the major factors that instilled this superiority consciousness in the colonialists and the conviction of a divine support to conquer and subdue (Cone, 2003: 77). This Christianity meant power, victory and freedom above other people of other religions. It had brought Europe to great heights and made them conquer the Islamic Moors.

This superior consciousness guided the 400 years of the slave trade and Christianity was written all over the plans and deeds of this expansion and exploitative enterprise. The African, uprooted from his homeland and taken to foreign lands, was naked and stripped of even his bare humanity. With chains in hands and feet, the only thing he could carry was his spirit, the spirit in his songs, his language, his culture, etc. In this spirit was embedded their religion/spirituality, for 'wherever the African is, there is his religion' (Mbiti, 1969: 2). Even when the African would lose the memory of his or her identity, language and culture, this spirit survived.

The religion, Christianity, now instrumental in the transaction and subjugation of the African, became known as the religion of the master.

> In the context of African slavery, Christianity functioned as a heritage that guided the reaction of Englishness toward the Negro. Christianity told the English that all people were made in the image of God but it also informed them that God was an Englishman. (Isiorho, 2010: 65)

This Christianity that had been dragged through the incessant wars and bloodshed that plagued Europe even against fellow Christians was not going to stop on account of the brute, soulless, pagan African. If anything, slavery would be a favour to saving his heathen soul (Iwuagwu, 1998: 150).

Contrary to this Christianity, the African spirituality was territorial conscious. The spirituality was accommodative and meant to keep the clan together. It revolved around exchange and connectivity between the spirit, the human, the animal and the plant realms in a way that maintains a cosmic balance. 'A porous border exists between the human realm and the sky, which belongs to the gods. Similarly, although ancestors dwell inside of the earth, their activities interject into human space' (Olupona, 2014: 4). Humans have the responsibility of keeping this equilibrium through the process of respect and relevance of all things. Everything *lives*. Hence, Laurenti Magesa (2013) would ask: What is not sacred? At the centre of this sacrality is the human life. Such a communal religious consciousness was no match for the ferociousness of the Western Christianity.

However, the singular factor that corrupted the African religious consciousness and indicted them in the story of the slave trade was the material enticements of the Europeans, a factor that remains part of African predicaments. The initial *modus operandi* of the Portuguese was to raid and kidnap Africans into slavery. Eventually the raiders were resisted in Gorée, Senegal, where they lost a number of their men in the hands of native Africans. So, they entered into a business enterprise with the Moorish Africans, involving the African kings and chiefs (Egbezor, 2009: 11–13). The Moors were already in the business of conquering non-Muslim communities and capturing them into slavery. Soon, it became a lucrative enterprise for some chiefs and influential men in Africa. The Europeans just needed to wait along the Bight of Benin and Bight of Biafra, named 'the slave coasts', for their merchandise to be delivered to them. The Africans profiting from this infamous trade were so involved that they were resisting the abolishment of the slave trade, even when the Europeans have been stopped. King Nzinga Mbemba of Congo's complaint to the King of Portugal in 1526 against the slave trade was thwarted by the slave merchants in his kingdom. The *Almamy* of Futa Toro in Senegal prohibited the Swedish merchants from slave trading, but his people sabotaged his fight and continued in the trade. The Sultan of Zanzibar was practically forced with sanctions and threats to sign the treaty to abolish the slave trade (Sherwood, 2007: 114). Though it would appear that the evil of supply was prompted by the evil of demand, yet the involvement of African partners in the Atlantic slave trade was heartlessly deliberate.

Once subdued, the African was meant to take the religion of the master. Consequentially, the African spirituality was rather practiced in secrecy. Yet, the African spirit was not to be given up. This spirit was forced to express itself in the same enslavement religion of the master. Then, after a while, these spiritualities were expressed, no longer out of compulsion but of free will. People of African ancestry make up a great percentage of Christians in the world today. So, the African Christian can worship Jesus Christ in his/her African spirituality as an African, different from the European.

But then, there have always been a number of Africans who express their spirit in the spiritualities of their ancestors, not in the Christian religion. These people live in various continents of the world today, reintroducing African spiritualities into mainstream religious forums. In what follows, we shall describe three of these African spiritualities that thrive outside the African continent, specifically in South America.

Popular Expressions of African Spiritualities in Diaspora

Diaspora, in our context, refers to people or practices that are dispersed from their African homelands to foreign countries. It equally refers to a location where such people or practices occur. Today, African spiritualities which were nurtured by the slaves in South America have taken different forms. 'The preservation of their [African] spirituality under the conditions of slavery was an astounding accomplishment, due principally to their creative genius in making Euro-American cultural forms and practices serve as vehicles for the transmission of African cultural elements'

(Paris, 1995: 35). With increasing migration and the flexibility of these spiritualities, the practices of Santeriá, Vodou, Candomblé, Witchcraft and so on, have gone beyond Latin America to include the USA, central Europe and so on. For the purposes of this study, we shall limit our analysis to the three most popular of these spiritualities as found in Santeriá, Vodou and Candomblé. One thing is common among these three. All are linked to the religious tradition of the Yoruba, a large ethnic group in the south-western part of Nigeria, but with other minor settlements in other parts of West Africa.

Vodou Spirituality

Vodou could be the oldest form of African spirituality practised in the diaspora and often regarded as the most controversial and widespread. Vodou spirituality involves becoming a servant of *lwa* (the equivalent of the Yoruba intermediary deities, the *orishas*) and the performance of a series of rites that sustain the divine–human interrelationship. Umesh Patel (2015: 172) observes that 'through the various rites and activities, the spirit is ultimately brought into focus, and is open to communication with the human world in an unlimited capacity'. Thus the validity and effectiveness of the *orishas* are made possible by the agency of adherents. This agency also plays out in maintaining a 'living tradition' that recognizes its African source even when the spirituality is practiced in the diaspora, which we could refer to as a second-tier dispersal. Initiation, therefore, preserves this sense of a living tradition, connecting the present to the past, and tracing the rites and rituals to their motherland (Patel, 2015: 172).

Essentially, Vodou is characterized by music, dance, ritual and prayer. These elements are often combined both in the initiation process and in the normal worship sessions where divination plays a huge role. Divination sustains the kinship within the community of adherents and the spirits. It basically involves seeking 'decision upon important plans or vital actions to be taken on important occasions' (Omosade, 1979: 175). Divination (*Ifa*) is a profound way of maintaining the living tradition in Vodou spirituality and is a practice at the centre of Yoruba traditional religion (Bascom, 1991, 1993). It is therefore deployed even in the ritual sacrifices, which is yet another element of Vodou spirituality.

Santeriá Spirituality

Santeriá, which also has Yoruba origins, began as a recourse for the oppressed slaves in terms of cultural and religious identity. It is based on a form of ancestral worship which incorporates some influences from Catholicism. This is evident in the name 'Santeriá', derived from Spanish 'Santo' which means 'the way of the saints' Miguel A. De la Torre (2016: 639) explains that 'Santeria was the product of a survival technique employed by the enslaved African people who masked their deities, known as *Orishas*, behind the "faces" of Catholic saints.' The concept provided for the adherents a way 'to continue worshipping their gods' while living under domination (De la Torre, 2016: 639).

At the heart of Santeriá spirituality is the *ashé*, namely 'a sacred energy that becomes the power, grace, blood, and life force of all reality, embracing mystery, secret power, and divinity' (De la Torre, 2016: 640). *Ashe* pervades every life and expression of power. It is through the *ashé* that the *Orisha* is sustained (De la Torre: 2016). Human life is also made purposeful by *ashé*. It is through the instrumentality of *ashé* that 'all things came into being, and all things will eventually return to *ashé*' (De la Torre, 2016: 640).

Santeriá aims at bridging the gap between the visible and the invisible and in doing so, it is heterodox. There are no set doctrines in Santeriá. Flexibility is a characteristic of Santeriá. What is

more important in this spirituality is the set of rituals which must be conducted properly (De la Torre, 2016).

Candomblé

Candomblé is another Afro-Caribbean religion that has its roots in Africa and, as such, is another manifestation of African spirituality. Candomblé is a Brazilian recreation of the West African religion/spirituality within the context of the slave trade (Johnson, 2002b: 5). The religion remains very popular in its expression of spirit possession and is organized in terms of territories and genealogy. In other words, the variations are marked by the names of the original nations of the slaves. Christopher Johnson offers this illustration:

> When a white man from São Paulo claims a Nagô or Angolan identity, this should not be taken as a claim to African descent so much as a claim to his social identity as constructed within the terreiro. (Johnson, 2002b: 41–42)

This goes to affirm the deep-rooted consciousness in Candomblé of its African origins. In a way, this organized consciousness has served to retain the African connectivity in the re-emergence of the religion.

Candomblé's link to Africa is re-constructed through the worship of the *orishas* with the intention of accessing power (*ashé*). Power here has a very practical character, in the sense that it is for the use of human beings to attract luck as well as other good things like fertility, riches, good health and honour within the society. Since *Orisha* is identified as power-giving, it is, therefore, logical that it is associated with other natural elements that manifest some form of power such as the rivers (*Osum*), seas (*Iemanjá*) and thunder (*Sango*) (Montgomery, 2013: 198). Also, *Orisha*'s power in deciding the fate of humans especially at the crossroads of their lives links it with yet another element, namely, doors and crossroads (*Esù*). Given all these dimensions of Candomblé, the practice is located within all natural elements and since the blessings are for human use, the centre of the ritualistic practices remains the house (terreiro):

> The practice of Candomblé locates the self within the classifying grids formed by these divine models, and within initiatory hierarchies of the houses (terreiros) where it is practiced: One is and acts only in relation to the social structure and ritual calendar of the house where he or she was ritually 'made'. (Johnson, 2002a: 313)

If *Orishas* are the deities that imbue power to humans, the power itself which is called *ashé* becomes the seed of transformation for the lives of those who seek it. Human supplications to *Orisha* are made with the intention of receiving *ashé* and is at once sustained by the reception of *ashé*. *Ashé*, therefore, stands in the middle of the relationship between the deities and the human adherents, in as much as it represents the conveying as well as the very gifts of wealth, health, fertility and prestige from *Orishas* to human beings. For Christopher Johnson (2002a: 314), *Ashe* represents 'the metaphysical muscle to change human destiny'. As a result, the rituals must be performed properly as is the case in Santeriá. Proper ritual performance implies observing all the secrecy that is involved in the traditional ritual practices. These secrets are once the foundation of the condensing and distribution of *ashé* and lies at the heart of the transformation of Candomblé as rightly observed by Christopher Johnson. The transformation of Candomblé represents its renaissance in the contemporary society and accounts for its re-emergence as an African spirituality, one that serves as an alternative in the modern quest for spiritual identity.

It is quite interesting to note that the evolution of Candomblé into an alternative spirituality that is no longer confined to its territorial origins is also found in other Afro-Caribbean spiritualities. In what follows, we shall address some of the reasons behind the re-emergence of these spiritualities.

Reasons for the Revival of African Spiritualities

Afrocentric Trend

Towards the collapse of colonization, a politics which could seem worse than slave trade to Africans, and the upsurge of fights for freedom in the early 20th century, from America to South Africa, a strong ideology of Afrocentrism was in trend. As an ideology, it was not properly captured in Stephen Howe's (1998: 1) unfitting description as 'essentialist, irrationalist and often, in the end, racist set of doctrine'. Rather it was the intellectual, physical and psychological movement that struggled to bring forth the Africanness that has been deliberately obscured and subdued by European imperialism. This ideology was intended to counter the sullen, dehumanized and negative image of the black person with which the 'whiteman' attempted to justify the project of dehumanization (Adeleke, 2009: 14). Black intellectuals wanted to tell their own stories by themselves. They wanted to control the way they are perceived. So, they promoted a pride consciousness in the mind of the black person. They started from academic historical aspect of Africa to politics and society. Now, this sense of pride in Africanness is seen even in music, hairstyle, modes of attire and cuisine. An integral part of this effort to promote Africanness was the reintroduction of African spirituality in a positive image. It is no longer communicated as the dark, secret, bloody religion dealing on evil charms and curses and 'is by no means, a faith dedicated to working evil' (Anderson, 2015: xvii). This positive affirmation goes against the narrative that African spirituality is all about 'Black Magic', which is considered to be evil and hurtful because it is 'black'. African spirituality is now communicated as a spirituality of freedom and meditation, empowering one to be in control of one's spiritual life. This trend of Afrocentrism contributes to the revival of African spiritualities.

The Decadence of Moral/Social Ethics

After years of Christianity on the African continent, some Africans feel a sense of moral decadence and loss of social values.

> The same channel through which Christianity came to it (the West) is now the very channel through which devaluation and destruction of Christian moral values – sexual moral values – are invading its borders in the contemporary world. (Aligwekwe, 2010: 250)

Even when they may not directly blame it on Christianity, they believe that a visible relevance of a religion is its moral strength. Traditionally, African peoples have held a strong belief that spiritual powers are deeply concerned about the moral conduct of individuals and communities alike. Since an individual's 'sins' could have socio-economic consequences for the entire society (Park, 2013: 179–182), resorting to a spirituality that upholds taboo and retributive justice seemed meaningful.

Healing the Mind and Body

The sense of oneness in nature equally extends to the medical-healing aspect of life. With the so-called alternative medicines, holistic medicine, natural medicine, naturopathic medicine,

homeopathic medicine, many people are introduced to other forms of healings that are not of Western scientific paradigm. They become involved in these processes of healing, practicing yoga and different forms of meditations for their well-being (Nweke, 2018: 237–238). But it was not necessarily a need to wonder about the universe or benefit from natural medicine that resuscitated African spiritualities. Rather, the revival was a result of a human yearning for contact with the divine, apart from the other forms of contacts in the established religions. In the context of slavery, one role assigned to African spiritualities in Latin America was essentially therapeutic. The therapeutic function is understood not just in the healing rituals that form part of these religions, but in the fact that it was a way of dealing with the disorientation wrought by the experience of slavery and its existential consequences. Bristol (2016: 203) argues that without discarding the Catholic practices of the society in which they found themselves, the African slaves turned to their traditional spirituality as a way of 'dealing with the hardships and disruptions inherent in slave life'. What was left of the African after the traumatic experience of his inhumane trans-positioning was not only a physical loss, but a psychological disaster as well. Worse still, the African was compelled to a slave life, the practical intricacies of which are still difficult to imagine. With the existential consequences of slavery still plaguing the African communities all around the globe, this therapeutic need contributes to the revival of African spiritualities.

Foreign Support

Some others are greatly influenced by the Africans in diaspora or other foreign interests in the African spiritualities, who reflect to them a sense of worth in their identity and spiritualities. Olupona confesses:

> I should also state that there are signs of the revival of African indigenous practices in many parts of Africa. Modernity has not put a total stop to its influence. Ritual sacrifices and witchcraft beliefs are still common. Moreover, the religions developed in the Americas impact Africa in that devotees of the African diaspora have significant influence on practices in Africa. (2015)

These influences also come in the forms of financial support and benefits. Financial benefit would always dispose people into actions and readiness to impress the financial source.

In Search of a True Identity

When one is forcefully separated from one's culture, people, land and especially religion, one tends to lose one's identity. Such a person becomes disorientated and may subsequently lose the meaning of his or her existence. What would Africans lose if they lose African spirituality? Olupona replies:

> We would lose a worldview that has collectively sustained, enriched, and given meaning to a continent and numerous other societies for centuries through its epistemology, metaphysics, history, and practices. (2015b)

As Viktor Frankl explains in his *Man's Search for Meaning* (1985), the search for meaning becomes a necessary condition for survival during difficult times. Religion is a major component of our human identity. When one is not affiliated with any religion, those personal beliefs, rituals, meaningful events and junctures of one's life become one's identity, taking the stead of religion. If one is forcibly, much less inhumanely, cut off from this religiousness, then one's identity is invariably affected. When the religion is forcefully replaced with another religion, recovering the true identity then becomes a much difficult task.

   The Africans who were ill-fated to cross the Atlantic Ocean as commodities were drained of their identities as humans and as Africans. In the search for an ordered and recollected identity, it became clear that the foreign religion of the slave masters was not a satisfactory option. A reach into an adaptable religious tradition of the native land became inevitable even in the face of colonial control who were always conscious of a possible rebellion (Bristol, 2016: 205). One consequence of this control is the secrecy that is associated with the practice of these religious rituals (Brown, 2001: 321). The fear of the colonial masters induced a 'double secrecy' since the African traditional religion already preserves a certain level of mysteriousness that is shrouded in secrets. We also find this secrecy playing itself out in the contemporary context where there is fear of acceptability of African spirituality in Northern America (Brown, 2001: 171).

   Closely related to a reintegration of existential wholeness is the rediscovery of identity as part of the driving forces behind the African spiritualities, especially in Latin America. Could the re-emergence of these spiritualities today be accounted for by a search for religious identity? The historian, Paul Christopher Johnson, had argued that the construction of the Yoruba ethnic identity from what was hitherto a linguistic affinity offers a possible explanation of why slaves from different cities were able to come up with Candomblé spirituality as an expression of their collective identity (Johnson, 2002b: 63). Johnson's claim that Yoruba ethnic identity as non-existent prior to 1800s leaves much to be desired since his sources were entirely Western, namely the records of colonial masters in sub-Saharan Africa. Nothing would have brought the slaves together if not a strong sense of ethnic identity. Johnson's claim reflects an attempt to give undue credit to the West for recognizing and recording what was already there.

   In its extensive development, the search for identity has not only reintroduced African spiritualities into the consciousness of Africans, it has equally incorporated non-Africans of different orientations who are in search of spiritual meanings outside the mainstream religions. Robert Wuthnow's *After Heaven* (1998) shows how the search for the self, especially among the millennial, has also prompted an increase in the search for new spiritual expressions. The identity of *seekers* alongside *dwellers*, both of which can be scripturally grounded, gives us a picture of how the negotiation of spirituality functions in the world of today. *Seekers* are not restricted to any form of spirituality and so find their way into African spiritualities as a way of rediscovering their true identity. In rediscovering their spiritual path and interior yearning for fulfilment, they contribute in giving contemporary relevance to African spiritualities.

   Furthermore, there are people (African and non-Africans) whose motivation for the revival of African spiritualities stems from the sympathy over the historical past that implicates Western Christianity. It is the 'close association between missionary efforts and the colonial enterprise that has led to the emergence of a hostile African intellectual opinion against Christianity' (Chitando, 2008: 52).

   This group does not only stand against Christianity but also stand in solidarity with all those whose lives were destroyed by slavery. Nowadays, such solidarity is organized as events to create awareness and teach people about Africa and African consciousness. A vivid instance is the annual *Remembrance Day* along the Coney Island of the Atlantic Ocean to commemorate drowned and tortured slaves, as well as *the London Black History Walk* event.

   Out of this sympathy and sense of justice, a supportive energy towards Africa is borne. Invariably these indicate a sort of anti-religiosity and racial grievance against the people and institutions responsible for the abuse of Africa.

Immanent Orientations of African Spiritualities

Another important factor in the revival of African spiritualities is its provision of imminent and feasible solutions to individual problems. For Christians and Muslims, these traditional beliefs

sometimes appear more expedient to their concerns. Without renouncing their religious adherence, they feel accommodated by the African spiritualities. Olupona confirms:

> I should add that without claiming to be full members of indigenous traditions, there are many professed Christians and Muslims who participate in one form of indigenous religious rituals and practices or another. That testifies to the enduring power of indigenous religion and its ability to domesticate Christianity and Islam in modern Africa. (2015)

Deterritorialization of African Spiritualities

The renaissance of African spiritualities is evident in the spread beyond the original territories. Such deterritorialization shows that, for example, beyond the Brazilian origin of Candomblé, African spiritualities have today spread not only to other nations within the South American continent but also travelled north and even found its way into Europe as well. Currently, the ethnic configuration of adherents has changed, with a greater percentage constituted by non-blacks. Johnson (2002a: 314) comments further,

> A religion that what (sic) was once relatively bounded by descent group, religion, and the secrecy of the knowledge of axé (*ashé*) gained only through long apprenticeship, is now public. New practitioners may be Brazilian (or others) of any background, and may acquire the knowledge to open a temple through books, televisions, video, and the internet.

The deterritorialization of Candomblé means that it is no longer limited to a particular type of people. After all, spiritual quest is a human phenomenon and is not restricted to a select group. The same experience is also found in the practice of other spiritualities. Vodou practices are no longer a Haitian spirituality, neither is Santeriá a religious practice that exists only in Cuba.

Deterritorialization as a characteristic of secularization hermeneutics could be identified as responsible for the renewal and reinvigoration of the practices of these African spiritualities. Studies show that this happens mainly in two ways. One is the migration of persons which makes it easy for people to carry along their spiritual practices from one place to another (Olupona, 2007: 27). In living out their spiritual convictions in new territories, there are chances that others might be attracted, and with time, such a circle of spiritual influence might expand as well. Second is the media, which in disseminating the practices that were once held secret, has succeeded in bringing them to the limelight and even enabling different versions and adaptations of the same spiritual practices (Montgomery, 2013: 197–214).

Before discussing these two forms of deterritorialization, it is pertinent to remark that the Afro-Caribbean spiritualities are by nature deterritorialized religions. The movement from Africa to diaspora marked the first territorial displacement of African spirituality. Paul Tiyambe Zeleza has described this as a 'flow' which has today been completed by a complimentary backward movement from the diaspora to Africa. This backward and forward movement is aimed at maintaining the African identity of these religions and in enriching the practices not only in the diaspora but also in Africa. According to Zeleza (2009: 151), 'The traffic in religious ideas, institutions, and iconography has been particularly intense and an important aspect of the African Diaspora experience, identity, and linkages with Africa'. Hence, some practitioners of the African traditional religion have come to learn more about some aspects of their religion which were better preserved in the diaspora (Glazier, 1996: 421). On the other hand, some diaspora adherents reach back to Africa, to intensify their affiliation and to learn more from the developments that have occurred in the

religion in the post-slavery era (Law and Mann, 1999: 314). Thus, the relationship has been that of an increasing mutual benefaction.

Migration as the first instance of deterritorialization of African spiritualities is marked by a voluntary attitude. It is no longer the form of migration that is compelled by slavery but one which is aided by the globalization today. Movement of persons from one country to another for economic and leisure purposes is further accompanied by a movement of cultures, customs and religious practices. In cases of resettlement, these ways of life are instituted by the practitioners who are now living in new environments. This explains one of the primary means of the spread of the African spiritualities or their recreated South/North American forms beyond their original territories, as well as their new outlooks in terms of modified practices and rites.

Beyond physical migration of persons is yet another form of extra-territorial movement made possible by the media. In a globalized world, media communication has continued to play its own role. Likewise, in the revival of African spiritualities, both the traditional media and modern social media have played great roles. Books, television, movies and so on have played their role in the understandings as well as misconceptions about African spiritualities and Afro-Caribbean forms like Vodou, Santeriá, Candomblé and so on. More explosive is the role of the social media. Today, several YouTube videos claim to explain these African-originated spiritualities. As a result, people are lured into experimenting or studying these spiritualities as a way of enhancing their knowledge of the spiritual world. It is, therefore, possible today to have people who practice Vodou without having a community of faith around them.

Prospects of a Spiritual Renaissance

Set in the context of secularization, the re-emergence of African spiritualities contributes to shattering modernity's predominant grand narratives. Since a secularized thought-frame would always point to a multiplicity of options, the African spiritualities point to a plurality of religious choices available to the public. It, therefore, offers the 'seeker' the opportunity to search for spiritual satisfaction and freedom. Before now, such an opportunity appears to have been hidden away not only by modernity's hegemony of religious traditions that were limited to quite a few, but also by the secret nature of the practices of these African spiritualities. There is, therefore, a certain sense of freedom offered by the deterritorialization caused by both migration and mediatization (Pérez, 2015: 84). To the individual in search of spiritual fulfilment, the openness to attempt or even embrace one of these spiritualities indicates also the freedom that lies therein. There is thus no element of compulsion by either birth or circumstances such as was imposed by the slavery at the pristine moments.

Today, the interaction between West Africa and the diaspora further intensifies the ties between both divides of the black world. The re-emergence of African spiritualities finds space therefore within a larger renaissance of African identity across the African continent. African identity both in the homeland and in the diaspora is both served by this exchange and interaction between them.

> One critical measure of the Diaspora condition as a self-conscious identity lies in remembering, imagining, and engaging the original homeland, whose own identity, in part, is constituted by, and in turn, helps constitute the Diaspora. (Zeleza, 2009: 145)

Religion as one of the key elements of culture thus plays a great role in reconnecting the African diaspora with the homeland. With its many cultural elements in terms of customs and vocabulary which have remained constant within Afro-Caribbean spiritualities, religion remains a force in driving a model of Pan-Africanism that has no boundary: a deterritorialized Pan-Africanism.

Premised on this cross-continental interaction, the re-emergence of African spiritualities has generated renewed scholarly interest across the globe. Rotimi Omotoye (2015) gives a succinct account of the renewed internationalization of the study of African religions. He argues that such revived interest in African spiritualities offers an approach that was missing in earlier accounts of the same religion. In the past, investigations into African spiritualities have always been carried out from the Christian perspective, often with the intent of describing them as 'pagan', 'primitive' or 'evil'. This is largely due to the oral tradition which has marked African spiritualities right from the start and the prejudice of belonging to a better form of religion. Today, scholarly interest in African spiritualities seeks a certain level of neutrality in examining the practices. Omotoye outlines that such an investigation must first be characterized by openness in which the religion is 'allowed to speak for itself' (2015: 36). Second, given the nature of culture as a people's specific way of life, there is the element of sympathy in such a study. In other words, one must do away with 'cultural and national pride' in giving an account of African spiritualities. Finally, since African spiritualities reflect people's way of life, they should 'be handled with the reverence and utmost care'. In doing so, 'generalization of ideas and distortion of historical facts on any issue' ought to be avoided (2015: 37).

Of course, one ultimate insight which African spiritualities present to both the individual practitioners and the global community is the subject of ecology. African spiritualities are intrinsically linked with the natural environment. Practitioners of African spiritualities need no lesson in environmental sustainability since their ritual practices and beliefs have great respect for the environment. In a study that focuses on Kenyan practitioners, Sussy Gumo et al (2012: 526–527) argue that African spiritualities offer veritable resources for the conservation of natural resources. In African spiritualities, the common belief is that the deities inhabit every corner of the created order. For instance, in Santeriá we have some of the *orishas* as including *Sango*, the deity of thunder, lightning and fire, as well as *Iemanjá*, the deity of the sea. Mountains, hills, forests, rivers and streams remain perfect places for the ritual practices of these spiritualities. They are, therefore, not to be defiled or destroyed but conserved as an abode of the spirits, gods and goddesses. Even the entire earth (*Mother earth*) is regarded and respected as divine. Advocates of environmental protection and the new adherents of the so-called 'earth religion' may find so many chances of learning and living through African spiritualities.

Beyond these opportunities, we recognize some challenges facing the re-emergence of African spiritualities. In what follows we shall explore some of these challenges.

Challenges in the Revival of African Spiritualities

The challenges over the revival of African spiritualities are posed partly by their historical origins as well as the secular vehicle of their re-emergence. They include the problems of discordant orientations, non-inclusiveness as well as global power dynamics.

Discordant Orientations

What are the original aims of the African spiritualities? How do the orientations of the Afro-Caribbean forms synchronize with the original orientations? Let us take Vodou for an instance. Though multifarious in its forms of practice, such as it could be understood as 'a full-fledged religion' (Anderson, 2015: xvii), Vodou maintains a set of basic orientations. It was a totally African spirituality of animistic and naturalistic compositions. The priestess, called Queen Mother, oversees the spiritual well-being of the whole community, ensuring justice and peace. Priestly service is genealogical and is formed through a covenant with the Oracle. However, in the Haitian Vodou,

a version of Voodoo pantheon with different compositions and orientation, priesthood is not forged through family covenant. Besides the priesthood, the religion now adapts certain Catholic symbols and rituals in its practices, hence having discontinuity with the original orientation. On another example, the Dahomey Voodoo uses the python in Voodoo snake rituals, while followers of the serpent god, Blanc Dani, in Haiti and New Orleans substitute with other snakes. Meanwhile Dani, the serpent, which represents injustice against the black people is associated with the statue of St Michael, standing on a serpent and holding a scale of justice (Anderson, 2015: 28). In that case, the aspect of the spirituality where the priestess is the custodian of peace and fairness is no longer sustained. Such discordance develops to a distortion of the original spirituality.

Even more, a strong characteristic of the African spiritualities is the community dimension. These spiritualities were created to address the religious, social and moral needs of a community. 'Morals take a central place in African society' (Park, 2013: 180). With what moral orientations do the diaspora offshoots of these African spiritualities represent Africa? In their foreign societies, what do sexuality, justice and communal dependence mean to them? Spirituality is foremost, in the interest of the community that creates it. The community deity in Africa does not only serve as a source of divine relationship, protection and provision. A deity also reflects the identity of the community, sustaining peace and social justice. 'Immersion into the life of the world through participation in your community is the very core of African indigenous spirituality and morality' (Magesa, 2015: 71). Normally, the priest or priestess is the foremost custodian of this morality. John Umeh (1997) pronounces this in the caption of his work, *After God Is Dibia*.

Linked to this disconnection from the community is another form of disconnection from the environment. As we have already argued, the environment plays a great role in the practice of African spiritualities, now called 'Ecospirituality' (Pu, 2016: 28). What will be the shape of such practice in an environment that is not close to nature? Of what impact will such spirituality make in the life of a practitioner who has no regard or respect for the natural environment, but seeks the spirituality only for personal fulfilment? These are questions that buttress the enormity of the challenges facing the re-emergence of African spiritualities today. For one thing, the radical change in the society today affects the practice of African spirituality.

This disconnection from the original orientations is even more challenging in the current revival of African spiritualities both in Africa and in other parts of the world. The renewal in the African spiritualities does not only lack communal dimension but seems to be equally driven by other interests. One of such interests is the tendency to expunge religions or express anti-religiosity. With the inception of pluralism as a decisive factor in the field of religion and theology, a wave of antagonism against the dominant major religions became trendy. Apart from those on the quest for refreshing spiritual life, some others embrace African spiritualities in revolt against their former religious communities for not being naturalistic and eco-friendly enough, for being too rigid with morals and laws or for some of the dark sides of their history (Jagire, 2011: 189). These anti-religious motives do not synchronize with the original orientation of African spirituality. The renewed spiritualities would seem to be mere instruments of revolt or antagonism under such an aim.

Another objective, one that is akin to the first, is propelled by racial animosity. For some Africans, the 'whiteman' is evil. It was the 'whiteman' that bedevilled, robbed and exploited, enslaved and abused the African for hundreds of years. Embittered, the African is consequentially very sensitive to anything that has the identity of the 'whiteman' attached to it. So, in distasteful expressions like 'whiteman's religion', 'white Jesus', 'white devil', etc. he or she begrimes or adulterates something by attaching 'whiteness' to it. Once Christianity has been tagged 'white', a typical African in this category finds reasons to return to his or her ancestral spirituality. The problem here, however, is that the interest to identify with the African spirituality is not motivated by

faith in its beliefs or by proper dispositions to its rituals and communal orientations. The interest is simply to justify one's animosity to the 'whiteman' and to remake that which was nearly destroyed.

'African Spirituality is not about creating a dichotomy between Western and African spirituality but about accepting a multiplicity of possibilities' (Jagire, 2011: 189). African spiritualities that are supported with these kinds of orientations risk the possibility of fizzling away once the trends of anti-religiosity and racial enmity are gone. Then its instrumentalization would no longer be needed.

The Bane of Inclusivity

As hinted above, deterritorialization contributes to the revival of African spiritualities. Ironically, this factor constitutes a big challenge for African spiritualities as well. Deterritorialization breeds syncretism, which is not necessarily forbidden. In a sense, syncretism can promote a religion or spirituality. If that which it promotes is authentic of the religion, then syncretism becomes even necessary. But in the context of planting a particular localized spirituality in another (but dissimilar) locality, some infractions might be incurred. For instance, in a new locality, an unqualified person might assume the position of a priest or priestess despite having insufficient knowledge of the rites and rituals due to a little number of well-versed adherents. Forced by prevailing circumstances, there might be a need to seek extraneous influences to supply for what is deficient. The very name 'Santeriá' already shows the syncretistic elements in such spiritualities. As a name borrowed from the Catholic Church, one is therefore not surprised about the many Christian elements that might be found in Santeriá.

Deterritorialization weakens exclusivity. Exclusivity is a characteristic of African spirituality, which is greatly threatened in its re-emergence. Among the Igbos, for example, one is by birth a member of a community and ipso facto, an adherent to a particular deity. A renunciation of that deity is a segregation from one's clan. Adherence to another deity of another clan is a serious betrayal of one's community. To be is to belong to one's family or clan. To belong to one's family is to cherish and be devoted to one's identity and deity. The very concept of 'deity' (*Arusi*) in the Igbo language implies *a demand of allegiance*. The word '*Arusi*' connotes two words, *aru* – 'Taboo' and *si* – 'says' (Asouzu, 2007: 295). In this context, *arusi* would mean *taboo demands* or *our social ordinance commands*. So, the Igbo's allegiance to his or her deity is in his or her very communal existence. This is a quintessence of exclusivity in an African spirituality. 'A person cannot detach himself from the religion of his group, for to do so is to be severed from his roots . . . and the entire group of those who make him aware of his own existence' (Mbiti, 1969: 2).

With deterritorialization, inclusivity replaces exclusivity. People of different aims and orientations become members of a particular spirituality and the authenticity of the spirituality is lost in the myriads of interests. What is left of the spirituality would be an adulterated version of the authentic spirituality. If the media is the source of one's adoption of such a spirituality, chances are that the knowledge obtained through media is deficient in itself. Without any contact with the body of worshippers, as has been argued, a practitioner ends up performing empty rituals since he or she may not fully understand what is involved.

The Power of Western Influence in Africa

There is a connection between the revival of African spiritualities in Africa and their re-emergence in other parts of the world. Interestingly, this does not take the shape of an export from Africa to the rest of the world. Rather, the increasing appeal of these spiritualities in Europe and America has greatly influenced the revival of these spiritualities in Africa.

> The religions developed in the Americas impact Africa in that devotees of the African diaspora have significant influence on practices in Africa. Some African diasporans are returning to the continent to reconnect with their ancestral traditions, and they are encouraging and organizing the local African communities to reclaim this heritage. (Olupona, 2015)

This might be a great danger. With different objectives, aims, and orientations, some of which are purely political, the sponsorship of these spiritualities in Africa would imply that the Vodou practitioner in Yorubaland, for example, would lean and learn from Louisiana Vodou practitioner in the United States. Like in many facets of African life, the affiliation with the Western world and the financial benefits involved make the African docile to the influences of the outside partner, not just in orientations and political objectives, but also in rituals and beliefs.

With such sponsorship, the interest in such spiritualities will increasingly continue in Africa, but the quality and sustainability will be impaired. For example, one cannot completely avoid the danger of having empty rituals in the name of practicing these sponsored spiritualities. If the influence on these spiritualities from outside is strong and decisive, then in time, the African spiritualities would be reduced to a commercialized venture of many interests and objectives.

Conclusion and the Model of Mutual Enrichment

At this point in history, the question that should busy Africans and non-Africans alike is no longer whether religion or spirituality could be instrumental in the achievement of an authentic African identity. The question, rather, should be whether the developments of the spiritualities termed 'African' are indeed African and have the sophistication to guarantee the religious or spiritual yearnings of the African. Beyond a common geographical continent, there may not be much that would encapsulate everybody and everything called 'African' into one concept, from colours to cultures. So, when people say they are spiritual in the African context, the question would be: which African spirituality? Influenced by the secularist motivations of freedom and humanism, someone might just imagine that sitting in a particular position before a big tree in the forest or by a riverbank and contemplating is all there is to an African spirituality. An African spirituality is religious and cultural, with rituals and cosmological processes, with communal and personal disciplines, with spiritual and deity implications (Gumo et al., 2012: 524).

As argued above, some of the numerous reasons for the re-emergence of African spiritualities are neither religious nor African. Therefore, amidst the prospects of identity and ecology, the question of whether and how these spiritualities will realize an uplifted Africa is a challenge to African scholars. For one, the world is globalized and interreligious-cultural influences have become normal. African spiritualities can no longer re-emerge without the influence of other religions, especially Christianity and Islam which have been dominant and influential in Africa. It implies that any effort along the religious/spiritual line for the renaissance of Africa would have to engage with Christianity and Islam in interreligious, intercultural encounters. It would have to address the question: How can the different religious possibilities in Africa work together to afford the African an authentic identity of who he/she is?

The re-emergence of African spiritualities, in the context of contemporary discourses on intercultural and interreligious relations in the secular world, would greatly benefit from the *model of mutual enrichment*. Kizito Chinedu Nweke (2017b: 147) argues that 'religion does not only have the uphill task of repackaging and representing itself to a secular world, it equally lacks any other option but to seek communion with the more decisive secular world'.

This equally applies to African spiritualities. This model taps into the globalization mode of the contemporary time by suggesting that every religion/spirituality has something valuable to offer. It proposes

> a concatenation of values and ideas, different or even contradictory, towards better knowledge and awareness of one's own values. It opines the emphatic attention to other's ideas and beliefs, for no other reason other than to see it as an additional dimension to the perception of one's values. (Nweke, 2017a: 314)

A consideration of the other as incompatible and incapable of authenticity would be a challenging perspective of any religion or institution, especially Christianity. As such, the burden of deconstructing this structure of devaluation with the intent to conquer would seem to be heavier on Christianity. This is because, by virtue of its missionary expedition, Christianity got into wide contacts with multiple religions and cultures with the opportunity to learn and to illumine these. Yet, most of these contacts were futile and their events have remained painful crosses for the church, adversely undermining its reputation and spiritual growth. However, there is a way forward, namely a corrective way that puts forward a Christianity that reflects in other religions, including African spiritualities. It is the model of mutual enrichment.

Three of the principles of this model are

1. *Complementarity and identity*: This does not imply complementing a religion in the understanding that it is incomplete. It is about underlying the fact that religions are different and these differences should be in a necessary mutual understanding and connectedness. The differences should be in communication for the realization of a peaceful world. It is about considering the perspective of the other as an extension or assistance to one's own perspective over the same matter.

2. *Identities and pluralism*: Man's adherence to his identity and culture is not a new phenomenon. Even in our world of multi-cultural societies, where interactions and interdependence have crossed geographical borders, propagation of identity, be it cultural or national, is not only happening but also encouraged. Why have African linguists and the Academia started complaining about the loss of their heritages and cultures? It is because of the exposure which globalization brought. The more Africans interact with other people, the more they realize how important their cultural identity should be. So the model of mutual enrichment enhances neither, *in stricto sensu*, a relegation of identity nor a negative adherence to it. This is because the model suggests the enrichment of one's values by understanding and learning from the other.

3. *The possibility of change*: Mutual enrichment encourages the need for change and the openness for its achievement. Either the participant finds more appealing insights into his or her reality and embraces a different new world or rather finds more insights into the life structure he or she already has and thereby is enriched in his or her perception of the world. In both cases, change has indubitably occurred. This theory of complementarity promotes change within the ambient of personal conviction (Nweke: 2017a).

If the rise of African spiritualities would develop along these lines of mutual enrichment, it would be able to address the challenges above. We posit that the re-emergence of African spiritualities could be enriching to Africans and the world, irrespective of one's religions, but without the objective of revolt against other people and their religions.

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