

Global Indigenous religions of Africa and Global Challenges-Overcoming Neo-Colonialism and Intolerance against Indigenous Religions of Africa and their Diaspora Derivatives

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The paper examines the significance of Africa indigenous religions to continental Africans and Africans in the Diaspora through the spatial trialectics that are challenges by the evolution of the plantation and colonial situations of the subjugation of African agency, humanity and identity. It considers that Africa indigenous religions needs critical reflection from Africana perspectives to depart from Western narratives or polarities of discrimination of realities into binaries. Furthermore, it explores the tropes of the Diaspora religious retentions in a heterotopia space and the significance of the wisdoms enshrined in African indigenous knowledge systems and religion, not merely as a space for worship but for cultural identity. Therefore, the paper argues that the challenges of indigenous Africa religions in plantation, colonial and neocolonial spaces, concerning black place with their race, culture, identity and land cannot be comprehended unless there is a total decolonization of African epistemologies, agencies and spatial livities as advocated by Rastafari.

A pending task that waits for the African Diaspora is unmasking and decolonizing indigenous African religions or spiritualities from the spatial representations engulfed in slave-plantation's so-called societies, colonialism and neo-colonialism. Unlike peoples in their native social spaces, African peoples in the Americas, during European Trans-Atlantic slave industry, "were not allowed to be human within their new location". (Bewaji, 1997, 9). They were

outlawed non-humans and every attempt was made to diminish their racial, cultural, spatial and religious Africana identity.

According to Mervyn Alleyne (1989, 76), the most significant difference between religion in Africa and the plantation in the Americas, "... was little or no large-scale political organization among slaves". However, a look closer at the Diaspora spatiality through the relation of freedom in their home-land Africa and the bondage of enslavement in a heterotopia space, we will realized that the Diaspora identity, culture and religious history goes beyond the retentions confined in the narratives from plantation spaces to Diaspora or from merchant Slave ship to garrison ghetto spaces.

Furthermore, the Americas for blacks under the 1636 Act were forced to be slaves and to serve the merchants on plantations all their lives from a social political governances of military management (Beckles, 2016, 23). While this spatial process of dehumanization was aimed to maximize capitalist profit on investment and "the enslavers were always anxious about their personal security and social stability of their plantations" (Beckles, 2016, 23), the enslaved were left with no room, whether cultural, economic, religious or social, to remain human. This means that in the Americas, the African did not have the freedom of religion, they were "denied a history, an ethnic heritage, a religion, personal names and family names." (Bewaji, 1997, 9).

Even with the odds against them, black people creatively assimilated their knowledge and retentions of Africa indigenous religions with colonial religion in order to keep their Africana identity, culture, memory and native religion alive through successive generations. For example, in Jamaica, religious retentions are demonstrated through Revivalism; and in Cuba, Santeria (way of the saints) is the combination of Yoruba religion/spirituality with elements from Roman

Catholicism. These retentions show that the attitude towards religion in a social space depends on the relations between spatial representation of that space and the people within the space.

Thus, the national religion of the colonial space influences the degree, manner and social acceptance of African indigenous religious retentions and practices. Consequently, the Spanish speaking countries in the Americas have stronger retention and social acceptance through Catholicism while non-Catholic English colonies have less retention and stronger taboo. Even though the church was involved with the slave trade, missionaries and slave owners use tactics to convert Africans on the plantations to European Christian religion, as a means of psycho-social and cultural reprogramming. It is not surprising that Rastafari among other religious groups in Jamaica adopted the English colonial religious views on African indigenous religion and Catholicism, even as they claim their Africana identity and as they promote practices of Africana religious retentions.

It is important to understand the plight of Diaspora spatial religious disposition in the Americas as they pursue the task of mental emancipation. The concern here is with the apparent death of African indigenous religion/spirituality, culture, metaphysic and cosmology in the face and space of neocolonialism. Africa and the Diaspora have a duty to the progeny to retain, teach and develop African indigenous culture. African Diasporas exist in a space that are exploited by Europeans but which they did not create. It is to Africa that the Diaspora looks for indigenous knowledge, just to as the Chinese-America look towards China for ancestral wisdom. It is important that African indigenous knowledge, culture and religion does not subside, remain marginalized and or disappear from African continent and among Africans of the Diaspora.

Marcus Garvey admitted that “we are children of an environment that we ourselves did not create...the influence brought on us is the influence of a superior group of men who have not only planned, but have , in every way, sought to maintain his influence for the power of their own control.” (1987, 28)

If it is true that “we are living now in the midst of the white man’s civilization,” (Marcus Garvey, 1987, 31) and “wherever colonisation occurs, native culture begins to wither. And among the ruins there springs up, not a culture, but a kind of sub-culture, a sub-culture that, because it is condemned to remain marginal,” (Aime Cesaire 2013, 37). It follows that “we cannot pose the problem of native culture without at the same time posing the problem of colonialism” (Aime Cesaire 2013, 28). The meaning and significance of this conference in my opinion is to stand up against the challenge of neocolonialism. Let our voices and actions stand as a force that manifest the wisdom of Africana indigenous religion, the ownership to Africana space, culture and identity. Neo-colonialism like the rest of Westerns economic predecessors aims to capture, convert and control. Marcus Garvey, Amilcar Cabral, Kwame Nkrumah noted the African challenge with Western ideology and in moving towards the 21th century, Frank Fanon calls oppressive force, cultural racism.

While we seek to resist subjugation, another pending task for both Africa and the Diaspora is to understand what it is about our Africana culture that causes the dilemma. The generosity or brotherhood of the African to accept Arabian and Western religion is explained by Abimbola (2006, 102) in *Yoruba Culture, A Philosophical Account*, where he noted that Orunmila “the Yoruba God of knowledge and wisdom, graciously accepted the conversion of his children to Islam. This is because Yoruba religion has a practical purpose. It is not merely concerned with faith and the afterlife, but also with practical guidelines on how to live together

in a diverse, multi-cultural, global and cosmopolitan world”. Unfortunately, the only reciprocation that Yoruba get is the destruction of the traditions, values and religions of Yoruba society.

For the last five hundred years of colonial situation, Arabians and Westerns societies, cultures, states or nations have not accepted, practiced or worship any African indigenous religion. This shows that religion for certain groups is more than welfare of the people. “Especially Christianity and Islam in Africa-could not care less about the souls of their followers, ...nor... Care about a whit about what the Supreme Being thought or thinks about their activities or the welfare of their followers” (Bewaji, 2012, 167), what is important is how to use the beliefs to empower Western societies at the expense of the converted African peoples.

Colonialism and neo-colonial state progress with discrimination against blacks, for instance killing of blacks that give birth to resistant and awareness of Black Lives Matter and most of the victims of COVID-19 pandemic in Northern countries are mostly African and peoples of colour. Bewaji (2012, 167) noted that “religion is simple and totally about human welfare”, the desert religions with their absolutism, monotheism and insensitivity that quickly destroys or capture the life or property of the others are hell bent on converting others to the gods of their fathers land, so that they can be conquered territorially and intellectually.

In closing this presentation I will reiterate that the meaning and significance of this conference in my opinion is to stand up against the challenge of neocolonialism. Let our voices and actions stand as a force that manifest the wisdom of Africana indigenous religion, the ownership to Africana space, culture and identity – a trialectics of spatial contestation which

Africans globally must contend with. We have the duty to tell the children of Africa and Diaspora the truth when they ask asked, “Who are the gods of our fathers land?”

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