

**THE PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES OF AFRICAN TRADITIONAL  
RELIGION IN THE CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY**

**BY**

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**A PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIONS  
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**SEPTEMBER, 2023.**

**CERTIFICATION**

This is to certify that this work was carried out by **ZABAYOR OMOSIGHO JENNIFER** in the Department of Religions Studies, Faculty of Arts, University of Benin, Benin City under my supervision.

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## **DEDICATION**

This project is dedicated to God Almighty who had made it possible for me to successfully complete this project throughout the time of this work. All thanks to Him for His protection throughout my four years of study at the University of Benin.

I also wish to press my deep appreciation to my parents, Mr. and Mrs. Zabayer Osazuwa Friday for being there for me all the time, and finally my sister Zabayer A. Precious for her financial assistance and moral support throughout these years of scholarly pursuit.

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study titled the "Prospects and Challenges of African Traditional Religion In The Contemporary Society" was aimed at examining the acknowledgement of African traditional religion in our contemporary time and society. This has become necessary due to the various and conflicting teachings on the subject matter. The method employed was historical and analytical. Data collection was from both secondary and primary sources which include interviews from some selected traditional rulers and leaders amongst others. The study revealed the disdainful societal misconceptions generally associated with the traditional religion in African which made it to have been forgotten with time, due to its inaccurate ideas and false beliefs. Based on the findings, it was recommended amongst others that there should be a need to investigate and address its concept, thereby finding a way for its possibility to be recognized not only during our contemporary era but also in the future which may pass through difficult challenges but with the aim of attaining and achieving a positive goal.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### GENERAL INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background to the Study

One issue that continues to elicit many and varied reactions amongst students and researchers is the view on African traditional religion and its challenges in society, especially in our contemporary times. Though it had remained a scorching issue for a long time. Over the years, it has been apparent that African traditional religions had been disregarded by many in the society and Africa at large. However, others believed it to have died a natural death because of the wrong terminologies and misconceptions about African traditional religions which were used by the European masters during the course of their unfortunate act and the ideology of colonialism and imperialism in Africa.

The conception of African traditional religion is believed to have been from the beginning even to the creation of man, this is because it is a nature religion that is to say a religion that comes on its own without any agents of revelation like messengers or prophets. Before the exploration of the Europeans to the African continent this religion had remained a strong belief system that must be obeyed at all times by all which were not to be compromised otherwise, it may attract grave punishment but as a result of the recent globalization process and the rapid development system of the world, science, belief as well as the way of living, things have changed a lot and

could have in one way or the other affected the belief system of African traditional religion (Idowu, 1973).

The fallacious eurocentric misconception and image that pictures on the fact that the Africans did not know or have any idea about God before the coming and introduction of colonialism to the African continent had remained one subject matter that continues to bother many and attracts reaction over the years, this is because of the erroneous ideas and opinion given by the colonial masters for instance during the time of the Arab invasion as well as the European incursion (Njoh and Akiwumi, 2012). Meanwhile, African traditional religion is believed to have existed as a nature religion, this is because it has been around since the beginning of humanity. Although it is common that most of them do not have a Holy book that guides or record their historical activities or any written text for references unlike the Muslim Qur'an or the Christian Bible, this might be the reason for some varieties of similarity or difference in their way of practice (Stinton, 2004). Therefore, it is not easy for those who are not from Africa to have a clear knowledge about the beliefs and practices of African traditional religion because it has not been written down.

Furthermore, Njoh and Akiwumi (2012) opine that one major feature of African traditional religion is that it is a way of life for Africans. Mbiti (1970) also suggests that African traditional religion is part and parcel of culture in Africa and it starts before the birth of an individual and does not end after death. This implies that Africans perceive God in every activity of their lives and often times chant or invoke

His name in their everyday conversations and it is always used as their most uttered word in their various languages. In fact, according to him, African morality is highly associated with God because if one does not want to invite the anger of God, he or she must not indulge in any evil deed. Hence, everyone is taught how to do right from birth to avoid immoral acts (Mbiti, 1970). It is a true fact that many today have different views about African traditional religion, failing to comprehend its historical background and original concept.

Therefore, this study undertakes a holistic investigation towards ascertaining the African position on traditional worship in order to understand if the practice is encouraged in our contemporary society.

## **1.2 Clarification of Terms**

In an attempt to understand this discussion, we therefore adumbrate on some definitions related to the research topic:

### **1.2.1 Prospect and Challenges**

The Oxford Advance Learner Dictionary defines prospect as “a possibility that something will happen in the future, this means a subject matter to some degree or extent that may likely occur. Challenges on the other hand simply mean a new or difficult task or a stimulating problem. Therefore, it is a predicament situation that can be hard to deal with or manage, but may also be overcome”.

### **1.2.2 Traditional Religion**

This refers to the indigenous or aboriginal religions of the people which deal with their cosmology, ritual practices, symbols, and arts in the society. According to Wikipedia research, these traditions are mostly oral rather than scriptural or written down. This means that they are being passed down from one generation to another through folk tales, songs, and festivals. In fact, it also implies that it has a belief system that may include that of spirits, higher and lower gods, the Supreme Being, sometimes the veneration of the dead, the use of magic as well as traditional medicine.

Therefore, the role of humanity towards traditional religion can also generally be seen as one that succumbs and conform nature with the supernatural and metaphysical (en.wikipedia.org).

### **1.2.3 Contemporary Society**

The world is changing globally as indicated by various modern trends. These trends have a universal geographical spread as it is no longer localized to a particular region or country. In essence, it simply refers to the society we live in at the present moment such as profound alteration, rectification, and remodeling of our current communal organization as well as the individuals' social ethos and lifestyle. For instance, this is a perfect example that relates to the industrialization or modernization of the present time (Osagie, 2020).

#### **1.2.4 African Global Landmass and Continent**

Africa from the old English is "the global landmass or continent that is located at the south of Europe, east of the Atlantic Ocean, west of the Indian Ocean and north of Antarctica". It is the second-largest and second-most-populous continent in the world after Asia. It ranges at about 30.3 million km<sup>2</sup> (11.7 million square miles) including adjacent islands, which cover 20% of Earth's land area and 6% of its total surface area (en.wikipedia.org). However, Merriam-Webster Dictionary also defines it as "one of the six or seven great divisions of land on the globe". Etymologically, the term Africa evolves from the Greek word "*aphrike*" and the Latin word "*aprica*" or "*afri*" meaning the inhabitant of countries that represent several peoples who dwelt in North Africa near the provincial capital otherwise known as Carthage, this has been postulated for the ancient name 'Africa' (newworldencyclopedia.org).

#### **1.3 Statement of the Problem**

The issue and challenges of African traditional religion in contemporary society have become suddenly controversial. The issues are now subject to several debates because various interest groups among the various researchers have had their individual stands on the subject matter. In African society the issue has also generated a lot of controversy among commentators, the recent being 'daddy freeze'.

Therefore, the problem of this study is an attempt to investigate the prospects and erroneous teachings concerning African traditional religion in our contemporary times, in order to draw useful implications and resolution to the subject matter.

#### **1.4 Aims and Objective of the Study**

The aim of this study is to investigate the extensive view on African traditional religion and the challenges it faces in our contemporary society and to draw out practical lessons from the investigation for its implications and resolutions. In order to achieve this aim, the following objectives were set:

1. to understand the origin and to show how the concept of African traditional religion came about as a nature religion.
2. to ascertain the nature of traditional religion in Africa and the concept of its practice.
3. to identify the challenges and implications of African traditional religion, to address and find its resolution.
4. to discover the extent to which traditional religions have and can also serve as a benefit not only to Africans but also to the rest of the world thereby giving the opportunity for it to be recognized.

#### **1.5 Significance of the Study**

- i. Our national leaders, presidents, senators, and governors in Africa will benefit from this study as it will be helpful to acknowledge the positive contributions of African traditional religion to the lives of the society.
- ii. The general members of other religious organizations and denominations will benefit massively from this study, as it will widen their ideology from false

indoctrinations and teachings, and emancipate their minds from the shackles of ignorance as regards the true concept of African traditional religion.

- iii. The religious heads and leaders like the Pastors and Imams particularly in Africa will also benefit from this study as it will help in their preaching and teachings of what is right about the true notion of traditional religion in Africa and making them know its real idea and conception.
- iv. The society as a whole will also benefit because it will serve as a general source of information as regards the true idea of African traditional religion.
- v. Upcoming ministers who are in theoretical schools and seminaries will also learn from this study as it will educate and inform them on the concept of traditional religion in Africa.
- vi. Teachers and students especially those studying theology and religion will also benefit from this study, for it will enlighten their minds on what is expected of them about traditional religious practice in Africa.
- vii. The authors of literary texts and curriculum planners will also benefit from this study as well as add to their knowledge base.

## **1.6 Scope and Limitation of the Study**

The scope of this study shall be on the passages that deal with the view on African traditional religion and the challenges it faced in society, especially in our contemporary times. More so, our society as well as traditional centers generally shall also be surveyed as respondents for this study, however, considering time and

financial constraints the crux of the study shall be restricted to some selected traditional leaders and experts as case study.

### **1.7 Research Methodology**

This research utilizes historical and comparative methods for effective analysis of data. The historical methodology would examine data analysis, information or recorded evidence and interpretations that would be gathered from historical source materials by researchers to draw a vital conclusion (<https://study.com>). The comparative methodology would examine the researcher's comparison of analyses or visual inspections of various similar items, datasets or citations to one another and see what their differences and similarities have in common or if they are dependent upon one another (<https://study.com>).

The method of data gathering shall include both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources would examine oral information, through interviews from scheduled meetings during the course of this research. The secondary sources are existing publications and data that other scholars have gathered which were gotten from journals, magazines, articles; the internet, dictionaries, and unpublished project works. Libraries such as the John Harris Library at the University of Benin, the National Library Iyaro, and Sapele Road were visited for this study.

### **1.8 Division of Work**

This work is divided into Five Chapters. Chapter One is on the general background and introduction to the study. This chapter also includes the aim and

objectives of the study, clarification of terms, scope, and methodology of the study, statement of problems and significance of the study as well as the division of work. Chapter Two is on review of relevant literature to the study. This chapter points to the works of other scholars, addressing the concept of traditional religion in Africa. Chapter Three discusses the general overview of the beliefs and practices of African traditional religion by examining its explicit prospects and conceptions. Chapter Four discusses the challenges and perspective of African traditional religion arising from the modern world, in this study. It also explains how modernization affects patriarchy, birth control, and burial rites as well as the perspective of the traditional rulers and religious heads interviewed. Chapter Five deals with the evaluation, conclusion, and recommendations of the study.

## CHAPTER TWO

### GENERAL INTRODUCTION

#### 2.1 The Origin of African Traditional Religion

African traditional religion has been an age long disposition. However, it is a practice that has prevailed from time immemorial, accepted by the majority, and that can also be traced far back in history in comparison to other world religions. This is due to the researcher's observation in the course of this research work, many not only disregard the opinion and notion that Africans have any idea about God but also choose other religions to be more preferably accepted and regarded favorable instead. Although some even went further to say that African traditional religion has no founder when compared to other world religions like Christianity, Islam, and Baha faith to mention but a few; they forget to acknowledge that the founders of African traditional religion are the African ancestors. However, these are the men and women who have lived fulfilled life worth emulating and handing over the religion to their descendants (Kanu, 2015).

Meanwhile, just as it is virtually difficult to know the origin of religion itself, it is also hard to know how African traditional religion began. Consequently, diverse scholars gave their ideas and suggestions about the origin and their understanding of African traditional religion, while some compare its origin to the creation of man in that man had been religious even from the beginning in the act of his creation, others have had speculations that African traditional religion is a natural religion. It is

believed that when God said "Let us make man", in return he had to give loyalty back to his God and creator (Ikechukwu & Ejikemeuwa, 2021). Milner (2018), believe that "African traditional religion is embedded in the traditional life of African" (p. 53). Therefore, it is part and parcel of the African people and it is very difficult to have a clearer understanding of it outside the daily activities of the indigenous people. However, it has been an established historical and scientific fact that Africa is the birthplace of humanity (Wayman, 2011; Tattersall, 1997), so it could also be the birthplace of religion owing to the similarities in practice. However, African traditional religion is simply not only the practice that originated from African ancestors and then transferred to contemporary generations who are the present heirs but also capable of resolving their personal conflict without any external interference (Ajayi, 1981). Onyeidu (1998), also believes that "the present adherents or worshippers of African traditional religion is a direct inheritance from their ancestors and ancestresses" (no. p). He went further to explain that African traditional religion is not only the type of religion where people are born, nurtured, and grew up but also that which is not based on proselytism. This implies that the mode of its operation is generational, and it is not primarily based on conversion. To Aloysius (1999), "besides being rational, humans are also social and religious by nature and more, must have had the idea of God in one way or the other" (p. 106). He further maintains that "right from time, the inhabitants of Africa have chosen their elders to be their religious leaders and sages for age long; who in turn have always served as custodians

and consultants to the religious needs of African community”. According to Milner (2018), “before the contemporary age, many have equated Christianity with civilization and any other religions that were not found among that introduced by the Europeans for colonialism were simply seen as demonic and paganistic” (p. 53). Parrinder (1962), also validated Milner, stating that “many administrators of colonialism have described Africans as an incurably religious people” (p. 49). Therefore, with this in mind the history of African religion had existed even before the advent of colonialism and the introduction of foreign religions to Africa (Namawu, 2007).

Oyeronke (2008), posits that “African traditional religion is the indigenous religion of the Africans which was handed over from one generation to another by word of mouth until recent attempts at documentation” (p. 3). Aylward (1978), further asserts that “the tribes in Africa have disappeared almost forever, and being replaced by new tribes bearing categories of interaction. Therefore, it is a mistake to conclude that African traditional religion is a dead or a dying conventional heritage” (p. 421). From what all these scholars have said so far, it means that due to European colonialism, the coming in of a new civilization, urbanization, and rural revolution which have brought entirely a new structure of practices, beliefs, and religions, for instance, the European introduction of Christianity and the Arabic Islam as well as other migrated religions to Africa had, in the long run, affected African traditional

religion by leading to its desolation (Aylward, 1978). Therefore, African religious practices became known as fetishism and mere superstition (Aloysius, 1999).

Aylward (1978), maintains that “although African traditional religion does not have specific backings on how it emanated, this could be true because African traditional religion did not have any written literature for it to be documented but was only passed through oral transmission which lasted for generations” (p.421). According to him, this has resulted in the dwindling of the shrines and oracles and the explicit despondency of African traditional religion. Oyeronke (2008), citing Awolalu stated that

"African traditional religion is the indigenous religion of the Africans, handed over from generations, the earliest attempt by the Europeans to study it was not geared or driven towards understanding its true perspective but to condemn it and advocate conversions to other religions such Christianity, Islam and other world religions" (no. p).

This infers that African traditional religion was not only regarded as negative, devilish, and inferior (Milner, 2018); but also primitive, native, savage, and paganistic, therefore was advocated to be discarded (Oyeronke, 2008). Idowu (1973), made it clear that it is wrong or inappropriate to describe African traditional religion with derogatory terms in its own right. Like every other religion in the world, all have their strengths and weaknesses. Consequently, this also was one of the reasons why African traditional religion was not recognized or had a clear foundation because it was never documented nor written down but only based on oral tradition.

It is still not apparent to have a clear understanding of how and when the African traditional religion originated or began, although some scholars had suggested in their speculations that it is a nature religion, that is the religion without a prophet or revelation that it may have started from the creation of man, because man seems to be religious in nature (Ikechukwu & Ejikemeuwa, 2021, pp. 200-211). Based on what had been stated earlier, the researcher identified some of the reasons for the difficulty in understanding or studying the origin of African traditional religion:

- i. The Evolutionary Theories of the Origin of Religion:** Oyeronke (2008), believes that from time immemorial, there had been some evolutionary propositions, impressions, and claims which influenced the early European writers and scholars who asserted that Africans whom they considered to be on the lower rank of the evolutionary ladder could not conceive of the absolute creator, God. This infers that there were multiplicities of hypotheses regarding the origin of African traditional religion which do not tally but only derived at the conclusion of disdaining the African continent.
- ii. Lack of Written Materials:** Just like what have been earlier stated, because all the available ideological information Africans had on the religion was basically oral, the lack of written records or documents constituted a big problem for the study of African traditional religion (Osagiede, 2019). Meanwhile, none of the manifestations of the religious consciousness of the Africans were preserved in a

sacred scriptural form, and this greatly affected all the attempts for research on African traditional religion and restrictedly hampered standardized documentation different from every other world religion (Osagiede, 2019).

**iii. Death:** The fact that African traditional religion was handed down from one generation to another and transmitted orally through narratives such as tales and songs. Therefore, it was not recorded (en.wikipedia.org). Consequently, as a result of oral tradition and the non-documentation of African traditional religion, it becomes very difficult to get accurate information to be passed on to younger generations. This is because from time to time, death carries away those who are custodians of culture and religious traditions (Osagiede, 2019). Hence, as one generation passes away, when the custodians of culture have all died, the traditions become inferior and lesser in detail and resulting in the weakening of authentic information and original fact (Oyeronke, 2008).

**iv. Dark Continent Syndrome and Ratification:** It is a clear fact that some scholars particularly European researchers claim that Africa was a dark continent and highly inaccessible, and because they were not familiarized with the continent their first investigation made them complain that the geography of the continent made it difficult for them to move around it and gather essential information (Osagiede, 2019). Therefore, this made them go ahead and published incorrect information about the African religion which to date, such information still continues to be and strive not only among foreigners but also among contemporary Africans. In other

words, because of the fact that the early writers lacked adequate knowledge of the people and the religion of Africa, most of what had been written is mostly untrue, exaggerated, distorted, and remained a fallacy (Osagiede, 2019).

v. **Direct and Indirect Colonial Indoctrination:** Oyeronke (2008), posits that a lot of indoctrination of the African mind against their culture and their religion have existed since the colonial days and continued even till today in the post-colonial era. For him, this has thrived unabatedly much to the extent of referring to the African culture as demonic or evil, and as a result, this has made most Africans not to be interested in studying the religion, and those who do are looked down upon. He further explicated that it has affected the research work of scholars most of whom today have become Christians or Muslims. Therefore, the lack of interest in African religion and culture is now leading to the gradual extinction of the religion and all it stands for (Osagiede, 2019).

vi. **Influence of Other Religions:** The influence of other foreign religions, especially Christianity and Islam in the study of African traditional religion cannot be overemphasized. This is because, along with other world religions which may have come to Africa in one way or the other especially through colonialism, Christianity and Islam had remained the most prominent ones. Osagiede (2019), asserts that "many books on African traditional religion in the early days were written by tourists whose only reason for visiting Africa was to make an explicit claim on their assumption and prejudice about African traditional religion based on the idea of

Islam and Christianity" (p. 26). It is very clear and apparent that the coming of younger generations in Africa under the influence of foreign religions, may either make them practice two religions or gradually forget and neglect their old faith (Osagiede, 2019).

**vii. Multiplicity of Languages:** Research makes us know that Africa is a vast continent with a multiplicity of languages. Taking Nigeria as a case study, there is at least five hundred (500) languages and no researchers could have such capacity or ability to master them despite a very great interest compelling his attempt (Osagie, 2020). Because the in-depth study of any religion requires a thorough understanding of the original language of the adherents of the religion, therefore diverse language differences can also serve as a hindrance to the study of African traditional religion (Osagiede, 2019).

**viii. Secrecy:** It is a true fact that most religious activities, information, or traditional practices are always shrouded in secrecy. Osagiede (2019), believes that "these secrets are often revealed only to the facilitating heads or initiates" (p. 25). More so, these adherents often may have sworn an oath of secrecy which makes it very difficult for others to gain a true understanding of these religions.

**ix. The Influence of Western Education and Culture:** Osagiede (2019), asserts that "Western education and civilization has most times taken people out of their native homes and exposed them to foreign race and culture" (p.27). This is because they lost touch with their homeland and indigenous culture as well as their religion. For

instance, there are times when the African people living or born in foreign lands return back home and are made rulers or chiefs yet they lack a proper understanding of the indigenous African religion which has in a great way resulted in serious problems for the understanding and study of African religions.

- x. **Comparison of Different Religions:** Many European scholars made unfair comparisons against African traditional religions in time past. They were always quick to make a judgment on other religions which may not conform to their own (Osagiede, 2019). For instance, Samuel Baker made an unfair comparison when he wrote derogatorily on the Nilotes of Sudan which holds that they are without a belief in a supreme being, neither do they have any form of worship or idolatry, nor is the darkness of their minds. This unjust affirmation has been said to be unfair and proven wrong (Oyeronke, 2008).

## 2.2 The Nature of African Traditional Religion

It has been said that African traditional religion is the indigenous religion of the African people which involves explicit practices and beliefs (Idowu, 1973). However, these are some of the characteristics and nature of traditional religion in Africa:

1. **Belief in God:** The Africans believe in the Supreme Being who is believed to be Omnipotent, Omniscience, and Omnipresent in the traditional practice of the African society. Idowu (1973), asserts that in many African societies, the attributes of the God who is the Supreme Being is oftentimes reflected in the names attributed to God, this is why the Akan people of Ghana that no one shows

the supreme being to a child. Mbiti (1977) observes that "all peoples in Africa, without a single exception, have a notion of God as the Supreme Being" (p. 27). He further asserts that among the Igbo the name of God is known as "Chineke" or "Chukwu" (the Creator God or Great God), for him, Africans have different names they call God. Among the Yoruba, they acknowledge God as "Olodumare" (Creator God), for the Hausa, God is called "Allah" (Almighty God). In other African countries like Ghana and Sierra Leone, God is also known as "Nyame" and "Ngewo" as well. Also, the nature or conception of God reflects in the names Africans give to their children. In African traditional societies, God is not only known as the Creator but also the Omnipotent, Omnipresent, Omniscient and to mention but a few. According to Onyeroké (2008), "some African societies have no name or specific gender for the Supreme Being unlike other religious denominations like Christianity, Islam, Buddhism amongst others where God is mostly conceived as a male" (p. 44). This is the reason why Africans have had the knowledge of the Supreme Being and have had interactions with God before their contact with any other culture and the coming of the European colonialists.

- 2. Believe in Divinities:** The African traditional worshippers also believed in the divinities which are considered to be the deities that have delegated authority from God (Parrinder 1962). This means that they are the second in the hierarchy that intercede between the supreme being and the human race, they depend on God for their powers and act as intermediaries between God and the people. For

Onyeroke (2008), they are called different names in the indigenous African traditional society, they are also different classes of divinities with different functions. For example, thunder, fertility, water, and economics. The African people also believe that there are various types of divinities. For instance among the Tiv of Benue, Nigeria, they are known as "Okombo" others are "Anyanwu" (Sun god), Agwu (wisdom, health), Amadioha, Igwe (sky god), and Ala (goddess of the earth) et.cetera. For him, they are also categorized under primordial divinities, deified ancestors, and Myraid spirits. This implies that they are subordinate to the supreme being like in the western religion (Christianity), the angels and saints are seen as divinities. This is because they are believed to be powerful intercessors through which one's prayer can easily be answered (Ogbonna, 2020)

- 3. Belief in Spirits:** The Africans believe there are different forms and categories of spirits. According to Onyeroke (2008), these spirits reside in natural phenomena like rivers, rocks, and grooves whereas others are known to manifest at different occasions as the need may be. For him, just like divinities, they operate as agents and it is believed that they are being delegated with divine powers and authority to assist humans in different circumstances, seasons, and times. Spirits in African traditional religion may also be appeased especially when being aggrieved in order to enforce peace and harmony (Oyeronke, 2008). However, Ugwu and Ugwueye (2004), state that "spirits are apparitional entities". This implies that

they do not have the material body nor can be seen with physical eyes, “they form a separate category or have different responsibilities from those described as divinities” (p. 46). According to Ogbonna (2020), in African traditional religion, spirits are believed to be everywhere. For him, there are trees that are believed or considered to be the abode of the spirits. More so, those whose dead bodies are not usually buried with proper burial rites, consequently they hover around in the world because of restrictions that deprived them of entering the land of the dead. Idowu (1973), there are good spirits and bad spirits, while the good ones always protect their relatives and loved ones, the bad ones cause havoc. For instance, those that are not properly buried with the appropriate burial rites consequently turns out to become a ghost that always hunt the family, another category is the Ogbanje or Abiku spirit; which are believed to be "born to die". This spirit enters into a woman and soon after birth dies to reincarnate. Another spirit is the one sent to harm people, known as witches. However, Ogbonna (2020), opines that sometimes these spirits take the form of animals to go and attack others while the person's body is sleeping. The Africans also believe that every person has "chi" or "ehi" in the Igbo and Edo traditional cultures; which are known as the guardian spirits and they usually lead and guide the individual. However, it is believed to be more effective especially when one has to work in accordance with this spirit for success, and one can also upgrade it in case it is of low standard. This spirit can be likened to individual gifts and talents that are naturally endowed, this

means that some person's talents or gifts for instance to become a seer or a traditional healer, is as a result of these good guardian spirits (Ogbonna, 2020).

- 4. Belief in Ancestors:** Ancestors in African traditional religion are "those who have realized to a remarkable degree the values and aspirations of their communities or groups" (Abanuka, 1994, p. 37). In African society, the ancestors are the dead members of the family that are still perceived as being a part of the members of the family. They are seen as always present and interested in the affairs of the family members (Idowu, 1973). These ancestors are often seen as the "living dead" of the community. This implies that they are the dead ones who are considered still living and around for family protection. This is because of the good quality of life they lived before their departure which makes them to be usually venerated. However, there are special criteria that make the qualification of an ancestor in the African community and society. Ancestors are the heroes because of their achievements in the community (Abanuka, 1994). Also, ancestors can also be seen as those who did not commit any scandal when they were alive. Ancestors are revered according to the level of their achievement in a particular community. Ogbonna (2020), also believes that those who died in ripe old age are also regarded as ancestors, in that sense, old age is regarded as a blessing in the notion of death for the Africans which determines ancestral ranks. According to him, there are other sets of ancestors with lower rank, these are those who died young but did outstanding things for the community. Meanwhile, there are some

that would have been qualified to become ancestors especially those who lived godly lives but were not identified nor venerated, which gives them the lowest ancestral ranks (Abanuka, 1994). Onyeroke (2008), posits that ancestors are to be venerated but they are not worshipped, just like in the African traditional society, the ancestors are also capable of influencing the things that happen in the lives of individuals, family as well as the entire community. For him, if anyone is to be qualified to be an ancestor such might have lived a good or moral life, well attested by others, must have died at a ripe old age, must have demonstrated good conduct, and be remembered after his death, must have had an heir, not just any but a male child at least to venerate him after his demise. For a person to be an ancestor he or she must be given a proper burial according to the African rite. An ancestor can be both male or female and death at old age is a compelling prerequisite to be an ancestor (Osagiede, 2019). Remarkably, the African notion of the ancestors could be seen in the Christian notion of sainthood and canonization (Ogbonna, 2020).

- 5. Belief in Magic/Medicine:** In African society, magic and medicine are usually corresponding and indistinguishable because, based on the African belief in some vital forces in the universe which control almost every aspect of man. These forces are believed to be tapped and controlled by man. More so, magic can be seen as man's attempt to control the supernatural powers in the world, and medicine is the act of using the available forces to prevent disease and restore

man's health (Ugwu and Ugwueye, 2004). Ritual and incantation are the common elements that are associated with magic and medicine; otherwise, it becomes less effective. Therefore, both the medicine men and practitioners are to observe rituals or incantations for the effectiveness of magic and medicine (Idowu, 1973). Ndemanu (2018), believes that magic and medicine in African society is the traditional practice that is always carried out by medicine men and they often use it for the power of good health which encompasses wellness and wholeness. That some sicknesses might not be physical but might be due to spiritual afflictions that could be caused through charm which is why the practice of healing always requires some specific magic (Ndemanu, 2018). The fact that magic and medicine is almost seen as having the same significance, shows that sickness in African traditional religion is perceived to have both physical and metaphysical aspects; this is because the Africans believe that not all ailment is physical but some are also spiritual too (Idowu, 1973). The practice of these healings may include the use of herbs, water, or oil to effect healing (Oyeronke, 2008). For the spiritual part, it could also include offerings, prayers, and sacrifices to divine super-sensible powers which may often involve recitations of specialized incantations by specialists in African mysticism (Idowu, 1973). In African medicine, the state of the mind is very important because it is closely related to the health of the body both the psychological and the physical are intertwined, that is why the deliberate

appeal to metaphysical forces in the universe is often made through magic (Oyeronke, 2008).

## **2.3 The Human Dimension of African Traditional Religion**

### **1.) Liturgical Ritual, Worship and Sacrifice**

The giving of offerings, worship, and sacrifice is one of the concrete notable aspects of traditional African religion. However, these sacrifices are rites that are offered which always go with prayers to God through their ancestors (Idowu, 1973). According to Ukpong (1983), the sacrifices and prayers they receive are ultimately received by God through the ancestors. Mbiti (1969), stresses further that, the kind of situation that calls for a sacrifice may include drought, epidemics, war, raids, calamity, insect pests, and destructive floods. Apart from worship, it could be true that other religions may have also learnt some religious practices from African traditional religion; this is because based on the consideration of African traditional religions being reflected in the Christian Bible, it is important to understand that the Christian biblical passage also illustrates the value of animal sacrifice as a way to seek salvation by appeasing God. Leviticus 1: 2-5 discusses sacrificial rites at the temple in great detail. When anyone offers an animal sacrifice, it may be one of his cattle or one of his sheep or goats. If he is offering one of his cattle as a burnt offering, he must bring a bull without any defects. He must present it at the entrance of the Tent of the LORD's presence so that the LORD will accept him. The man shall put his hand on its head, and it will be accepted as a sacrifice to take away his sins. He shall kill the

bull there, and the Aaronite priests shall offer the blood to the LORD and then throw it against all four sides of the altar (Leviticus 1; 2-5). Similarly, in the African setting, a rooster or a goat that is being offered as a sacrifice to God to wash away somebody's sins would be taken to the shrine and the person on whose name the sacrifice is being made is required to be holding or touching the rooster or the goat as its leg or the throat, it is being cut for blood to flow (Idowu, 1973). However, while the cutting of the throat is happening, chants seeking God's forgiveness and blessings is being made by an elder on behalf of the donors. While the religious sacrifices and tithing may be taken for granted, it has a far-reaching impact on people's belief and life style (Idowu, 1973).

## **2.) Morality and Mythology**

Just as there is morality in the human dimension of African traditional religion, there are also myths. Ndemanu (2018), believes that morality is a very prominent observation and practice in African society, which have a reflection of their daily lives for him, this moral gesture extends beyond the confines of the worship houses to the community at large because it is applied, and termed as learning. This means that the Africans believe that morality makes one learn every day as nobody is perfect, a child ought to have good home training which is a great privilege that must be followed, and younger ones have to show respect to elders. In addition, when an African person, offers to take someone to a restaurant or a bar, they are willing and ready to pay for that person's food or drinks. The invitee may end up offering a round

of drinks too or side dishes but it is generally not expected. It is culturally and morally unacceptable when the guest is expected to split the bill with the person who initiated the invitation to eat or drink. But unfortunately, morality is not common in the Western world as well as our contemporary times because of its decadence, which makes it important to adopt African traditional religion.

Mythology or Myth is from the Greek word "*mythos*" which means anything "oral". On the other hand, it is simply a story that tell of the origin and destiny of the human person which is prevalent in African traditional religion and society (Onyeroke, 2008). This could be seen in the creation myths among the Africans. Although, despite that these creation myths also differs, it has some similarities and difference, for example, the Ife creation myth among the Yoruba people of Nigeria, the Nyamwezi creation myth among the Tazanians, the Wassa and Basare creation myths found among the Ghanaians (Ikechukwu & Ejikemeuwa, 2021, pp. 200-211). Mbiti (1977), believes that most of the mythologies in Africa traditional religion has their important significance in the life of human kind, some of the examples of these myths are based on some specific purposes for instance, the Yoruba myths of creation among the Nigerians, which centers on the belief of the first mother town Ife, how the earth was created through Olodumare, through His emissary, the Orisha Obatalá which was said to perform this task; and first ever ruling kingdom by Oduduwa which serve as the genesis of the spread of human kind to the rest of the world (Idowu, 1973).

### **3.) Revelation and Dreams Interpretation**

In African traditional society, it is believed that ancestors communicate with the living through dreams, omens, and divinations. Observers and adherents of traditional religions operate under the dictates of dreams, divinations, and omens sometimes known as revelation; which can also be reflected in the lives of the African diviners, through diverse significant ways in the African society (Idowu, 1973). Most times, they would even alter their travel plans in case a forewarning that is considered very serious is received in a dream or from a soothsayer before their time or date of departure. Ndemanu (2018), posits a stance that, in some situations, if a person is on the way may be walking on foot, to sell goods, and accidentally kicks a half-buried rock in the middle of the road with a left foot, it could also be a bad or good omen depending on which foot is believed to represent one's fortune. He further suggests that if omens are properly respected, one could steer clear of some unfortunate occurrences like plane crashes, car accidents, and stock market losses (Ndemanu, 2018). This implies that to respect this sign, warning or omen, a dream or divination, one is to be meticulous in the observation of these beliefs and he/she would never cease to believe in the power of dreams and omens even if it was a pure coincidence and not the work of ancestors and God (Solis & Bacon, 2016). Therefore, people are to examine the thought process behind these beliefs. Furthermore, it is believed that whenever they find themselves dancing in a dream, there is a high probability that

they will receive a gift of money, reimbursement of a debt, or some form of monetary transaction that would benefit them (Ndemanu, 2018).

#### **4.) Age Grade, Inequalities and Class Division**

Even though there is a ceremony oftentimes set aside or held annually in distinguishing those in the same age bracket and peer group, differences in class are also an integral aspect of African society. The hierarchical structure and social order is a prominent disposition in African society, both in terms of gender and social class. However, Ndemanu (2018) asserts "the fact that people are not considered to be born equally, strictly influences the African hierarchical system" (p. 79). Just as is the case in many parts of the world, this hierarchical structure does not favor the female counterpart because young women and children play very minimal roles in traditional African religions. For instance, they are not expected to pour libations. Ndemanu (2018), believes that "this hierarchical power dynamic has perennially and unquestionably been accepted by women" (p. 79). This infers that since patriarchy has so much influence, and more privilege for male children, they would head prominent positions even in their old age. This is also similar to the other world religions, especially Christianity and Islam. It is very apparent today that most Christian churches forbid women from joining the priesthood, yet they can all go to church and sit on the same bench to worship the same God. In Islam, women are hardly seen praying in the same mosque as men, and even when they do, they are relegated to the less prominent corner of the mosque (Ndemanu, 2018). These

practices may have been influenced by African traditional religion the other world religions, although it favors men over women in the economic sphere and the act of gaining opportunities. However, this shows antiquities. The African oral narratives about miracles surrounding age grade, inequalities, and class division are that many are believed to have been born great or born with a gift this is because of the extraordinary happenings surrounding their birth (Ndemanu, 2018). While some are believed to possess some innate supernatural powers to communicate with the ancestors, others are even reported to have come out their mothers' wombs with their legs first; and as a result of this they are believed to possess supernatural powers and are venerated (Mbiti, 1977). More so, in African society, it is believed that people are born with different talents and gifts from God, while some are born progenies, psychics, diviners, etc. Soothsayers are considered to be directly sent by God; they are endowed with extraordinary foresight to intercede between mankind and God; more so, they are often consulted on past, current, and future events and possess strong healing powers as well; this sacredness is one of the reasons why Africans are always respectful especially to seniors and elders (Ndemanu, 2018).

### **5.) Observation of the Sabbath**

In most African traditional societies, a week is five days long, while in others eight; seven of which are workdays, and the eighth day is consecrated for worship and offering sacrifices to God and their ancestors. Unlike every other religion, the Sabbath is the eighth day of the week. It is recognized as a day of rest and worship in

the African traditional religion (Ndemanu, 2018). Although the day set aside for the Sabbath are not the same in different African culture it is strictly respected because there are also fines enforced by the traditional council under the auspices of the king for any violations. Another deterrent for people not to disrespect the Sabbath is the fear of divine retribution (Ndemanu, 2018). Furthermore, it is believed that if anyone happens to hurt himself/herself both intentionally or not especially while working on the Sabbath, it would be viewed as punishment from God. The traditional African Sabbaths are different from Christian Sabbath which is on Sunday while for the Africans it is any day that has been generally set aside in various traditional communities and this also involves festivals (Idowu, 1973).

## **2.4 The Ontological Dimension of African Traditional Religion**

### **1.) Life after death and Reincarnation**

Many Africans not only believe in life after death but some also believe in reincarnation. For them, which means that anyone who dies on this Earth is reborn to another mother sooner or later. Death is a transition into another life and a journey is undertaken by the dead to the land of the spirit after death, provisions are made for the envisaged needs of the deceased. There may include clothes, food items, cooking utensils, cosmetics, and slaves to attend to his needs. This belief that life continues after death reflects the people's theology of the end time, often being informed orally (Onyeroke, 2008). Parrinder (1962), suggests that there used to be weeks of mourning when a person happens to die in the African culture but some even mourn for only a

few days depending on the age, family size, and social status of the deceased person (Ndemanu, 2018). For him, there are reasons why Africans not only honor and take care of the elderly when they are dead but also when they are alive because they are seen as future ancestors. It is believed that the wealthier a family is, the more expensive the casket and general funeral expenses would be. More so, some people upon dying state categorically or say beforehand how they would like to be buried some even request the kind of clothes to be worn or casket to be used this is because the Africans are not careless with the dead because they are not considered dead and gone forever. According to Ndemanu (2018), the dead in African traditional religion are believed to be in heaven watching over the living. Although is believed that it is the soul that rises to heaven, the body is still supposed to be treated with maximum respect. Consequently, this is one of the reasons why a lot of money is mostly being spent on constructing their grave. For instance, some are made with marble, cement, and tiles; and sometimes a roof is put over the grave so that it does not rain on the dead (Ndemanu, 2018).

## **2.) Witchcraft and Sorcery**

The existence of Witchcraft and Sorcery is one of the explicit beliefs in the African traditional religion which has had immense influence on the African people's thought and state of mind (Idowu, 1973). It is believed that in every form of unfortunate death for instance, when somebody dies of a road accident, AIDS, cancer, diabetes, suicide, or food poisoning, the more conservative members of the traditional

religion would insist on performing a traditional post-mortem to determine the cause of death (Ndemanu, 2018). However, after examining the internal organs of the deceased, the traditional medical examiners would emerge from the graveyard with a statement about the cause of death. If the autopsy's oral report is inconclusive, the oracles would then be consulted and sometimes the oracles' report may be disputed if the cause of death is being blamed on somebody (Ndemanu, 2018). When the accused person disagrees with the allegation, it is believed that the last step is to revisit the deceased's grave and take the final oath which is done by invoking the deceased, the ancestors, and God by declaring conditionally that if he/she was responsible for the deceased person's death, would receive the punishment of nemesis which involves him/her own life is taking away within days after the oath. Furthermore, in some instances, people who happen to have taken such oaths would have mysteriously passed away just a few days after (Ndemanu, 2018). This implies that as a result of this, the disposition to hold these traditional beliefs remains indelibly in the people's minds because they view such death as a cause of either a Witchcraft attack or suicide through the influence of a sorcerer (Ndemanu, 2018).

### **3.) Healings and Incantations**

Based on what had been said before concerning Witchcraft and Sorcery, it is important to acknowledge that incantation is one of the instruments diviners used for healing. This is because, in African society not all sicknesses are considered to be physical, many are believed to be caused either through mistake, taboo, or affliction

by the wicked ones, particularly Witches (Idowu, 1973). More so, Onyeroke (2008), believes that "some of these healings are being carried out by spiritual experts and diviners through oracles and divination" (p. 25). According to him, some African people have divination practices whereas others do not. A perfect example of oracles is the Ifa oracular system among the Yoruba people of Nigeria and the Fa oracular system of the Ewe people of the Republic of Benin. However, wherever healing is being carried out, through incantation, divination and oracle, the people tend to have strong faith in it and it usually work for them. Therefore, oracles are reliable sources of the theology of the people because it encompasses the basis of the people's philosophy and worldview (Onyeroke, 2008).

#### **4.) Escatology and Divine Retribution**

In the African traditional society, many things is considered taboo or that is forbidden, some include lying, stealing, and evil deeds in this world to mention but a few. According to Ndemanu (2018), this punishment continues not just while the person is still on earth alone but also in the hereafter; especially after the death of the person who commits such taboo; in cases when a person defrauds another, with no legally binding contract between them, the victim would lay a curse on the defrauder which will in turn result to grave consequences. Most of the time, if the accused also has strong traditional religious influences, he/she would return the defrauded item to the original owner because he/she does not want to be visited by God's wrath. For him, this is why Africans with strong beliefs in traditional religion tend to be very

honest people. They would offer to pay off loans owed by living or deceased family members to avoid divine retribution on the family (Ndemanu, 2018).

Furthermore, in African traditional religion, it is believed that suicide is an abomination not only to the family but to the entire community. Whenever it does occur, serious cleansing rituals are always organized to make sure such a forbidden act never repeats itself. Most times anyone who commits an abominable act, may also receive its punishment and consequences even when the person is still alive, for instance in the case of auto accidents, from a religious lens, are viewed as examples of divine retributions and thus require the elders to seek answers from the oracles to settle it (Ndemanu, 2018).

### **5.) Symbols, Sayings, and Songs**

Symbols are representations of some other things which may include; works of art, emblems, carvings, paintings and engravings et cetera. These symbolic representations may be oftentimes found at the shrines, grooves, and sacred places of worship in Africa (Onyeroke, 2008). However, these representations may also embody divine essence which is usually treated as sacred objects. For example, the practice of masquerade festivals also represents divine visitation from the super-sensible world. This practice may be found among different people in Africa like the Gelede tribe of Benin Republic as well as the Egungun tribe of the Yoruba people in Nigeria (Onyeroke, 2008).

Based on what has been speculated earlier, sayings on the other hand do not only comprise dictums and riddles but also proverbs and incantations. According to Onyeroke (2008) these types of saying are usually products of human experiences and interactions, and messages over the years, which are coded and need careful analysis to unravel. He further suggests that sayings serve different purposes in conversations which may include scolding, teaching, commendation, and encouragement. More so, it may also serve as record of a people's hopes and aspirations, especially when facing formidable challenges (Onyeroke, 2008).

Apart from sayings, songs are also important to the social and ritual lives of Africans. This implies the recordings of a people's experiences in life and most times they are rendered in melodious tunes. Songs are often featured, on almost every occasion, especially when it deals with joyous and solemn gatherings in African society. However, it is seen as one of the ways of the preservation of oral information from generation to generation, they are recorded in songs and it gives room for the people's understanding of God and their experiences of the divine, thereby sustaining the hopes and aspirations of the people (Onyeroke, 2008).

## **2.5 The Relevance of Traditional Religion to African Society**

It is very apparent that African traditional religion is the indigenous religious practice of the African people, based on what has been speculated earlier, we will be looking at why it should still be relevant in our contemporary times:

1. It will help Africans to re-establish their historical beliefs and reconstruct their past to understand the present and to make effective plans for the future in their political, social, religious, and economic sphere of life (Osagiede, 2019).
2. It will help to acknowledge the African worldview and make it known to the outside world thereby enlightening them, on the rich cultural heritage of the African people. Little wonder that many higher institutions both in Africa and outside Africa may have included the study of African traditional religion in their curriculum (Okeke, 2019).
3. It provides societies with moral values by which to live; for example, it tells both right and wrong, what is good and evil, just and unjust, virtue and vice, etc. This is because it is a religious practice that deals with morality and a perfect ethical way of life (<https://thisisafrica.me>).
4. It gives room for the recognition of women activities; this is because women play key roles in these traditional practices and indigenous African religions contain a great deal of wisdom and insight on how human beings can best live within and interact with the environment. This will go a long way in solving the issues of gender inequalities which is common today, and will ensure women's right not to be infringed upon by patriarchal domination (<https://thisisafrica.me>).
5. Its characteristics of communalism make it a religion that promotes oneness and unity. Therefore, it will promote harmony and love in the society which will help to preserve African values and culture, which is beneficial to the society,

continent, and the world through its history, epistemology, metaphysics as well as its general practice (<https://thisisafrica.me>).

6. It gives room for diviners, researchers, and students studying religion or theology, to gain more knowledge on how to go about any project they may have to embark on (Okeke, 2019).
7. It advocates for equal rights especially when being in comparison with other religions to show that all religions are equally blessed, endowed, and share some basic elements such as beliefs, norms, and rites (Okeke, 2019).
8. It serves as the basis to correct the wrong notions, misconception, ignorant impressions, and misunderstandings about African traditional religion by some foreign investigators; especially the early European researchers who used wrong terminologies to describe or qualify its belief through speculations (Okeke, 2019).
9. It educates the modern world on the true concept of African traditional religion; by providing a better explanation and enlightenment on hidden facts, providing a better understanding of its practice (Ajuyi, 2000).
10. It pays attention to the key moments in the life of the individual; for example. Birth, initiation, puberty, marriage, and death. In so doing, it shows the value/concern of the individual (Mutugi, 2007).
11. It attracts and makes room for traditional diviners and the best historians of the African culture, academics, researchers, writers as well as the general seekers of

knowledge in the world in the quest for more wisdom and safeguard their learning opportunities (Eduproject, 2017).

12. It gives many Africans a chance to go back and know their customs and traditions, laws, and ordinance. Most African Muslims and Christians still consult traditional religious healers when someone is sick and participate in ceremonies to honor their ancestors and the traditional laws (Eduproject, 2017).
13. African traditional religions tend to propagate peaceful coexistence and promote good relationships with members of other religious traditions that surround them (<https://iproject.com.ng>).
14. Concerns for health, wealth, and procreation are very central to the important aspects of African traditional religions. That is why Africans have developed institutions for healing, commerce, and the general well-being of their practitioners and adherents of other religions as well. Therefore, this reduces both physical and spiritual sicknesses that have hindered the lives of humanity (<https://iproject.com.ng>).

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION; BELIEFS AND PRACTICES**

#### **3.1 Patriarchy in African Traditional Religion**

Patriarchy, male supremacy, and dominance in rulership and prominent positions of authority are one of the explicit practices and prioritized attributes of the African traditional religion and society. Etymologically, women have occupied inferior and subservient positions in African society, except for some few respected individuals of royal status and backgrounds like the Queen, Princess, or the mother of a King. In fact, she is being respected because of her position and given relative prominence, eminence, and prestige meanwhile other women are seen as ordinary and insignificant in the African traditional society. This is because, the social and political system of life in Africa is built on a strong patriarchal tradition (Bradbury, 1957; Omorodion, 1989). Hence, this implies that women are regarded as second class, not only believed to be always submissive but also highly seen to be mere subordinates and of no value, this idea is generally accepted historically by the Africans, as permitted and ordained by the African traditional structure right from time.

However, Bradbury (1957) revealed that "the African monarch had an entourage of wives and concubines which served as a royal reserve from which such women are given as gifts to loyal chiefs or for services rendered to the monarch" (pp. 39-40). In addition, this means that women were generally regarded as mere commodities to satisfy the desires of males within a marriage arrangement that has a master/slave-like

relationship (Osezua, 2012; Yakubu, 2014). Moreso, these scholars also postulate that "despite the harsh and hostile environment which is hard for the women to bear, they are still able to fully thrive, women have defied the odds and have excelled in the society" (Osezua, 2012; Yakubu, 2014). This means that women have been outstanding despite the situation being faced in African society. Moreso, this is a very good illustration of how antagonistic the patriarchal African culture was to women. In the same vein, based on observation and research, distinguishing the way the African social tradition is built, it is very apparent that a prevalent patriarchal arrangement has been substantiated and sustained. This is why Curnow (1997), a highly notable historian of the ancient African society explicitly affirmed this arrangement in his description of women in Africa. For him, the patriarchal system is still the order of the day in the African traditional society thereby, regarding women as of less importance.

However, there are several factors enhancing the patriarchal system in the African traditional society, these are:

**1) Religious Factor:** The African traditional religion believes in the submissiveness of wives to their husbands just like other world religions like Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. For instance, the Old Testament revealed God's ordinance that men should rule over women as a result of their disobedience. However, this may have made the majority believe that women should look unto men for their sustenance (Genesis 2:18, 20). Moreso, this is no longer valid

because the death of Jesus Christ on the cross has forfeited the Old Covenant but generations after them still hold these ideas as synonymous with the African traditional culture.

- 2) **Educational Factor:** It is no doubt that in our contemporary times, the system of patriarchy has thrived due to a lack of education. On the other hand, men and women in Africa should also be given proper enlightenment. Therefore, this may go a long way in making them have a sense of gender equality.
- 3) **Economic Factors:** The economic sector not only in ancient African society but also in the contemporary world at large, has been one area where patriarchy and women's subordination has been richly pronounced. Makama (2013), believes that in African society, more men have been involved in politics than women, especially in our contemporary era and the role of women in employment and economic activities is often underestimated because most women work in the informal sectors, usually with low productivity and incomes, poor working conditions, with little or no social protection. This implies that if women are given more opportunities to work in a more recognized field of economic activity, there would not be any gender inequality or pressure against women in favour of men.
- 4) **Bio-Socio Factors:** The situation of patriarchy is deeply embedded in the socialization process of the girl child in our contemporary times where biological gender imbalance and value are widely held not only in African

society (Osagie, 2020). However, the biological makeup of the female gender has been seen as a factor hindering women's empowerment and political participation. Their roles as mothers and wives have also been culturally influenced and predetermined (Makama, 2013). Thus, this scholar maintains that a lot of women have come to see themselves as subjects, which must be provided for, or an object of beauty which must be maintained, which must look good all the time thereby making what is expected of them is remaining calm, gentle and providing care for their husbands and children at all times.

**5.) Socio-Cultural Factors:** Makama (2013), suggests that "the generally accepted gender roles of men as owners of the property, decision makers and heads of household are socially, historically and culturally constructed" (p. 118). It is a true fact that women's consideration as a less valuable gender is generally seen to be paramount and widespread in favour of their male counterparts. However, women are not in control of some of the social and traditional factors that happen around them. Therefore, this may be because women are believed to be weaker vessels and men now hold the positions of authority and primarily responsible for making decisions in African society.

### **3.2 Inheritance in African Traditional Religion**

In the African traditional society, men are given high prestige and significance; this is because they are voluntarily given hereditary and property rights which are more prominent and recognized most especially in post-colonial times (Omorodion,

1989). This means that the African traditional religion is one of the world religions that are most highly based on the practice of patriarchy, which willfully gives the position of respect and admiration as well as the reputable right of honor to men over women. Traditionally, female children do not have access to hereditary titles, as long as they are exclusively preserved for the eldest surviving sons of the last incumbent title holders. This has not changed, despite the extraordinary achievement of some women in African traditional societies, they cannot be made “chiefs” or elected as part of the cabinet or any prominent offices, especially of the African monarchical system of government. The best a woman can do is to be honoured and decorated with coral beads (Osezua and Agholor, 2019).

According to Curnow (1997), the law of inheritance has no provision for female children to inherit property. Therefore, this infers that women in Africa are generally conceived as insignificant in this circumstance. Thus, the principle of male hereditary is sustained, despite the fact that the form of succession, practiced and regarding some titles; is also seen to be apparent among the Africans. The doctrine of automatic primogenitary succession to kingship prevails as the mode of male inheritance to the throne of the African traditional monarchs (Osezua and Agholor, 2019). This means that women are not recognized to hold any position notwithstanding the achievement and contribution they have made. Thus, even though they merit it but are being deprived of such right. However, according to Osezua (2012), "although these notions, ideas and practices are changing gradually especially because of the introductory

practice of contemporary education as well as migration" (p. 413). Some of the long-standing barriers to wealth accumulation are eroding and diminishing fast. For instance, Omorodion (1989), also added to these scholars by asserting that "in our contemporary time, women now bypass the lineage systems and secure land from the open market" (pp. 203-205).

Similarly, the concept of "land-lady" as against landlord is fast becoming a normative order in many parts of the African societies especially as a result of high male migration to Europe and America, leaving wives behind (Osezua and Agholor, 2019). Moreso, the current rates of human trafficking have also created wealth in the hands of women as well as those with low educational achievement, they can now access critical economic resources like landed property (Osezua, 2012). From what these scholars postulate, it, therefore, means that due to industrialization, and modernization, women now control most economic resources, being involved in high profit-making businesses, they now own landed property and also exercise control over authorities. Hence, as a result of this, patriarchy is reducing gradually and women are now gaining ground to wealth, and power, and many now take part in politics (Osezua, 2012).

### **3.3 Widowhood Practice in African Traditional Religion**

In most ancient African societies, widow inheritance is practically always restricted and it is a common practice that exposes women to abuse (Osezua and Agholor, 2019). However, this inheritance is believed to be a traditional bestowment

or legacy consistently validating a legitimate member of the family. Most times, brothers of the deceased predominantly hijack these properties from the wife of the deceased, accusing her of the demise of her late husband. In fact, a widow who happens to have lost her husband will also lose her freewill, this is because the attitude of the people as regards the death of a man is believed to depend on the degree in which the deceased has fulfilled his social destiny during his life time (Osezua and Agholor, 2019). The widow of a deceased is always being summoned and interrogated in order to explicitly ascertain what could have warranted his early passage and demise, especially in the event of a premature death, in most case when it is perceived that the deceased has not fulfilled his social destiny (Osezua and Agholor, 2019). Moreso, the only way to prove her innocence is when she is compelled to go through certain obnoxious widowhood practices: she must shave her hair, sleep on the floor with the corpse for days, drink the water used in bathing the deceased, and swear by his forehead; and if the widow eventually dies, haven been exposed to cruel and distressful widowhood rites, her death is attributed to guilt. Therefore, this means that she is then found liable for her husband's death, even for her own death. Ogbonna (2021), believes that "due to the death of the husband, the widow is not supposed to appear in public places and events like markets, burial ceremonies, traditional weddings, etc, until the burial of her husband is over. Even after the burial her movement is also placed on restrictions" (p.191).

Hence, Ebohon (1996), also opined that in African society, a woman must be made to swear different oaths; particularly those who lost their husband, to absolve or vindicate the widow from the death of her husband. Refusal to undergo this widowhood rite results in the disowning of her children, from the deceased's family, and the loss of her children's claim to their inheritance meaning that the inheritance of the children now belongs to the father's family. These scholars also claim that it is most widespread and alarming in the African traditional society, it is the women particularly widows who mainly undergo these rites performance and obnoxious practices, not men, this indicates their conspiracy with patriarchy and that women are reduced to be subordinate and therefore voiceless in the African society. Obviously, it is very clear to acknowledge that on the other way round, there are no degrading traditional rites for a widower; rather, his welfare is the paramount concern of both family and friends. In some parts of Africa, customs and tradition demand that a widower should not sleep alone but with another woman of his choice until his wife is interred, so that the spirit of the dead wife may not come and disturb his peaceful sleep (Isibor, 2008). This is to show the level of patriarchal prejudice against women which is in favour of men and the segregation of women particularly widows in the African traditional society.

### **3.4 Male Child Preference in African Traditional Religion**

Male children are held in high esteem in the African traditional religion, they have more value because they are believed to be the only gender that can continue the

names of the families. However, Osezua (2010), also believes that in the African traditional society when the female children are given birth to, they are derogatorily referred to as “half current,” unlike the male counterpart which is "full current" this is a vernacular terminology used to describe the perceived idea of degradation to the girl child and the direct lack of respect to her inferior status. This infers that women are marginalized and discriminated against, and in our contemporary time, they have become fertile ground for gender-based violence. According to this scholar, these gender acts of violence include:

- 1.) Trafficking of girl-children for the purpose of sexual exploitation,
- 2.) Spousal violence in marriage,
- 3.) Female genital mutilation by abusive parents or spouse, and
- 4.) Widowhood practices, that is, norms preventing women to re-marry as their punishment for the loss of their husbands (Osezua, 2012).

These are some of the discriminatory cultural practices, which are considered by the researcher as cultural prejudices and gender-based violence revealing how they have been restricted by the historical conception of patriarchy in African society, thereby, placing women at an extreme disadvantage in relation to men (Osezua and Agholor, 2019). However, Bradbury (1957), also correspondingly states that "marriage was of great importance and sacred during the pre-colonial time and divorce was invalidated and highly frowned at, apart from the marriages of those who

are of noble birth" (pp. 28-29). According to these scholars, wives were being careful not to default in adhering to the sanctity of marriage most especially in terms of sexual purity. A woman must succumb to these conditions in her matrimonial home, if not she was expected to make confessions in this regard. This indicates that there is a strict limitation to a woman's freedom and an amount of excessive sexual restrictions placed on her chastity, this means that there is quite a number of gender discrimination and segregated tools used against their free will, among other practices apart from women of royal heritage.

Consequently, there is a high level of polygynous marriages in favour of men, among Africans as the number of wives a man has is seen to boost their status in society but women are restricted to do so (Curnow, 1997; Osezua, 2010). In line with these scholars' postulations, in many African societies, women do not have basic control not only in their matrimonial home but also over what happens to their bodies, as long as husbands had the right to chastise their wives; and since women were subordinate to them and because of the laid down customs and traditions in the African society such as the payment of "bride price," men then participate in the absolute purchase of their wives' freedom and sexual liberty, thereby standing on this ground to dictate the terms of sex without due recourse for their spouses.

### **3.5 Burial Rites in African Traditional Religion**

It is believed that initial burial rites and rituals for the dead were limited to the people that have good moral behavior in the African society and performed on

anyone who passed on without minding the moral implications of the African traditional society. This is because rites and rituals for the dead in African society were greatly influenced by the people's traditional belief in Africa for the purpose of reincarnation; and for the Ancestors (Nwokoha, 2020). In fact, different burial rites in the African traditional society depend on the cultural background, yet their purpose is one. Thus, the Africans believe that death does not mean the end of man, as there is a continuity of life. However, these rites are the last of the rite of passage in the life of man; with which the dead is prepared for the journey to eternal life (Ogbonna, 2020). Moreso, burial rites in the African traditional society are seen as a last respect accorded to a dead person by which he/she gains light feet for the Journey to the other world. These rites serve as a link or measure through which the Africans traditionally attain the goal to become an ancestor after death. This is why a deceased must be given correct funeral rites supported by a number of religious ceremonies which in turn will attract blessings and favours to the living relatives (Nwokoha, 2020).

When titled men like chiefs pass away, family members are not permitted to work till the burial rites are completed. If it is a traditional king, his stool and crown will remain untouched for one year. Therefore, the rites and rituals will be performed by the chief priest of the community's deity; the rites and rituals accorded him is a community affair and many cows, goats, and fowls will be killed as a mark of honor to the king. These rites may not be specific but must be memorable (Nwokoha, 2020). According to Ilogu (1972), these burial rites and rituals in Africa are a practice that

must be obeyed. Sometimes, not performing these rites and rituals for the deceased will result in the family experiencing some difficulties. For him, many families abandon their traditional religion to Christianity or other religions of the Western missionaries, therefore not wanting to know about the African worldview. These families oftentimes refuse the traditional rituals for their deceased; despite the word of wisdom from the elders of the community. Today some of these families are having difficult times like late marriage, barrenness, and sometimes untimely death; because they are unable to locate their problems rather, they accuse their neighbours and relatives as the source of their predicaments. However, Madu (1997), suggests that "people without good moral values like armed robbers, vagabonds, witches, fugitives et. cetara; are denied such burial rites" (p.135).

Therefore, the aim of burial rites in African society is determined by the good moral behavior performed by the deceased alongside other good qualities that ratifies him/her to become an Ancestor. These qualities include the following:

- 1.) The deceased must have lived to a ripe old age.
- 2.) The deceased must have lived a good moral and worth-emulating life, with a good character and behavior that must be attested by others while still alive.
- 3.) The deceased must have left at least a male child behind to venerate him/her; who is to perform such rites or rituals on his/her behalf after his/her departure. This is why Megesa (1997), opined that "marriage and childbearing is a requirement for a good death and barrenness is seen as a punishment from the spirit world in Africa

traditional religion" (no. p). According to Ezekwugo (1992), "the death of one who has no offspring is seen as the end of the continuity of life, the discontinuance of family tree and the quenching of the flame of life of the pedigree of the ancestral lineage" (p. 88).

### **3.6 Birth Control in African Traditional Religion**

African traditional religion like every other world religion is strongly against abortion. However, for age long, a wide range of the control of birthrates in Africa had been practiced. This is because Africans is believed to be polygamous in nature. Long before the coming of Western ideas, the understanding of the importance of child spacing to maternal and infant health had been prevalent and widespread in these African cultures (Ronald, 1978). Moreso, despite the unavailability of "modern" contraceptive methods, an array of techniques was developed to enforce taboos on fertility behavior. Due to the researcher's observation in the course of this research work, the variety of traditional child spacing methods can be categorized into the following:

1.) **Preventing Premarital Intercourse:** This had been one of the means of preventing births in the African traditional society. This was done by the adherence to strong taboos that prevent such (Molelekwa, 2020). However, part of the wedding celebration itself was a determination of the bride's virginity. If she was found to be a virgin on her wedding day, the husband would give a goat to the bride's mother to

honour "the woman who had preserved her daughter's virtue" (Molelekwa, 2020, pp. 176-177).

2.) **Total Abstinence:** This was the traditional belief and law in African society forbidding a man to have sexual relations with a woman after she had just given birth. A nursing mother was not to be approached, and there were strong social pressures exerted to enforce this taboo (Molelekwa, 2020). A woman who eventually had another pregnancy outside her marriage was also ridiculed and shamed publicly. Special songs of contempt were sung at the woman, with descriptive gestures and mockery (Molelekwa, 2020). However, on the other hand, a woman who followed the rule of abstinence would be honored by a feast; and this abstinence was physically enforced by strict separation of man and wife, they were to sleep in separate beds, preferably in separate rooms. (If there was only one bed, the man would sleep in it and the woman would sleep on a mat with her child). Sometimes, abstinence was also reinforced by ritual taboos (Molelekwa, 2020).

3.) **Use of Waist Bands:** One of the common techniques of African indigenous contraception is the use of waistbands/belts, such as tying a rope containing traditional medicine around the waist, most of which are medicated and most times prescriptive (Wood and Jewkes, 2006).

4.) **Child Birth Spacing:** Child spacing is clearly the most common practice of African indigenous preventive methods of pregnancy. This means providing adequate birth spacing between two or more consecutive pregnancies. It can also be done

through postponement of birth especially in some parts of Africa, virginity is also another technique used in preventing pregnancy (Waife, 1978). For instance, virginity is considered a method for postponing first birth which is very important, especially as a measure to prevent teenage pregnancy (Ramathuba, Khoza, and Netshikweta, 2012).

5.) **Polygamy:** This is another strict rule of abstinence in the African traditional society. A man can decide to marry another wife, depending on his choice in order to control the childbirth of his first wife. In most African societies, polygamy is very common: "Ancestors always have more than one wife, even up to twenty wives if the man is rich" (Waife, 1978, p. 45). At a minimum, a man can also decide to have a wife and a "concubine" to go to after his wife gave birth (Molelekwa, 2020). Therefore, polygamy and abstinence are natural ways of controlling birthrates through child spacing in African traditional society.

6.) **Contraceptive Methods.** Apart from simple withdrawal by the male before ejaculation, the use of herbs and extracts of medicinal plants have been used as contraceptive agents in ancient African traditional society (Keshri, Lakshmi, and Singh, 2003). However, certain herbs and roots and herbs were used as contraceptives (Kaur, Sharma, Kumar and Kharb, 2011). According to Bledsoe, Hill, D'Alessandro, and Langerock (1994), "most times, these herbal preparations, are usually crushed, boiled, pounded or mixed, to be taken orally for months before engaging in sexual intercourse to prevent pregnancy in women" (pp. 81-82). Therefore, the African

discovery of plant-derived contraceptives have gone a long way in helping to reduce unwanted pregnancies and risky abortions faced by women (Handelsman, 2005).

### **3.7 Women's Education in African Traditional Religion**

There is a need for women's education in the African traditional society, this may go a long way in addressing some ignorant notions against women and freewill of not being subordinated or finding a solution to any discriminatory act against women in leadership positions that is prevalent in the leadership structure that had been made. However, there should be a formulation and framework that allows women to take part in national activities. Moreso, political ordinances, constitution and, lay down rules should be revisited and amended and any other obnoxious beliefs, which have been found to be responsible for the women's degradation and their low participation in leadership roles must be broken for African contemporary societies to grow. This means that contemporary African societies must change their programs and attitudes that tend to perpetuate discrimination and degradation against the female sex and gender. Therefore, there should be gender equity, a need to allow women to participate and occupy sensitive positions in the leadership structure, and giving them an opportunity to hold some key offices it will give them a sense of belonging and rekindle their interest to do their best towards national development.

There is a need for women's enlightenment which can be a remedy and solution to the concept of patriarchy in African society. Thus, the refusal of their education may result in national retrogression because of the lack of vital skills and talents that

may have been possessed by the female gender for welcoming national development. However, there are several ways this women's education can be disseminated in our contemporary times. At this juncture, they shall be explicated below:

**1.) There should be Women's Empowerment:** This can make women be more valuable in our society. As a result, it can expose women thereby empowering them which will give room for opportunities, facilities, skill acquisition, and position in authority, especially within the political sphere. However, if this development is accorded to them, there will be an opportunity to develop their individual talent and contribute more meaningfully to societal national development.

**2.) There should be an Effective Formulation and Implementation of Policies in Equal Gender Roles:** There is a need for declamation, to address the discriminatory act against women in leadership positions that is prevalent in the leadership structure that had been made. However, policies should be formulated to checkmate any form of gender inequality, that may have hindered the right of women in the African traditional religion, thereby bringing about a solution for unity, growth, and stable development in African society.

**3.) Men should Recognize the Right of Women:** Man's historic treatment of women, due to his conceit, ignorance, or moral perversion, has taken woman's inferiority for granted and has thus necessitated it by her enslavement and degradation. However, men in Africa should acknowledge the equal right of women for speedy economic growth and national development.

**4.) Men and Women should be Interdependent:** There can be vital things women can do to contribute to the growth of the nation or society at large, The fact that they are born the same way as their male counterparts and are supposed to have equal right as a human being. It is no longer a surprise that most women have God-given talents that men may not possess and this can go a long way in the swift development of African society (Becker, 1999).

**5.) The Activities of a Nation should not be Male Centered:** A social system that is male-centered, inevitably values men over women. In some societies, male supremacy is mostly held in high esteem whereby they have the ideology that men are naturally superior to women in essence and in all areas (Becker, 1999). However, in the African traditional society, the customary belief of the patriarchal family is that a man is the head of the family, while the woman and her children are generally considered the property of a man (Effah and Onyegbula, 1995). In the aspect of marriage, the custom of the bride price instills in the husband the feeling of ownership of the wife, which encourages some men to treat their wives like their property. The fact that wives should be submissive to their husband's authority, does not mean that men would absolutely overrule them and therefore lead to slavery, in the other hand, husbands should also always learn to reciprocate this by exercising their authority with love and not by coercion (Becker, 1999).

**CHAPTER FOUR**  
**CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS OF AFRICAN TRADITIONAL**  
**RELIGION IN THE MODERN WORLD**

**4.1 Modernization and Patriarchy in African Traditional Religion**

The concept of patriarchy in the African traditional society as well as its practice in the modern world, is one issue or outcome that continues to elicit many and varied reactions amongst theologians and scholars. Though it is suggested to be the rule of the father or the system of government where by male rules and have dominance (Asianbola, 2005). According to Bible Encyclopedia (1896), patriarchy emanates from the Greek word "*pā'tri-ark*" and from the Latin word "*patriārchēs*" which means the father and ruler of a family; one who governs by paternal right. This is another reason why patriarchy in African traditional religion has remained a prominent deliberation in nearly every political discuss, since women are restricted to partake or participate in governance in the African contemporary society. It become apparent that women have been relegated on the ground of political governance (Oronsaye-Salami, 2005). Whereas political atmosphere in the African society is not different from other parts of the world where political participation is always in favour of men. However Oronsaye-Salami (2005), believes that "in African traditional religion, women are rendered nearly invisible and excluded from the political space which is often regarded as the male preserve, thereby depriving the state from benefiting from their potentials and contributions to national development"

(p.34). For him this has remained one of the greatest challenges that had been ignorantly embraced today and hinders the growth and progress of a nation.

This implies that the platform for governance has been generally regarded as the domain of men, and women do not have equal influence over the policy decisions that affect their lives and the overall development which have affected their empowerment, social status and contribution to development of the nation in the African contemporary society. Therefore, almost every vital part and facet in government has been male dominated, and by means of that reduces the participation of women in acquiring such right, as a result of gender inequality that is widely upheld by the law of patriarchy in the African traditional society. Due to the researcher's observation in the course of this work, it is obvious that only few women in Africa, have actually gained access to the political arena in the contemporary era. Oronsaye-Salami (2005), opined that "right from time, although women have manage to thrive in the leadership role in Africa, but their representation in governance has always been minimal below 30% affirmative action as against 50/50 in other parts of the world like Germany" (p.35). He even went further to suggest that "male politicians characterize politics as patriarchal and excessively masculine" (p.35). In other word their ideological aim is to perpetuate and legitimize patriarchy in the political system, this means that women political participation in the African contemporary society is being marginalized which would result in a national retrogression because of the lack of vital skills and

talents that may have been possessed by these female gender towards a welcoming national development.

#### **4.2 Modernization and Birth Control in African Traditional Religion**

The coming of Western education to Africa has brought about new form of industrialization and modern civilization. However, this has not changed the African concept of the beliefs and ideas of birth control but rather modified it (Ronald, 1978). For age long, before the coming of Western ideological innovation, the understanding of the importance of birth control and its practices had lingered in the African traditional society and cultures (Ronald, 1978). Moreso, over the years the new form of developmental techniques in the control of child birth have been introduced in the continuation and modification of African ancient contraceptive methods and preventive measures of excessive birth rate which had earlier been stated in this research. Thus these modernized forms of birth control includes:

- 1.) **Sterilization:** Sterilization is one of the methods of birth control in modern African contemporary society which include both surgical and non-surgical processes, that exist for both males and females (Peterson, 2008). Sometimes it's procedures are intended to be permanent; in which reversal is generally difficult or impossible. It's often divided into two categories, vasectomy in males and tubal ligation in females; while the vasectomy in males is "the surgical incision of all or part of the vas deferens (duct in the testicle that carries semen from the epididymis to the ejaculatory duct) as a means of male sterilization

(<http://en.m.wiktionary.org>). The tubal ligation in females is the surgical procedure for sterilization for women, in which a woman's Fallopian tubes are blocked, severed or cut free (<http://en.m.wiktionary.org>). These are one of the processes and methods of controlling birth rate in the modern world.

- 2.) **Intrauterine Contraceptive Devices (IUCDs):** This is a small, often T-shaped birth control device, like a coil that is inserted into the uterus of a woman to prevent pregnancy (Winner, 2012). Most women have chosen this contraceptive method as a means of their family-planning because it is one form of long-acting reversible birth control (LARC), which makes it more considered as an option for the female gender in the contemporary African traditional society (Winner, 2012).
- 3.) **Contraceptive Implant:** This is an implantable medical device used for the purpose of birth control. After insertion, it prevents pregnancy by releasing progesterin which inhibits ovulation ([en.wikipedia.org](http://en.wikipedia.org)). However, the implant may depend on the timed release of hormones to hinder ovulation or sperm development, the ability of copper to act as a natural spermicide within the uterus, or it may work using a non-hormonal, physical blocking mechanism. As with other contraceptives, a contraceptive implant is designed to prevent pregnancy in the modern African traditional society ([en.wikipedia.org](http://en.wikipedia.org)).
- 4.) **Oral Pills:** Pill can also be referred to as "a small dietary preparation in a small rounded mass containing medicine to be taken orally" (Merriam, 1993).

However, oral contraceptive is a birth control pill designed to be taken orally by women (Teal, 2021). When taken correctly, it alters the menstrual cycle to eliminate ovulation and prevent pregnancy. More so, oral contraceptive were developed to prevent ovulation by suppressing the release of a hormone known as gonadotropins in the woman's body, it is another form or method of birth control in our contemporary world (en.wikipedia.org).

- 5.) **Contraceptive Patches:** This a transdermal patch, that is applied to the skin that releases synthetic oestrogen and progestogen hormones to prevent pregnancy. They have been shown to be as effective as the combined oral contraceptive pill with perfect use, and the patch may be more effective in typical use. The patch is applied onto the upper outer arm, buttocks, abdomen or thigh on either the first day of the menstrual cycle (day 1) but most times it is preferred to be used on the first Sunday following that day (Trussell, 2007). After seven days later, the user removes the patch and applies another to one of the approved locations on the body. This process is often repeated and the patch should be applied to skin that is clean, dry, and intact. This means if skin is red, irritated, or cut, the patch should not be placed in that area. In addition, a female should also avoid using lotions, powder, or makeup around the area where the patch is or will be placed, it is another form or method of birth control in our contemporary world (Nanda, 2011).

- 6.) **Vaginal Ring:** This is a polymeric drug delivery devices which is inserted into the vagina and provides contraception protection and designed to provide controlled release of drugs for intravaginal administration over extended periods of time of which the vaginal walls hold them in place (Mulders, 2001). There are four types of Vagina rings which are:
- a.) Estring - Estring is inserted into the vagina and left in place for three months, after which it is removed and replaced with a fresh ring (Phelps, 2014).
  - b.) Femring - Femring is inserted into the vagina and left in place for three months, after which it is removed and replaced with a fresh ring (Phelps, 2014).
  - c.) NuvaRing - NuvaRing is inserted into the vagina and left in place for three weeks, after which it is removed and discarded for a 'ring-free' week to allow menstruation to occur. At the end of that week, a new NuvaRing is inserted ([www.plannedparenthood.org](http://www.plannedparenthood.org)).
  - d.) Annovera - Annovera ring is inserted into the vagina and left in place for three weeks, after which it is removed for one week. Unlike the NuvaRing, users will reinsert the same Annovera Ring one week later. A single Annovera Ring is used for 3 week cycles for a total of 13 cycles ([en.wikipedia.org](http://en.wikipedia.org)).
- 7.) **Contraceptive Injections:** This is the type of injections that contains Progesterone which is a form of hormonal contraception, used mainly by women that are administered by injection and providing long-lasting birth control. This

is another one of the processes and methods of birth control in the modern world (en.wikipedia.org).

- 8.) **Physical Barriers:** These refer to the male and female condoms which are the most common method of birth control (Chaudhuri, 2007). They are devices that attempt to prevent pregnancy by physically preventing sperm from entering the uterus and can also help prevent sexually transmitted infections (Neinstein, 2008). The male condom is also called "external condom" because it is put on a man's erect penis while the female is also called "internal condom" because it is inserted into the vagina or anus prior to sexual penetration and physically block ejaculated sperm from entering the body of a sexual partner (Hamilton, 2012). However, it can also prevent contact with body fluids (such as blood, vaginal fluid, semen, rectal mucus), and other means of transmitting sexually transmitted infections (like skin, hair and shared objects) during sexual activity; but if external and internal condoms are used at the same time, they may break due to friction between the materials during sexual activity (Neinstein, 2008). Moreso, modern condoms are most often made from latex, but some are made from other materials such as polyurethane, or lamb's intestine, this is another one of the processes and methods of birth control in the modern world (Hamilton, 2012).
- 9.) **Diaphragms:** Just like male or female condoms, the diaphragm is a barrier method of birth control which is placed over the cervix with spermicide before sex and left in place for at least six hours after sex. However, before inserting or

removing a diaphragm, one's hands should be washed in order to avoid introducing harmful bacteria into the vaginal canal, and it is another form or method of birth control in our contemporary world (en.wikipedia.org).

10.) **Birth Control Sponges:** This is a spermicidal barrier (a substance used for killing sperm) that is inserted into a woman's vagina before intercourse which can cover the cervix and prevent any sperm from entering the uterus (en.wikipedia.org). Moreso, sponges can also be know as a physical barrier, trapping sperm and preventing their passage through the cervix into the reproductive system. The spermicide is an important component of pregnancy prevention and it is another form or method of birth control in our contemporary world (en.wikipedia.org).

11.) **Fertility Awareness Methods:** This involves determining the most fertile days of the menstrual cycle and avoiding unprotected intercourse (en.wikipedia.org). Techniques for determining fertility include monitoring basal body temperature, cervical secretions, or the day of the cycle (en.wikipedia.org). This can also involve the act of regulating the timing or method of intercourse to prevent introduction of sperm into the female reproductive tract, either altogether or when an egg may be present and it is another form or method of birth control in our contemporary world (en.wikipedia.org).

12.) **Sexual Abstinence:** Sexual abstinence may be used as a form of birth control, meaning either not engaging in any type of sexual activity, or specifically not

engaging in vaginal intercourse, while engaging in other forms of non-vaginal sex. However, complete sexual abstinence is 100% effective in preventing pregnancy and it is another form or method of birth control in our contemporary world (en.wikipedia.org).

13.) **Behavioral Contraceptive Method:** This is the withdrawals method (also known as coitus interruptus) is the practice of ending intercourse ("pulling out") before ejaculation. Thus, during penetrative sexual intercourse, the penis is withdrawn from a vagina prior to ejaculation so that the ejaculate (semen) may be directed away from the vagina in an effort to avoid pregnancy (en.wikipedia.org). The main risk of the withdrawal method is that most times, the man may not perform the maneuver or body movement correctly or in a timely manner and it is another form or method of birth control in our contemporary world (en.wikipedia.org).

#### **4.3 Modernization and Burial Rites in African Traditional Religion**

The researcher's observation in Chapter three of this research work, acknowledge that burial rites were rituals for the dead that was limited to the people that have good moral behaviour in the African society. Just like birth control, it has not changed but have had few modifications, this is because the rites and rituals for the dead in various African traditional societies have some differences despite its similarities that has not only influenced the traditional belief system of the Africans, but also has been greatly built on the cultural background of the African traditional

society and being passed from generations (Nwokoha, 2020). Therefore, here are some of the reasons why burial rites is still relevant today:

- 1.) **To sustain the Rich Cultural Heritage of the Africans:** The Africans have a great values on their customs and tradition, because of their unique belief system based on their cultural practices. However, burial rites is still valid today for the reason that the African culture recognizes the dignity and integrity of its adherents being despite their diversities through its religion (Sunday, 2015). Therefore, this has continued to strengthen the rich cultural heritage and unity among the people of Africa as one universal family (Okeke, 2019).
- 2.) **To preserve its Moral Validations to Humanity:** African traditional religion has a well defined moral value that determined every aspect of the lives of the African people. However, the Africans are expected to always keep their moral way of life in order to gain greater achievement, such as long life and to avoid bringing curses or taboo upon themselves. Those who are disobedient to these moral practices through various immoral behaviours like adultery, stealing and murder and many more others which are strongly frowned against would also attract grave consequences (Mbiti, 1977).
- 3.) **Educational Purpose:** This is not only to teach the younger generations how burial right practice can be respected and sustained in the Africa culture and tradition but also to understand its true concept like its origin, to ascertain its nature, the challenges it may face today and how it can also serve as a benefit

not only to Africans but also to the rest of the world thereby giving the opportunity for it to be recognized ([www.vanguardngr.com](http://www.vanguardngr.com)). However, because of its organized hierarchical structure, it can also make contemporary national leaders, the society as a whole, and also college students especially those studying theology and religion to benefit, thereby adding to their knowledge based on its contributive enlightenment ([www.vanguardngr.com](http://www.vanguardngr.com)).

4.) **Its Metaphysical Anxiety:** Researchers crave to know more about metaphysics, something beyond the physical like medicine, spirits, ritual practices, witchcraft, sorcery as well as magic ([www.encyclopedia.com](http://www.encyclopedia.com)). However, this have in one or two way maintained the zeal of earnest inquiry of African traditional religion and its relevance ([www.encyclopedia.com](http://www.encyclopedia.com)).

5.) **To Restore its Forgotten Value:** African traditional religions have undergone rapid transformations over the years. Recent study shows a significant threat of extinction due to the rapid infiltration of the forces of globalization and modernism. However, practitioners of the African indigenous faiths are confronted with the fear and visible threat that in the not-too-distant future the traditional religious beliefs and practices of the African people will be, if not totally wiped out, as a result of its alignment with the trends of globalization and modernity (Chitando, Gunda, & Togarasei, 2020). This implies that the African traditional religion has been undergoing subtle transitions and alterations over the years. These transitions have been taking place from the inception of

colonialism through to the post-colonial era to modern times. Therefore, efforts have been made to ascertain the influence of globalisation and modernism but care is taken not to limit the African definition to the Western concept of development. Therefore, various attempts have been made to restore its forgotten value, of the extent to which African indigenous religions have been influenced by the agents of globalization and westernization (Van-Niekerk, 1986).

#### **4.4 Traditional Rulers and Religious Heads in the Contemporary Society**

In this section, some selected Traditional Rulers and Religious Heads were sampled for interview in order to ascertain their perspective on the concept of patriarchy, birth control and burial rites in the African traditional religion in correspondence to the modern society and contemporary world.

##### **Is Patriarchy, Birth Control and Burial Rite Still Relevant to People in our Contemporary Era?**

**i.) Interviewing Some Selected Religious Heads:** High priest Osemwegie Ebohon, a herbalist, a native doctor and a traditional psychotherapist, of the great Benin kingdom, suggests that patriarchy is a practice that has existed in African traditional history and culture from time immemorial, accepted by the majority and shall continue. For him, nothing had and nothing would change it. However, it is a predestined divine mandate that has been given to humanity by the Supreme Being from creation. According to him, it is a natural will for man to rule over women, even till our modern times and any attempt to alter or change that, would go against the

divine order and would also attract severe punishment. He made a brief example, by saying that due to the eurocentric belief system, many have gone away from this divine traditional mandate especially in our contemporary era, that is why there is chaos, disorderliness, imperfection and indiscipline in our society today. Therefore, unless we go back and re-embrace this divine Law of patriarchy things would not only remain where they are but also become worse (Personal Communication, August 8, 2023). In addition, he says that in his observation birth control and burial rites have not changed over the years but birth control had only had a slight modification and improvement as a result of industrialization and civilization in our modern world compared to the ancient African traditional society (Ebohon, Personal Communication, August 8, 2023).

Apostle Barnabas Inomwan, a clergyman and general overseer of Voice of Life Ministry, believes that patriarchy has a role in fulfilling the plan of God in the Bible, by ensuring that man may not fail from God's purpose and fall into temptation the second time like in the Garden of Eden. According to him, because the serpent could not pass through the man, he however went to the woman that is the weaker and imperfect vessel and deceived them to eat from the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil which God commanded them not to eat. Therefore, he opines that patriarchy is part of the plan of God for humanity (Personal Communication, August 12, 2023). In addition, according to him, patriarchy has been predestined because God had ordained that from the beginning man must always be the head in the family, and

society, and that is why in ministry God always call the man first, then God calls the woman to flow in the same grace. This implies that the wife can therefore tap from the anointing of her husband to receive her own calling (Personal Communication, August 12, 2023).

In the same vein, Prophet Clem Adigun also believes that God always sees man as the head of the wife and Jesus the head of the church just as it is in the New Testament, he quoted Ephesians 5: 23 and Colossians 1: 18 for his scriptural backing (Personal Communication, August 14, 2023). He added that in the Old Testament God chose Moses to be as God to the Israelites, that God can decide to chose any man for his plan. For him the reason why God chooses man over woman is to make everything to be perfect, that naturally man is more in a perfect position in handling things and situation compared to the female counterpart (Personal Communication, August 14, 2023).

Rev. Patricia Tim Okaka, said that God can sometimes call women too in ministry. According to her, because men are more popular in most activities does not mean that women can not also do the same as well (Personal Communication, August 19, 2023). Meanwhile, Pastor Kingsley Okuji suggested that in the Old period it was generally accepted that man must be chosen first before woman can come in but it should no longer be applied to our contemporary era (Personal Communication, August 28, 2023). He went further to say that hence we are in the era of development,

this should no longer be validated and therefore, there should be need for changes (Personal Communication, August 28, 2023).

Furthermore, Apst. Victor Ijegbe (Personal Communication, September 2, 2023) agreed with Rev. Patricia Tim Okaka. For him, women should be given equal rights with men in anything whatsoever, because they were both created from the image and likeness of God, that God never made any mistake in creating both male and female, boy and girl or man and women. Therefore, we are all equal in the sight of God and given equal qualifications, that accepting this will lead to a rapid National Development.

**ii.) Interviewing Some Selected Traditional Rulers:** According to the Odionwere Ni Igbinake, Obasogie Enobakhare Osahon (Personal Communication, September 7, 2023), historically, African traditional religion has a belief system that governs the African constitution, just as every other religions all over the world which they depend on and everyone must be able to know this in order for their lay down guidance. According to him, some Laws had been written down in history that is why in the African customs and tradition, when a King or Monarch dies, using the Ancient Benin Kingdom as a case study; every male child or adult must all have their hair cut irrespective of who they are or the position they hold as far as they are Benin. He added that, men are naturally given some privileges and rights that only a male child can enjoy, that is why a King or Monarch must have a male child no matter the circumstances and if not his female children can never inherit the throne, that is one

of the reason why they marry as many wives as the custom allows (Personal Communication, September 7, 2023).

More so, Eyeye Community Leader, Osakpanmwan Igunma (Personal Communication, September 12, 2023), also added that the reason why females are not allowed to own any position in the Palace of a King and Monarch or have a chieftaincy title in the African society, is because of what the forefathers of the Africans have held from history and believed in which is very difficult to alter, peradventure anyone attempts to change anything from its laid down customs and traditions, that person has automatically attracted both spiritual and physical punishment not only to himself but also to his generations (Personal Communication, September 12, 2023).

Furthermore, Odionwere Ni Ekosodin, Omorodion Osabuohien (Personal Communication, September 16, 2023), believes that in the African traditional society, there is no way dynasty can be shifted or transferred; that is from a male child to the female child. According to him, this should be generally accepted by all. Although as a result of modernization and the introduction of Western religions, many things has changed. He went further to say that apart from the African traditional religion, there is rarely any other religions or kingdoms of the world that may not base their belief on this system. For example, like in the Great Britain, the Queen is also accepted and regarded as the Sole Head in the absence of any male child (Personal Communication, September 16, 2023).

#### 4.5 Prospects of African Traditional Religion in the Contemporary Society

African traditional religion has remained the indigenous religion of the African people from time immemorial, which has not only dealt with their metaphysical ideology but also encompasses their cosmological practices regarding their rituals, cultures as well as their belief systems. Over the years, there has been some form of wrong terminologies introduced by the European misconceptions which has however remained a fallacy. Therefore, in order to ascertain a perfect understanding of its concept, here are the prospects and characteristics of African traditional religion:

1.) **It is Based on Oral Tradition:** It is believed that the original establishment of African traditional religion was orally transmitted and handed down from one generation to another through folk tales, songs, and festivals but as times went on it began to have some forms of texts (en.wikipedia.org). However, as a result of this, some facts may have been lost, distorted or exaggerated. Nevertheless, there is still enough information to guide its adherents about what happened previously as regards the conception of African traditional religion (en.wikipedia.org).

2.) **It is a Natural Religion:** African traditional religion most frequently means the "religion of nature", in which God, the soul, spirits, and all objects of the supernatural are considered as part of nature and not separate from it. However, it is also the religion that is capable of being known, and understood apart from divine revelation through logic and reason alone which implies the religion that comes naturally without any agents of revelation like messengers or prophets (Harper, 2020).

Therefore, African traditional religion is believed to have existed as a nature religion, because it has been around since the beginning of time (Harper, 2020).

3.) **It is associated with the Supernatural:** The role of African traditional religion with humanity can generally be seen as the conformity of nature with the supernatural and metaphysical. According to Mbiti (1970), "because African morality is highly associated with God, if one does not want to invite the anger of God, he or she must not indulge in any evil deed. Hence, everyone is taught how to do right from birth to avoid immoral acts". Therefore, African traditional religion is widely established with the belief system that includes the Supreme being, higher and lower gods, spirits, sometimes the veneration of the dead, ancestor worship as well as the use of magic and medicine.

4.) **It is Built on the African Cultural Heritage:** Sunday (2015), believes that "the African cultures recognize the dignity and integrity of every human being in Africa, despite their diversities through its religion" (p. 8). Therefore, this has sustained and fostered the cultural unity of Africa as one universal family. Moreso, African traditional religion has helped so far in preserving the rich cultural heritage of the African people (Okeke, 2019).

5.) **It has an African Traditional Custom and Belief System:** African traditional religion not only encompasses the way of life of the Africans but also the characteristics of its practices (Njoh and Akiwumi, 2012). Infact, it is also suggested to be the integral components of the African belief system based on their traditional

laws and customs (Mbiti, 1970). However, it means that African traditional religion is exclusively not separated from the African culture, because, they perceive God in every activity of their lives and often times chant or invoke His name in their everyday conversations. Moreso, it is always used as their most uttered word in their various languages (Mbiti, 1970).

**6.) It centers on African Worldview, Lifestyle and Value:** African traditional religion has moral, political as well as religious values permeating every facet of their cosmological and physical lifestyle. However, the African traditional society has a moral system of various beliefs and customs which every individual ought to keep in order to live long and to avoid bringing curses or taboos upon themselves. Adultery, stealing and other forms of immoral behaviour are strongly discouraged and whenever a suspected offender denies a charge brought against him, he would be taken to a soothsayer or made to take an oath for proof of innocence (Mbiti, 1977). Politically, the African hierarchy begins with the family. Each family has a family head; each village has a village head. From these, we have clan head and above the clan head, is the paramount ruler (Gabriel, 2015). Moreso, in a religious sense, African traditional religion also has the perception of the existence of good and bad spirits that make communication with the Supreme Being possible. Above all, it holds a moral sense of justice and truth and the knowledge of the existence of good and evil (Umoh 2005).

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **5.0 EVALUATION, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION**

#### **5.1 Evaluation**

The focus of this study is on ascertaining the understanding of the prospects and challenges of African traditional religion in the contemporary society. It is a five chapter thesis. Chapter one gives a detailed introduction on the work. It covers the background of the study, statement of the problem, aim and objectives, significance of the study, methodology and scope of the study and the organization of work. In Chapter two, literatures on the concept of African traditional religion, and the origin and nature of the practice over the years were reviewed. Chapter three entailed the concept of patriarchy in African traditional religion, and how its beliefs, practice and ideology has evolved over time. In Chapter four, the researcher examined the findings of the study which consist of the challenges and prospects of African traditional religion in the modern world. Chapter five which is the last chapter, evaluates, concludes and makes recommendations based on the findings of the research.

#### **5.2 Recommendations**

In view of the foregoing thesis, the idea of analyzing cultural activities from the Eurocentric principles as against the African traditional beliefs and practices, is a grave mistake that have cost Africans, their rich cultural heritage with great ideology. Therefore, the following are recommended:

(1.) Avenue should be created for African's at large to be taught to understand the African worldview because this is the only, way they can fully understand and appreciate the effort and ideas of their fore-fathers.

(2.) Government should also introduce African traditional religion and cultural studies in our secondary schools and primary schools to promote good moral behaviour.

(3.) There are lots of women who due to the prevalent economic situation and laid down trend of patriarchy in our society today give their attention reluctantly to its enslavement despite the danger and negative result it brings. Such people should free themselves from the bondage of patriarchy by rather focusing on the positive outcome and benefit when there is gender equality.

(4.) There is a need of declamation to address the discriminatory act against women in leadership positions that is prevalent in the African traditional society whereby only the male gender can attain chieftaincy title. This can be done by allocating political positions to women on quota basis because it is a representative law that usually help the state to achieve gender equality thereby leading to national development by a means of commitment to the affirmative action on women representation.

(5.) Political ordinance, constitution and laid down rules should be revisited and amended. This means that the nation must change their programmes and attitudes that tend to perpetuate discrimination and degradation against the female sex and gender.

Therefore, there should be gender equity, a need to allow women participate and occupy sensitive positions in the leadership structure and giving them opportunity to hold some key offices it will give them a sense of belonging and rekindle their interest to do their best towards national development.

(6.) Societal obstacles of patriarchy, custom, religion, tradition and other obnoxious beliefs, which have been found to be responsible for the women degradation and their low participation in leadership role must be broken for our contemporary societies to grow. This can be achievable by regular training and awareness creation by several means like the mass media, oral information and lots more. Therefore, all these steps should be followed to be able to sensitize the people who believed until now that leadership were exclusively preserved for men. More so, women in the African society should not be domesticated in terms of gender roles. This will encourage more women to show interest and make them outstanding.

(7) Traditional rulers, religious heads and leaders should educate their members and followers on the need for gender equality and also emphasizing the accompanying benefits.

(8) The concept of absolute patriarchal Laws and principles in the African traditional society and religion should be amended. Therefore, Africans should have a rethinking among traditional rulers, religious heads and leaders currently involved in the practice.

### **5.3 Conclusion**

Through this research work, it becomes safe to conclude that the nature and manner of patriarchy being practiced in the African traditional society is quite similar although with some little differences from what is obtainable in the contemporary world, especially in the aspect of birth control and burial rites. Furthermore, it could be right to say that the current practice of patriarchy is an idea and practice that might be ignorantly initiated by men and being passed on for generations. As it appears today, It is a true fact that the rulership and governance in the African society has been dominated by men to the detriment of the female counterpart which would continue except an action is being placed to strike a balance on gender representation. Therefore, the decision making process would not always be balanced until effective formulation and implementation of deliberate policies towards the attainment of gender equity and equal political representation of both genders. This can be a panacea and remedy to the continuous retrogressive trend in governance and the political participation of women in the African traditional society and the modern world.

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## APPENDIX

<b>NAME</b>	<b>LOCATION</b>	<b>SEX</b>	<b>AGE</b>	<b>DATE</b>
High priest Osemwegie Ebohon.	No. 1, Odenede Street, Off Alohan Street Ivbioto Quarters, Benin City, Edo State.	Male	82	08/08/2023
Apst. Barnabas A. Inomwan.	Voice of Life Ministry No. 7, Oni Street, Back of C.P.M Camp Ground, Udumwugha Town, Edo State.	Male	52	12/08/2023
Proph. Clem Adigun.	Solution Fire Evangelical Ministry-No.1, Obakpolor Street, Off Uwasota Eyeye Street, Ugbowo, Edo State.	Male	35	14/08/2023
Rev. Patricia Tim Okaka.	The Ark Of God Christian Worship Centre- No7, Moye Street, Off Adolor College Road Ugbowo, Edo State.	Female.	46	19/08/2023
Pst. Kingsley Okuji.	Omega Fire Ministry Ugbowo Chapter, OFM 11 Headquarter, No 232 Ugbowo Lagos Road Opp. Eco Bank Ugbowo, Edo State.	Male	41	28/08/2023
Apst. Victor Ijegbe.	Finger Of God Prayer Ministry-Plot 25, Stephen Igbineweka Street, Igue Iheya Quarters, Edo State.	Male	44	02/09/2023
Obasogie Enobakhare Osahon (Odionwere Ni Igbinake).	No. 175 Igbinake Street Off Upper Sakponba Road Benin City, Edo State.	Male	62	07/09/2023
Osakpanmwan Igunma (Eyeye Community Elder).	No. 06 Eyeye Street, Off Uwasota Road, Ugbowo Benin City, Edo State.	Male	57	12/09/2023
Omorodion Osabuohien (Odionwere Ni Ekosodin).	No. 13 B, Ben Edo Street, Off Edo Street, Ekoodin.	Male	64	16/09/2023