

## **Emigration And Exportation of Benin Traditional Religion: A Contemporary Phenomena**

**Ajele Joseph<sup>1</sup> and Jalo Ayuba Solomon<sup>2</sup>**

### **ABSTRACT**

The emigration and exportation of Benin Traditional Religion (BTR) represent complex phenomena with profound implications for both the Benin Kingdom and global cultural dynamics. Through qualitative approach the paper examines the factors driving the emigration of BTR adherents from Benin, exploring the mechanisms through which elements of the religion are exported internationally, and discusses the impacts of these processes on the preservation and adaptation of Benin Traditional Religion in global contexts. The research findings revealed that Benin Traditional Religion has been transformed through migration and globalization, influencing both local practices and global perceptions of African spirituality. The paper recommended that various agents should be introduced to help educate others to reduce the constant migration and subsequent exportation of the Benin culture, Traditional Religious practices, in other to sustain Benin Traditional Culture and artifact as our identity. The paper draws its conclusion on the fact that transporting leads to exportation of the both cultural and religious practices, which led to copying and modification of spiritual contents as well as making it ineffective.

**Keywords:** Benin Traditional Religion, emigration, exportation, Diaspora, globalization, cultural identity

### **INTRODUCTION**

The Benin Kingdom, located in present-day Nigeria, has a rich cultural heritage deeply intertwined with its traditional religious practices. Benin Traditional Religion (BTR) encompasses a diverse array of spiritual beliefs, rituals, and customs that have evolved over centuries. In recent decades, the global movement of people, facilitated by migration and globalization, has led to significant Diasporas communities of Benin TR practitioners around the world. This paper

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Christian Religious Studies, Federal College of Education Okene, Kogi state. He can be reached at [coclyola@gmail.com](mailto:coclyola@gmail.com) 08168491172

<sup>2</sup> Department of Christian Religious Studies Federal College of Education Okene, Kogi state. He can be reached at [malambore4christ@gmail.com](mailto:malambore4christ@gmail.com) 08060865721

explores the processes of emigration and exportation of Benin TR, examining how these dynamics have shaped the religion's identity within and beyond its traditional homeland. Man is born into a religious home, live in a religious world and will still end in a religious world. The Benin people, have a rich cultural heritage and a complex spiritual system, they believed in the existence of pantheon of deities such as: Osanobua (God almighty) the supreme deity and creator of the universe. The major deity of the Benin people Olokun (God of the ocean) and is associated with fertility, prosperity and protection, Ogun (God of iron and war) patron deity of blacksmiths, warriors and hunters, Esango (God of thunder) associated with thunderstorms and fertility and Osun (Goddess of fertility and Beauty) patron deity of women, fertility and beauty. They also believed in nature deities such as: Erinmwin (God of the forest) associated with hunting and wildlife, Ogiuwu (God of the River) patron deity of the fishermen and riverine communities and the Ukhun (God of the mountains) associated with agriculture and fertility (Akiti, 2013,46). Lastly they believed in ancestor deities which includes the following: Ozolua (founder of Benin) ancestor deity revered for his wisdom and leadership and Ewuare the great (Legendary king) ancestor deity revered for his military prowess (Clifford and Felicia, 2020,68-69). The Benin people believed in rituals, witchcrafts, ancestors spirit for their various roles in the family such as family police, family morality, family security, family guardians, family peace providers, family reward and punishment e.t.c (Clifford and Felicia 2020,26-47). These believes of the Benin people of the Edo in the South-South Nigeria has played and still playing a vital role among Benin people, especially those that adhered to the cultural practices. The exportation and the transmission of these ancient traditional believes has caused a lot of havoc to the efficacy and effectiveness of the practice, its influence on the foreigners especially the bad eggs coming to infiltrate the Benin people

### **Historical Contexts: Emigration and Religious Transmission to foreign lands**

The Benin Kingdom, with its capital in present-day Benin City, Edo State is one of the oldest and most powerful pre-colonial African states. The kingdom was historically centered on the Oba (king), who was not only the political leader but

also a spiritual figurehead. BTR is deeply tied to the monarchy and the socio-political structure of the kingdom, with religious leaders and priests playing key roles in the governance of the society (Akhilomen, 2012,34-36).

### **Emigration Trends from Edo State**

Large-scale emigration from Edo State began during the colonial period, but intensified in the post-colonial era, particularly in the late 20th and present 21<sup>st</sup> century, due to Political instability, insecurity, economic hardship, and the search for better opportunities abroad drove many Edo people to migrate to Europe, North America, and other parts of the world. As they settled in these new regions, they took their cultural and religious beliefs with them, leading to the establishment of small Diaspora communities that continue to practice BTR (Kanu, 2019, 50-51).

### **Concept of Migration, Pattern of life and Traditional identity**

Migration is the process of entering another country in order to live there, or is the movement from one place to another by a large group of people, birds, animals etc. Migration emphasizes on the movement from one place to another and is emphatic on the reason for the movement, which is to live there. The only fact to be buttressed here is that the distance covered in this movement in the context of this paper is a relatively far destination where one can experience a reasonable change in culture.

Throughout history, man has moved from place to place in search of food or shelter. Generally, this is known as migration and has been defined as “the permanent change of residence by an individual or group. Residing in a new place for a reasonable number of a year is considered as migration. Such reasonable duration and distance is what this paper viewed as either immigration or migration.

**Pattern of life:** pattern of life deals with a way or ways person or people live their lives. This phrase is synonymous to culture, as culture is the totality of people’s ways of life. Gene can influence one’s pattern of life, but pattern of life in this context is basically a social phenomenon. Migration is a socio-cultural inheritance, a habit which one learns as a member of a given society. Therefore, among the Beninese of Edo state, migration had to be practiced as a pattern of life. The

Europeans are also seen as migrants, people from many countries and continents migrate to places for some reasons. Migration has been a normal thing in people's ways of life.

**Traditional identity:** Tradition is that part of a people's culture that has survived for generations. It is the oldest parts of any culture. Tradition is a belief, custom or way of doing something that has existed for a long time; the way in which things are done in a particular country, group of people etc. traditional on the other hand has to do with things connected with tradition. Identity is the qualities and attitude you have that make you feel, you have your own character and are different from other people. Traditional identity means that archaic or long time belief, custom or way of doing something that make someone feels he has his own character and are different from other people (Nathaniel, 2010, 40-41).

#### **Factors Driving Emigration:**

The emigration of Benin Traditional Religion adherents is influenced by a combination of push and pulls factors. Push factors include economic challenges, political instability, and social discrimination within Nigeria, prompting individuals and families to seek better opportunities and security abroad. Pull factors encompass the desire to reconnect with cultural roots, establish religious communities in new environments, and participate in global networks of African spirituality. Case studies of diasporic communities in Europe, the Americas, and other regions illustrate how these factors manifest in the migration patterns of Benin TR practitioners (Ndubuisi, 2019, 21-23).

#### **Factors that necessitate Migration of Beninese Traditional Religion**

This paper presents economic, social, religion-cultural and political factors as well as health factors as areas of emphasis. It is worthy to note that most activities in Benin traditional society revolve around Benin Traditional Religion. More so, all these factors influence the religion and cultural identity of the Beninese of Benin city in Edo state. Economic factor appears to be the most common factor responsible for migration. Man always tries as much as possible to make ends meet. Human ends invariably differ from one person to another. In some cases, means of

economic survival can be conceived in a given society with very limited areas of human endeavor, hence, people with higher ends struggle to source out other areas of economic engagements in order to actualize their life dreams. When these areas of endeavor are not found within the immediate environment, people begin to think of other places or settling where they can find opportunities for wealth acquisition. In so doing, people migrate beyond their immediate environment. At a time, when some must have achieved their economic dreams, they are seen pursuing more by extending their tentacles to other geographical areas. Some people developed extensive quest for wealth because as they acquire wealth, more responsibilities surface from friends, kinsmen, brothers, and sisters, cousins, in-laws and then his own immediate family members.

### **Mechanisms of Exportation**

The exportation of Benin TR involves the dissemination of religious practices, artifacts, and spiritual knowledge beyond the geographic boundaries of the Benin Kingdom. This process is facilitated through various channels, including migration, international travel, digital communication platforms, and cultural exchange programs. Initiatives such as festivals, workshops, and academic conferences contributed to the global visibility and recognition of Benin Traditional Religion, fostering intercultural dialogue and understanding among diverse audiences worldwide.

## **RELIGIOUS PRACTICES OF THE BENIN TRADITIONAL RELIGION**

The Beninese people of Benin, in Edo State, Nigeria, have a rich cultural heritage and spiritual tradition. Their religious practices are deeply rooted in their ancestral beliefs, which emphasize the interconnectedness of humans, nature, and the divine (Dmitri, 2015, 98-99).

### **Traditional Religious Practices**

1. **Ancestor Worship:** - The Beninese believes in honoring their ancestors, who are considered intermediaries between the living and the divine. These ancestors serve as family police, guardians, rewards givers and punishment

implementers of the family; they control morality of the family and bring peace and security to the family (Clifford and Felicia, 2020, 72-73).

2. Olokun: - Worship of the god of the ocean, associated with fertility, prosperity, and protection.
3. Osun: - Reverence for the goddess of love, beauty, and fertility.
4. Ifa: - Divination system that uses palm nuts or cowry shells to communicate with the divine.
5. Osaonuba: - This is the worship of the god of fertility, childbirth, and agriculture and livestock productivity. He is considered a god of prosperity as he gives wealth, success and good fortune, a god of protection for his ability to safeguard against evil spirits, diseases and misfortune (Michael, 1969)

#### **Applications in Real-Life Situations**

1. Conflict Resolution: - Elders use Ifa divination to resolve disputes and restore balance and peaceful atmosphere in the family and the society.
2. Health and Wellness: - Traditional healers use herbal remedies and spiritual interventions to treat ailments.
3. Agricultural Productivity: - Farmers offer sacrifices to Olokun and Osun for fertile soil and abundant harvests.
4. Personal Guidance: - Individuals consult Ifa priests for guidance on life decisions (Aiworo, 2023).

#### **Impacts of Benin Traditional Religion and Global Cultural Dynamics**

The emigration and exportation of Benin TR have both positive and negative impacts on the religion's cultural integrity and adaptation. While Diaspora communities contribute to the preservation and revitalization of Benin TR through the maintenance of traditional rituals and oral traditions, they also face challenges related to cultural assimilation and religious syncretism in multicultural societies.

Furthermore, the global dissemination of Benin TR challenges stereotypes and misconceptions about African spirituality, promoting a more nuanced understanding of indigenous religions in the contemporary world (Oguntoyinbo-Atare, 2015, 42-44).

### **The implications of Benin Traditional Religion on foreign Belief systems.**

The implications of Benin Traditional Religion are multi faceted, but one of them is the blending of traditional African beliefs with foreign religious practices resulting in unique syncretism practices which gave room for the merged with both Christianity and Islam giving birth to distinct spiritual tradition.

In some cases, traditional African religion has influenced the development of new religious movements in foreign countries. Example, the Afro-American religious traditions, such as Vodou and Santeria, has incorporated elements of African traditional religions, including Ancestral worship and recognition of a supreme deity.

Moreover, the cultural exchange between Africa and foreign countries has led to a greater appreciation and recognition of traditional African religion especially the Benin Traditional Religion. This results to Academic research interest as well as effort to preserve and promote Africa's rich cultural heritage.

However, it is also important to acknowledge the historical impacts of colonialism and imperialism on African Traditional Religions such as Christianity and Islam which has led to marginalization of traditional African beliefs and practices.

Currently there has been a resurgence of interest in traditional African regions, particularly among Africans in the Diaspora. This has led to the efforts to revive and promote these religions as well as to recognize their significance and contributions to global cultural diversity.

### **Impacts of emigration and exportation of Benin (Edo State) Traditional Religion**

The emigration and exportation of Benin traditional religion practices have resulted in several negative impacts:

**Loss of Cultural Identity:** Cultural identity is lost through the following: dilution of traditional practices through syncretism, disconnection from ancestral heritage and erosion of cultural values and norms.

**Disruption of Community and Social Structure:** Breakdown of community cohesion, disruption of traditional authority structures and loss of social support networks.

**Commercialization and Exploitation:** Commodification of sacred symbols and artifacts, exploitation by external interests (e.g., tourism) and cultural appropriation.

**Suppression and Stigmatization:** Persecution and stigmatization by dominant religions, suppression of traditional practices, forced assimilation.

**Loss of Traditional Knowledge:** Decline of traditional healing practices, loss of divination techniques, disappearance of sacred stories and myths

**Psychological and Emotional Impacts** Cultural disorientation, identity crisis and emotional trauma for example Benin bronze artifacts removed during colonialism, Traditional priests forced to convert to Christianity or Islam, Commercialization of Vodun practices in West Africa.

**Consequences for the Diaspora Community** Disconnection from ancestral heritage, difficulty maintaining traditional practices and cultural identity crisis

**Preservation Efforts** documenting traditional practices, establishing cultural centers and Community-led preservation initiatives (UNESCO, 2023, 13-14).

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the emigration and exportation of Benin African Traditional Religion represent dynamic processes that reflect broader trends in globalization, migration, and cultural exchange. By examining the factors driving emigration, mechanisms of exportation, and impacts on both local and global scales, this paper contributes to a deeper understanding of how Benin ATR is evolving in response to contemporary challenges and opportunities. Future research should continue to

explore the complexities of diasporic religious practices and their implications for cultural diversity and identity in an interconnected world.

### **Recommendations**

1. **Preservation of Cultural Integrity.** Encourage practitioners and scholars to document and archive rituals, oral traditions, and sacred texts of Benin African traditional religion (BTR). This ensures that its authenticity is preserved even when practiced outside its origin.
2. **Develop partnerships** between cultural institutions in Benin and diasporic communities to maintain traditional practices and avoid dilution.
3. **Establish cultural hubs** or centers in diaspora communities to foster a connection with the heritage and provide spaces for practice.
4. **Legal and Ethical Exportation.** Ensure the ethical exportation of sacred artifacts by obtaining consent from communities and adhering to international cultural heritage laws.
5. **Collaborate with international organizations** to prevent the illicit trafficking of religious artifacts while promoting their appreciation through exhibitions and research.
6. **Global Engagement and Dialogue.** Promote interfaith dialogues to highlight the philosophical and spiritual contributions of Benin TR to global religious landscapes.
7. **Use contemporary media,** such as films, documentaries, and literature, to portray the religion's depth and relevance.
8. **Develop apps or websites** that provide access to sacred texts, traditional chants, and teachings for global audiences.
9. **Research and Academic Support.** Support research initiatives to critically analyze and document the diaspora's adaptation of Benin TR in contemporary contexts.

10. Encourage collaboration between Benin scholars and global academic institutions to promote scholarly works on the religion
11. Government and Policy Support. The government of Benin should actively support the dissemination of its cultural heritage through policies that promote TR's positive image globally. Include Benin TR in educational curricula, both at home and abroad, as part of African history and religious studies.

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