The place of african traditional religion in contemporary africa

[Religion](#)

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The sacrilege of Africa in earlier days by the Western European powers totally and undesirably affected the customary cultures of the native African people to the level that many traditional principles, customs, social values, and rituals were either entirely destroyed or overlooked. Mostly, they were considered to be no more than pagan ethics and misconceptions that played no particular part in traditional African culture. Culture in that contest is the way of life established by people as they cope with survival. Real culture then must comprise the spiritualism and traditional beliefs. The introduction of European Christianity and values separated the indigenous Africans from their traditional spiritual roots as well as their traditional distinctiveness as a spiritual people.

Traditional African religion is focused on the existence of one Ultimate High God. However, the Europeans who introduced Christianity in Africa didn't understand or properly appreciate the Africans own understanding of the Great Creator. They saw no resemblance between the God they talked about and the Africans own belief in the One Highest God and creator who was, Omnipotent, king, the Great Judge, Omniscient, Compassionate, Holy and Obscure, Immortal and Supreme (Olupona, 1991). The traditional African belief is that the Great One brought the mysticisms into being. He therefore is the creator and everything in heaven and on earth owes their origin to Him alone. He is the king of kings and can not be likened in majesty. He is above all grandeurs and divinities. He resides everywhere. Thus He is omnipotent and is able to do all things and nothing can be created apart from Him. He is

behind all achievements. He alone can speak and accomplish his words (Olupona, 1991).

In Yoruba myth, Sango once governed as the fourth Alaafin of Oyo. Sango is said to have succeeded his father as one of the early kings of Oyo, and several verses say that he became a king. He was recognized for his magical power and was feared because when he spoke, fire came out of his mouth (Olupona, 1991). After his unusual life and controversial death, his friends esteemed him as a god. His cult has enjoyed the royal patronage of the Alaafin of Oyo, who is regarded as his descendant. Sangos cult played a significant role in securing the peoples loyalty to the Alaafin in the days of the Oyo Empire (Olupona, 1991)

History has it that he is the son of Yemoja, the mother goddess and guardian of birth. Sango had three wives. Sangos followers regard him as the epithet of great creative potential. His devotion to power over life and death and to imagination is imitated in Sango's reminder houses, such as the one found in the compound of Baalekosoin Oyo, which overflows with carvings, ceramics and other artwork (Olupona, 1991).

The feel of community and humane living are vastly cherished standards of traditional African life. This statement is true in spite of the seeming confusion in the experience of current politics and brutal internal wars in many parts of the Continent. For traditional Africans, the community is essentially sacred, rather than worldly, and enclosed by several religious forms and symbols. A foreigner in Africa is soon struck by the recurrent use of the first person plural we, ours in everyday dialogue (Olupona, 1991). In modern African urban cities, primary community loyalties of ones extended

family continue to exercise their hold over people who live away from the communities of their home-towns. People normally return to their villages from their dwelling in the cities from time to time to join members of their village community to celebrate important traditional rituals and cultural events like initiation, title-taking or festival (Olupona, 1991). From their dwelling in urban cities, they send considerable financial contributions to their rural home communities to upkeep various development projects like provision of electricity and pipe-borne water, building of educational institutions and scholarship awards, funds to send young men and women on further studies in far-off countries or in ones own country.

Primary communities based on clan, or ethnic descent, or church association equally prosper in many modern African cities. Olupona (1991) points out that these are often, for people who are disconnected from the communities of their home-towns. He underscores the imperative belief and sense of the community among traditional Africans. In traditional Africa, the individual does not and cannot exist alone except corporately. He owes being to other people, including those of past generations and his generations (Olupona, 1991). Whatever happens to the person is believed to happen to the whole group, and whatever happens to the whole group happens to the individual. Olupona (1991) discusses the religious length of community in the traditional African background. Several myths relate the founding of community as well as shed light on certain symbol objects and forms that feature conspicuously in the ritual network of the people. He try to show how such pertinent ritual forms and symbols are employed by Africans to improve the ideal of community.

References

Olupona, J. (1991). African Traditional Religions in Contemporary Society. St. Paul, Minne: Paragon House.