‘Outsider’ and ‘Insider’ Study of African Traditional Religion

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Abstract

The paper sets before ‘Outsider’ and ‘Insider’ as pivot, the study of African Traditional Religion which it argued that has undergone various stages of evolution. It then proceeds to contribute to the on-going efforts of scholars of African Traditional Religion to identify the classification of scholars of African Traditional religion that could be described as ‘Outsider’ and ‘Insider’. This distinction we found to be blur, overlapping, interface and cross-pollinating. The paper argues that to clarify the distinction between the ‘Outsider’ and ‘Insider’ study of African Traditional Religion, there is the need to expunge biological, racial and geographical sentiments. It posited in its conclusion that other parameters like prejudice, brainwashing, hyper-diffusion, theological gymnastics, and conceptual convoluted thoughts of running African Traditional Religion on the template of other religions with Judeo-Christian at the fore should be given sufficient considerations.

Keywords: ‘Outsider’, ‘Insider’, Study, African Traditional Religion, Classification

Introduction

African indigenous religions are timeless, beginning with the origin of human civilization on the continent, perhaps as early as 200,000 b.c.e., when the species *Homo sapiens* is believed to have emerged. Because they date back to prehistoric times, little has been written about their history. These religions have evolved and spread slowly for millennia; stories about gods, spirits, and ancestors have passed from one generation to another in oral mythology.[1] Without equivocation, African Traditional Religions showcased true evolution especially when one takes into cognizance the age of the world. The world has been claimed to run into billion years of existence and there is no specifics on the origin of human life. On the list of the claims that address themselves to the origin of human life is the *Homo abilis, homo erectus* and as stated earlier here by Olupona that it is when the species *Homo sapiens* is believed to have emerged.

Prior to the emergence of the *Homo sapiens* species, the existence of religion was not on record. Even the existence of human was imagined in the realm of animals whose major notable and observable concerns do not include stories about gods, spirits, and ancestors. This left us with the question that queries the emergence of the notion of God to man, again it also queries which comes first religion or the conception of God. This also places side by side if the conception of God predated the existence of God. What is only clear in the foregoing is that a time in human experience between the *homo abilis* and *homo erectus* had existed when human beings concerns were not metaphysical, in other words everything about human beings were material and now. This may sound primitive, little or no wonder then that foreign scholars or outsiders to African Traditional Religion sometimes described it as primitive as exemplified in the works of Edward Burnnett Tylor (E.B. Tylor, Religion and Anthropology, Cambridge University Press)