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## Approach to the study of ATR and its relevance to National Development

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### Abstract

This study examines the ongoing debate between protectionism and liberalism in international trade, focusing on their implications for Africa's economic development. African nations face the dual challenge of fostering domestic industries while integrating into the global economy, making the choice between protectionist and liberal trade policies crucial for sustainable growth. Protectionism, often employed to safeguard nascent industries, can foster short-term industrial development but risks inefficiency and market isolation if overextended. Conversely, trade liberalism promotes competition, foreign direct investment (FDI), and integration into global value chains, yet it may expose vulnerable industries to overwhelming foreign competition. Countries can choose to implement more liberal or protectionist policies. The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) represents a hybrid approach, offering trade liberalization within Africa while allowing flexibility to protect strategic sectors. Using a blend of recent literature and case studies, this study explores how a balanced trade policy—combining selective protectionism with elements of liberalism—can enhance industrial growth, innovation, and competitiveness across in African economies. The study underscores that no single approach; protectionism or liberalism is universally applicable or inherently bad; rather, trade policies should be tailored to each country's unique economic context and development stage. Furthermore, African nations should adopt a protectionist stance initially to safeguard emerging industries and develop their competitiveness before pursuing a liberal approach to world trade. Alternatively, they could adopt a protectionist stance in certain economic sectors while maintaining a liberal stance in others to maintain competitiveness in those vital sectors that are crucial to Africa's development. Ultimately, AfCFTA presents a viable framework for advancing Africa's economic integration and positioning the continent more strategically in global trade.

### Keywords

Approach, ATR, Relevance, National, Development.

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## INTRODUCTION

Africa, the place of origin of all humankind, is divided into numerous political and cultural regions, reflecting its diverse range of histories, ethnicities, languages, beliefs, attitudes and behaviors. Its various indigenous spiritual systems, usually called African traditional religions are many. Every ethnic group in Africa has developed a complex and distinctive set of religious beliefs and practices. Despite their seemingly unrelated aspects, there are common features to these systems, suggesting that African traditional faith forms from a cohesive religious tradition. Africans are known to be deeply rooted. Hence, they are deeply spiritual people.

To understand the study of African Traditional Religion, one must have to get to know the approaches surrounding this particular study. Every Religion has an approach which will enable one to understand its antics and it is important because it helps us look at the different way people approach the study of the African religion. It is normal that for anybody to embark into a journey which, such person needs to know the rules of engagement, approach and procedures. This is because with this, such person would get or rather achieve what he or she wants to achieved. The approaches to the study of Africa traditional religion may include

1. Descriptive Approach
2. Comparative Approach
3. Thematic Approach
4. Historical Approach
5. Enumerative Approach
6. Sociological Approach
7. Theological Approach
8. Anthropological Approach
9. Psychological Approach
10. Philosophical Approach
11. Empirical Approach

Knowing these approaches will thus provide one an opportunity to learn about a range of disciplinary approaches, and even more importantly, the connections and linkages among them. In this way, studying the approach to African traditional religion invites us all to think in a more African and integral way about the African cosmology, our role and place in it.

### 1. DESCRIPTIVE APPROACH

This focuses on documentary and describing rituals, beliefs, practices, and symbols of African religions. Africans are known with the oral traditions which have been kept sacred. Unlike other religions that have written texts, African traditional religion survives on oral tradition which has resulted to some transcripts which was written down from oral performance. For Fargion (n.d), the written transcripts are not integral to the religion however; the performed words are a powerful force in their own right. The descriptive approach which is commonly used in studying Africa traditional

religion involves observing, documentary and analysing various aspects of the traditional religion such as rituals, beliefs, symbols, and practice, without imposing external interpretation. Unlike other religion's texts and tradition which has external influence during its redaction, African traditional religion does not accommodate that. Towards this study, a researcher or researchers aim to provide an accurate and comprehensive description of the religion's characteristics and intricacies. The approach over time helps to preserve the authenticity of culture and can contribute to a deeper understanding of the religion's significance within its specific cultural context and religion context.

Explaining better with an illustration, imagine trying to learn about a special game that kids in a different country play. Instead of guessing how the game works, you decide to watch them play, listen to their rules, and ask questions. You are not trying to change the game, just understand it better.

Similarly, when people study African traditional religion, they use the descriptive approach. They watch and learn from the worshippers of the religion like how they pray, what stories they tell, and what special things they do. They write down everything they see and hear, like a detective taking notes. This way, they can understand the religion better without changing it. It is learning African traditional religion by watching and listening carefully.

When rites of a people are described, rituals, symbols, beliefs, and practices are described; it helps in the understanding of African traditional religion. Scholars will aim to provide an accurate and unbiased account of the beliefs, rites, rituals, symbols, and traditions within the context of the African traditional religion. Researchers who use the descriptive approach to the study of African traditional religion often spend time with adherents of the religion, participating in the rituals and rites, believing in the belief system and understanding the symbols of the African religion. By participating, learning, understanding, listening and asking questions, a researcher immerses himself in the culture of the people and can gain deeper understanding of the religion's significance and the role it plays in people's lives. Hence, there is no better way to describe African traditional religion than getting involved with the rites, rituals, symbols, and beliefs and practicing of the worshippers.

This approach emphasizes the importance of cultural context and avoids imposing western or external perspectives on the religion. It helps to preserve the authenticity of the tradition and allows researchers to capture the intricacies and nuances that might be missed through other approach.

## **2. COMPARATIVE APPROACH**

Typically, when religions are compared, a more profound comprehension of their essential philosophical inquires like ethics, metaphysics, and the concepts of salvation is attained. This approach generally, involves examining and contrasting the beginnings of different world religions, along with the commonalities they share. According to Keeves (2001), comparative approach involves whereby “the characteristics or the parts are compared across two or more research situations”. Comparative approach makes use of comparative analysis through which an objective, honest and dispassionate analysis of religion is obtained. It reveals that in spite of the differences present in the different religions, there are similarities running across them. This approach when used can bring about a better understanding among followers of the different religions thereby fostering religious harmony. However, a comparative approach to the study of African traditional religion involves analyzing and comparing the various traditional religious practices and beliefs of different African cultures. This approach helps to identify similarities and differences in their religious practices, which can provide insight into the shared cultural and historical influences in the religion.

One way to approach this study is by comparing the creation myths and cosmologies of different African cultures. For examples, many African religions believe in a supreme creator deity who is responsible for creating the world and everything in it. However, the specific details of their creation myths and cosmologies can differ significantly. By comparing these myths and cosmologies, scholars can identify the common themes and motifs that appear across different cultures and identify the distinct features of each culture's religious beliefs. Another way to approach the study comparatively is by analyzing the religious practices of different cultures. For example, scholars can compare the role of divination in different African cultures, as well as the specific techniques and tools used in divination. Similarly, scholars can compare the role of sacrifice and offerings in different cultures, as well as the specific types of sacrifices and offerings made.

By comparing these practices and beliefs, scholars can identify the shared cultural and historical influences in the religion as well as the unique features of each culture's religious practices. This comparative approach can also provide insight into the ways in which different cultures have adapted their religious beliefs and practices over time, as well as the ways in which religion has been used to shape social and political structures in the region.

### **3. THEMATIC APPROACH**

A thematic approach to the study of the African traditional religion involves examining the religion's major themes or concepts that are shared across various cultures and traditions within Africa. This approach recognizes the diversity and complexity of African traditional religion and seeks to identify and explore its commonalities rather than its differences. Some of the major themes that can be explored in this regard include;

**Ancestor veneration-** The ancestors are revered and believed to have the power to intervene in the affairs of the living.

**Deities and Spirits.** African traditional religion recognises a vast array of deities and spirits that are believed to influence the natural world and human affairs,

**Rituals and ceremonies-** Rituals and ceremonies are an integral part of the African traditional religion and are often used to invoke the power of the ancestors, deities, and spirits.

**Divination:** Divination is a common practice in the traditional religion of the Africans and is used to gain insight into the past, present and future.

**Sacrifice and Taboos:** Sacrifice is often performed as a means of appeasing the ancestors, deities and spirits. As for taboos, certain actions and behaviors are considered taboo in the traditional religion and are believed to bring bad luck or misfortune.

### **4. HISTORICAL APPROACH**

This study of African traditional religion has been approached historically in several ways. One approach is to examine the religion in the context of the social, cultural and historical developments of the various West African societies. This approach emphasizes the interrelationships between religious beliefs, practices, and social structures. Another approach is to trace the evolution of the traditional religion of the Africans from pre-colonial times to the present day. This approach emphasizes the changes and adaptations that have occurred in the religion over time, particularly in response to external factors such as colonialism, missionary activity and globalization. Also, this approach is to analyze the mythology and cosmology of the traditional religion. This approach emphasizes the

symbolic meanings and significance of the myths and stories that form the basis of the basis of the religion's beliefs and practices.

The comparative approach is to focus on the rituals and ceremonies of traditional religion. This approach emphasizes the importance of these practices in the religious and cultural life of African societies and the ways in which they are used to communicate with the spiritual realm and to express communal identity and solidarity.

Overall, the historical approach to the study of African religion recognizes the religion's dynamic and evolving nature and the ways in which it is influenced by historical and social contexts.

## **5. ENUMERATIVE APPROACH**

The enumerative approach is a method of studying a particular subject by breaking it down into smaller parts and categorizing them. When applied to the study of traditional religion, the enumerative approach involves identifying and classifying the different elements and practices of the religion. Some of the key areas that can be studied using this approach include;

Deities- Enumerating the different gods and goddesses worshipped in African traditional religion, their attributes and their roles in the religion.

Rituals: Examining the various rites and rituals that are performed as part of the religious practices, such as sacrifices, offerings, and festivals.

Symbols: Identifying the different symbols and their meanings in the religion, such as the use of animal motifs, masks and sacred objects.

Ancestors: Examining the role of ancestors in the religion, including their veneration, offerings, and commemoration.

Beliefs and Ethics: Enumerating the core beliefs of the religion, such as the existence of a supreme being, the afterlife, and the interconnectedness of all living things and examining moral and ethical principles that guide the behavior of followers of the religion, such as the importance of community, respect for elders, and hospitality.

By using the enumerative approach, scholars can gain a comprehensive understanding of the various elements of African traditional religion and how they interrelate. This approach also allows for the identification of similarities and differences between different regions and ethnic groups that practice the religion.

## **6. SOCIOLOGICAL APPROACH**

The term religion describes various systems of beliefs and practice that define what people consider to be sacred or spiritual (Fasching and Dechant 2001; Durkheim 1915). Throughout history, and in societies across the world, leaders have used religious narratives, symbols, and traditions in an attempt to give more meaning to life and understand the universe. Some form of religion is found in every known culture, and it is usually practiced in a public way by a group.

The practice of religion can include feasts and festivals, intercession with God or gods, marriage and funeral services, music and art, meditation or initiation, sacrifice or service, and other aspects of culture.

While some people think African traditional religion as something individual because religious beliefs can be highly personal, religion is also a social institution. Social scientists recognize that African traditional religion exists as an organized and integrated set of beliefs, behaviours, and norms centered on basic social needs and values. Moreover, religion is a cultural universal found in all social groups. For instance, in every culture, funeral rites are practiced in some way although these customs vary between cultures and within religious affiliations. Despite differences, there are common elements in a ceremony marking a person's death, such as announcement of the death, care of the deceased, disposition and ceremony or ritual. These universals and the differences in the way societies and individuals, experience religion, provide rich material for sociological approach.

This approach is also based on the environment Africans find themselves. It investigates the social factors that help in the origin and development of the traditional religion. Africans worship the deities and spirits of what they live in and behave in respect to that.

## **7. THEOLOGICAL APPROACH**

This approach looks into the religion and seeks to understand what it means to believers or worshippers within its own terms, and how that system works as a rational worldview to those within it. For Chidili (n.d), the theological approach is both revelatory and salvific. This approach focuses on God, human person and the world. The Supreme Being reveals himself and lives among Africans. This Supreme Being is referred to, in names that they can describe him with. For them, the Supreme Being is the creator of the universe and the mightiest. This theological approach would involve looking at the beliefs in the divinity in Africa as Africans believe in deities, ancestors, and spirits.

## **8. ANTHROPOLOGICAL APPROACHES**

The decline of evolutionist approaches to the study of African traditional religion marked the beginning of anthropological approaches, which were facilitated by colonialism. Ikenga-Metuh (1987) argues that the colonial establishment created an environment in which anthropologists could undertake extensive field work and documentation of the tradition, customs, beliefs and practices of Africans before these beliefs and practices could be contaminated by foreign influences. ANTHROPOLOGICAL approaches to the study of African traditional religion evolved in two distinct schools or national lines: British and French. This according to Ray (1976), unfortunately "slanted fieldwork studies according to the nationality of the author, and thus imposed a colonialist structure upon the study of African social and religious systems."

## **9. PSYCHOLOGICAL APPROACH**

Here, this approach tries to understand the cause-effect relationships of religious experiences and religious consciousness so as to be able to predict behaviors. It aims to study the religious consciousness with investigations in religious behavior patterns. The belief in spirits both malevolent and benevolent and belief in ancestors which has criteria for admission has changed the psychology of Africans. This change may be bad or good but here, it has to do with one's religious expressions. This is the reason why when most things happen in the African cosmology, ways to define it would be divination and the use of protection to ward off bad omens.

## **10. PHILOSOPHICAL APPROACH**

Africans have philosophies that have guided them for over the years. Here, the philosophical approach is a rational thought about religious issues and concerns without a presumption of the existence of a deity or reliance on acts of faith. This philosophical approach to the study of study of African

traditional religion encompasses several key aspects and perspectives. It is important to note that African traditional religion is a diverse and multifaceted belief system, and the philosophical approach seeks to understand its underlying principles, values and worldviews.

The approach looks at the adages, proverbs of the Africans, the oral traditions and the belief systems of the Africans. This is because under the adages, proverbs, folklores, and oral traditions, underlies the philosophy of the Africans which make up their belief systems. Some of the key aspects of the philosophical approach to the study of African traditional religion involves holistic understanding whereby philosophers and scholars approach this study with the aim of gaining a holistic understanding of the belief system. This includes exploring its metaphysical, ethical, and ontological aspects. Also, oral tradition and symbolism is a significant portion of Africa traditional religion which is transmitted through oral tradition and symbolism. Africans explore the role of oral narratives, rituals, and symbolic expressions in conveying philosophical ideas within the traditional religion.

In summary, the philosophical approach to the study of the African traditional religion seeks to understand the deep philosophical underpinnings of the traditional religion of the Africans, including its metaphysical, ethical, and epistemological aspects, while acknowledging its unique cultural and communal dimensions. This approach contributes to a richer appreciation of the diversity and complexity of African philosophical thoughts.

## **11. EMPIRICAL APPROACH**

This approach to the study of African traditional religion involves the collection and analysis of observable data and evidence related to African traditional religion practices, beliefs, and rituals. This approach aims to understand African traditional religion through direct observation, fieldwork, and the systematic gathering of information. Not only does it involve fieldwork and observation, it involves interviews and surveys, collection of artefacts and symbols, documentation of oral traditions, recording rituals and ceremonies, cross-cultural comparisons and ethical considerations.

This approach helps researchers gain a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the religious practices and beliefs of the traditional religion. According to Chidili (2005), at the end, scientists have discovered that religious phenomena manifest themselves in all human experiences and irreducible to any other class of existence except religion. This however, seems to place the traditional religion of the Africans at a disadvantaged position.

## **RELEVANCE TO NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT; AN ASSESSMENT**

National development is the highest priority of the government. Government will unlock all constraints to ensure that economic growth is enhanced, inclusive and sustainable over the plan period and beyond to generate employment and reduce poverty.

It is the capacity of the country to raise the standards of living of its residents. It can be achieved by providing individuals with basic livelihood requirements and supplying them with employment. Development is a process that creates growth, brings in progress and positive change.

Religion can contribute to national integration, political mobilization, reformation of ethnic identity, nationalism, peaceful co-existence, economic, social, and political development (Afolabi, 2015). As long as Nigeria is concerned, the role of religion to national development remains diverse. This is because we have several religions in the country and the beauty of it is in the diversity. However, the approaches to the study of African traditional religion is very much considered to be relevant to

national development just as other religions has its role to national development. Here, we will discuss the relevance of Africa traditional religion which will be subsumed.

## 1. SOCIAL ROLES

The study of African traditional religion has shown that Africans believe in a supreme being which for the Igbos, they call him Chukwu. For the Edo, he is being referred to as Osanobwa while for the Urhobo, he is referred to as Oghene. For the Yoruba, they depict this Supreme Being as Olorun/Olodumare and the Ibibio/Efik, they call him Osa-Nudazi. All these still points out to the supreme being which the Christians call God. Hence, according to Ikechi-Ekpendu, Audu and Ekpendu (2016), "the recognition of social justice implies the recognition of God in the scheme of all things and this is tantamount to progress and development" (p.84). God is believed to be the creator of the universe, and the sole maker of man and all sole source of all good; prosperity, peace and justice. The fact that Africans believe in this, it boosts the national development and by this, Africans work towards ensuring prosperity, peace and justice in the society. African traditional religion has made her adherents come of the knowledge that man has specific triangular obligations to himself, his fellow human and the society to which he belongs and then, to his maker. Africans do not joke with this maker of his life and would do anything to be at peace with his maker. Hence, the desire for life (ndu) and its preservation is the summumbonum. According to Ikechi-Ekpendu et al. (2016), it is called social justice.

The religious teachings we Africans get from the priest, diviner and through oral performances are mostly based on morality. For Ezeanya (1980), "to attempt to build a nation without god is to hope to construct a massive structure upon the foundation of sand, such building will collapse at the slightest gust of wind and the fall will be great". This goes to show how much religion cares about the society and its promotion. With peace, justice and harmony in the nation, Nigeria will be a place where people will live in harmony and that will attract foreigners.

Africans belief in the preservation of life and hence, abhors killings or anything that will endanger a person's life. This is an ethical and moral teaching of the African traditional religion. If the nation buys and returns back to the teachings and tenets of African traditional religion, kidnapping, rituals killings will stop and our health sector will also develop as doctors and nurses will be keen on preserving life first. People will have to be careful with things they do as not to hurt or take another person's life. Corruption will end too. The social roles of African traditional religion centers on God and his creation and also his desire for man to look after his fellow man.

According to Agha (2003), "no society can live without morals". He argues that morality encompasses of those standards of conduct which the reasonable man approves. Conceptually, African traditional religion provides adherents a guideline about life and the life after. Morality brings peace and unity and the idea of god in African cosmology is a unifying factor. Nigeria cannot develop on itself unless the citizens come together to develop it.

## 2. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Africans are conscious of the community consciousness which is their common philosophy "I am because you are and because I am, you are". They believe to having to take care of others so as they too can survive in the same environment. This, when recognized by every African or rather when Africans go back to their root, it will increase the economy of our nations. A nation where everyone will be working towards a sustainable society that will give everyone comfort. Comfort has to do with economy too because you cannot be in a place where roads leading to your house is not good and be



comfortable. You cannot be comfortable when you do not see food to buy so as to eat. Man is not an island. African traditional religion teaches to look out for another. For example, in Adazi-ani, you see individuals tarring roads without the help of the government.

Also, Africans are well known for agriculture. As a matter of fact, the oil well, for Nigeria in the 20th century was agriculture before the emergence of crude. Hence, farm produce sustains the nation and also livestock too. When this is further encouraged, it will help in alleviating poverty.

There is also need to recognize the fact that the traditional religion can be a significant attraction for tourist interested in experiencing the rich cultural heritage of Africa. Tourism and cultural ministries can generate revenue thereby contributing to economic development in regions where the traditional religion is practiced. Also, the traditional religion often involves communal rituals and gatherings. These events can strengthen community bonds and social capital which can have indirect economic benefits by promoting cooperation and trust among community members and as well, boost their morale for urge for development.

Some aspects of African traditional religion involve the production of traditional arts, crafts and artefacts. These products, if encouraged can be a source of income for the Africans and the nation at large. Not forgetting too is the medicinal expertise of the traditional religion which is currently being recognized and invested in and as well, contributing immensely to the growth of the economy.

## **CONCLUSION**

The study of African traditional religion can be relevant to national development by preserving cultural heritage, fostering social cohesion, promoting tourism and economic growth, imparting ethical values, facilitating interfaith dialogue, promoting environmental sustainability, and enhancing healthcare options with the traditional medicine.

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