(Re)imagining Ndau indigenous religion of Zimbabwe in the digital age

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Abstract

The twenty-first century has been characterized by various digital communication technologies that are a major agent of globalization. Today Africans find themselves in new geo-cultural contexts within their countries and in the diaspora through migration triggered by many factors. These geographical dislocations disrupt the traditional clan settlement patterns and in turn challenge indigenous media of communication in indigenous African societies. Digitalization becomes a lifestyle in this globalizing world. African Indigenous Religions (AIRs) practitioners are embracing digital communication facilities. However, there are fears within some sections of African indigenous communities whether African Indigenous Religions could utilize the emergent communication technologies and remain unscathed. These sections hold the view that digital communication technologies are incompatible with the African indigenous worldview. There has been scanty literature on AIRs in general and Ndau religio-culture in particular to respond to these fears. Mindful of the variations that characterize AIRs, this article uses Ndau religio-culture of Zimbabwe to contend that AIRs are dynamic and have long been digital. In this regard, digitalization is neither new nor opposed to African indigenous religions. Rather, it is the amplification of the old as it fuses with the new. This empirical article employs the theological ethnography design to access the meaning embedded in the indigenous Ndau's interaction with the digital communication services. Afro-centricity provides the lens to glean phenomena from the standpoint of the Ndau as key players in their life-worlds. The research findings were that the Ndau have a penchant for innovation and creativity in ways of thinking and doing things in order to survive in new circumstances. The article concludes that the Ndau religio-culture is an enduring heritage that has responded to the digital communication revolution by finding ways of reimagining and revitalizing its communication repertoire to be compliant with the dictates of the digital era.