

## A Philosophical Appraisal of Spirituality and Witchcraft through Mami Water Belief System in Igbe Cult Traditional Religion in Aguleri Cosmology

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**ABSTRACT:-** Various symbolic rituals recognize *Mami Water*'s power to give countless blessings, but at the same vein require that the devotees give gifts to others as well as receive them for themselves. Nonetheless, the fears and aspirations of the devotees are equally identified in the course of the sound and incantations ascribed to *Mami Water* and other divinities. Sacred sound is a novel ground breaking study in the area of religious scholarship and it has been shown to be intrinsically important in aiding of spirit invocation and possession in religious communication of any kind as it pertains to Igbo tradition and culture through the mediation of some indigenous instruments. Belief in witchcraft is one of the focal point of negativity why mother African is under development through spirit possession. This paper focuses on the creation of spirit possession in *Mami Water* worship through the mediating power of sound produced by clapping of hands with the hand fans of the members of *Igbe* cult – a collective ritual of group of devotees who worship the tutelary spirits. Through philosophical and metaphysical analysis, it explores how this ritual emerges as a manifestation of the group's intrinsic power of accomplishment, adaptation, and invention. Moving through ritual spaces and will, these mediums utilize their independent and ritual performative power in order to actively develop their religious practices through sound in Aguleri cosmology.

**Keywords:** Devotees, Invocation, Mediums, Ritual, Sound.

Witches are clearly distinguished from sorcerers. The former are called *ndi amusu*, while the latter are called *ndi na akpa nsi*, 'those who deal in destructive medicine'.

Emefie Ikenga Metuh (1999: 128)

### I. INTRODUCTION

The main issue of creolization of African water divinities can be found in the ritual production of *Mami Water* through the ritual and spiritual endeavours of the *Igbe* cult, an indigenous religious movement in Aguleri cosmology. According to Kathleen O' Brien Wicker "*Mami Water* is the name applied by Africans to a class of female and male water divinities or spirits that have accreted elements from several European, New World, and Indian cultural traditions" (2000:199). In Igbo traditional religion, *Mami Water* is understood and interpreted in various ways as an "African-centered manifestation of traditional water deities despite her apparently foreign iconographic characteristics (Wicker, 2000:203). According to Achebe (1986:15) "with the arrival of Europeans to this part of the world, *Nne Mmiri* became known as "*Mami Wota*" – a translation which enabled the local inhabitants to communicate the existence and exploits of this female deity to foreigners". In thinking of the devotees of the *Igbe* cult religion, Jell-Bahlsen (1995a; 1995c) comments that "*Mami Water*'s luxurious long hair is dada-rasta hair and represents unrestrained fertility, creativity, and spirituality. The white complexion and facial features in *Mami Water* representations are regarded not as maskers of ethnicity but rather as a symbol of the sacred". One school of thought believes that "a legend from Surinam tells of the Great Mother of the Inland Waters who delivered Africans from slavery as they made their way up to the Mamadam River in two boats with six paddlers each. One interpretation of this legend suggests that its original inspiration was in stories about a woman who aided African slaves' in escaping from bondage (Paxson, 1980:54-80). This is the reason why inscription of small boats with six paddlers are found in a number of African *Mami Water* shrines, perhaps recalling these traditions (Drewal, 1988b:41).

### **Origin of Igbe Cult Religion**

However, not minding the historical paradigm and the contestations of the origin of *Igbe* religion as an indigenous religious movement in Nigeria, Johnson (1927:74) posits that it originated from Kokori. Nzewi asserts that oral tradition have it that “the music style in which it figures originated in Aguleri – a farming/fishing Igbo community on *Omambala* River basin of South-Eastern Nigeria” (2000:25). According to David Chidester (1996) the supposed discovery of such indigenous religious movement was based on the practice of morphological comparison that established analogies between the strange and the familiar. He argues that morphology did not depend upon reconstructing historical links between ancient and contemporary religions; rather, morphological comparison relied exclusively on the observation of formal or functional resemblance (Chidester, 1996:18). Apparently, one obvious social function of belief in witchcraft is social control and the preservation of order...while the belief in witchcraft can also support certain types of authority in society (Bourdillon, 2000:187).

It is on this position that Akama (1985:25) asserts that “belief in witchcraft and practices of other allied antisocial evils appears to be the root cause of the emergence of the *Igbe* cult” in community like the Aguleri and its environs. In Igbo belief system, witchcraft is found in all Igbo communities, but its potency and practices seems to be very strong among the riverside of the Igbo, *ndi olu* like the *Omanbala* people which Aguleri community belongs to. According to Metuh, “belief in witchcraft is not found in all Igbo communities, but it is very strong among the riverside Igbo, *ndi olu*” (1999:128). It is believe in social anthropology that women are basically the people that practise witchcraft in Igbo ontology that is why Metuh (1999:128-129) again comments that “the woman is the witch, *Amusu*. Men who practise witchcraft are hard to find, but they do exist and are called *Ajalagba*, wizards. *Ajalagba* are by far more powerful and more dangerous than witches, hence the saying: *Amusu ada ebu ajalagba*, ‘A witch cannot carry a wizard’. This has overtones of male chauvinism and is often used by men to remind women who appear to be very forward of their subordinate place in society”. No wonder, then it is believed that witchcraft is one of the negativities why mother African is under development and coupled with the question raised by Walter Rodney in his book: “*How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*” thus – ‘can development take place when our production strategy is influenced by the demands of the world market which is determined almost exclusively by the pattern of production and consumption within capitalist Europe and America?’ (1972:314). However, this is to counter the claims that “the gospel in Igbo land achieved an amazing success where the walls of pagandom collapse Jericho-wise” (Ayandele, 1973:126). This is the reason why Bourdillon (2000:181) echoes that “whatever outsiders may think of the reality of a witch’s powers, in the perspective of insiders, witchcraft is a social reality that cannot easily be laid aside”. Interestingly, it has been observed that the *Igbe* cult movement carry out their religious rituals every *Afor* and *Nkwo* days in Igbo calendar and every four days interval respectively known as *Izu* in Igbo tonal language. At the shrine, according to Jell-Bahlsen (1989) the devotees meet every fourth day of make offerings and dance in honour of these divinities. No wonder Umar Danfulani (1999:167) affirms that “African communities used various methods for controlling witchcraft before the introduction of colonial rule”. Similarly, Kathleen Wicker (2000:198) asserts that “these characteristics differentiate African spiritual traditions from Western religions, where faith usually involves acceptance of an articulated set of beliefs posited as absolute truths”. But not withstanding the controversies on the origin, one thing that is clear is the fact that the ritual activities of the *Igbe* cult movement is filled with ritual dance and songs that subdues the physical bodies of the devotees, while the spirit possession comes to the fore, in which a state of altered consciousness is attained and worship will be better effected through the mediation of *Mami Water* worship. It is no wonder then that “possession by a water spirit may induce a socially accepted form of dancing out of control” (Jell-Bahlsen, 2000:42). Michael Nabofa (2005:358) asserts that “these songs have been claimed to have been revealed to any of the members in dreams and in visions. They are not codified but learnt by memory because most members are illiterates”. He argues that “the ability to be able to master these songs indicates how mature the person is, spiritually and also how involved the person is in the religion. Although, these songs are not written they are well punctuated and they blend with the musical instrument” (Nabofa, 2005:358).

From the analysis of the above assertion, it has come to show that the historical paradigm of how the dance came into being which has been part and parcel of the Aguleri oral tradition that is somehow neglected. No wonder Jacob Olupona (1991) has observed that the failure to engage in a history of African religions has created the impression that the religion is static and unchanging and that in the history of religions, diachronic analysis can no longer be neglected. Such analysis normally leads to issues of continuity and change in African traditional religion (Olupona, 1991:3). Chidester draws our attention to the idea that “such oral tradition as a myth is not a story with canonical closure, but rather than being subject to timeless repetition, such a myth is opened and reopened by interpretation, and as a result, such myth is a type of ongoing cultural work” (1996:261). Anthony Aveni asserts that by this way “history is regarded as a chain of events, a process whereby every happening contributed to the causation of future events” (1998:315). Against this backdrop, it should be noted as Moghalu commented that “African science is not the popular perception about the manipulation of

supernatural phenomena that pervades African societies, but in fact was underpinned by natural, empirical scientific knowledge more advanced than what obtained in what is today the Western world, thousands of years ago, and certainly rivalled it as the gap narrowed in the last few hundred years and Africa went into a period of reversal as a result of colonialism. Who knows what trajectory Africa's innovation path might have taken had colonialism not intervened? This is not an excuse for Africa's underdevelopment, but only a counterfactual....With the confidence that this knowledge of recorded history should imbibe, Africans have a basis to develop a worldview that approaches technology and innovation from the standpoint, not of an alien wonder, but of reclaiming a lost heritage" (2013: 215-216).

### **Understanding of Witchcraft as Cult in Igbo Cosmology**

Witchcraft itself is made up of two spiritual powers – the power of metempsychosis and that of destruction. The power of metempsychosis is known in Igbo tonal language as *eriri*. This means a method of leaving one's physical body and transforming to other spiritual forms, while the destructive mystical power of attacking / inflicting spiritual injuries to others by eating their souls known as *Obi* in Igbo language. A witch is a wise person supposed to possess supernatural powers in consequence of forming a league with devil or evil spirits. Affirming to this, Metuh (1999:129) asserts that "a witch is a person who possesses a psychic quality which permits her spirit, *Obi*, to leave her body, *aru*, while she is asleep to afflict injuries on others or even to eat their souls". Commenting further, He writes that:

A witch uses no medicines, utters no spells and performs no rites. Her powers are inherent in her personality; she did not have to learn it like learning a trade. In this, it differs from *Igwo Ogwu*, making medicine, or *Ikpa Nsi*, sorcery, which are arts and trades sometimes learnt through a long period of apprenticeship. Both witchcraft and sorcery have the same purpose, namely, the evil and devilish intention of injuring their fellow men by occult means. Some people are born witches, though witchcraft can also be acquired by swallowing a chemical substance inducing a psychic state which makes it possible for witches to leave their bodies and attack others spiritually (Nabofa, 1999:129).

A witch projects her evil thoughts directly from her mind, invisibly and without causing and invoking. In the Yoruba context, a witch is normally called (*Ajo*) and also in Igbo context it is called *Amusu*. Then the question that arises is: Is witchcraft real? Yes, witchcraft is real because information gathered from people who have confessed their bad behaviour for example, a woman who confessed that she causes her husband's business failure, she killed the child of her brother and other people around. Once a witch confessed and promises to leave the craft, she is spared and leaves a good life normally. Accusation of witchcraft are made against real persons not imaginary personalities, victims of witchcraft are real. Those who confess to be head of anti-social secret members are also real. The main information concerning witchcraft is gathered from confession made by the witch themselves. These confessions constitute largely to the people's belief about their existence of witches. People ask: if x is not a witch, how could she claim to have done all these things that she claimed that she had done? The witches carry out their activities in circullit or shadow form. She must have been sleeping on her bed in her physical body but she is not there spiritual. According to Metuh (1999):

Igbo beliefs about witchcraft generally follow the African patterns already known in social anthropology. The woman is the witch, *Amusu*. Men who practice witchcraft are hard to find, but they do exist and are called *Ajalagba*, wizards. *Ajalagba* are by far more powerful and more dangerous than witches, hence the saying: *Amusu ada ebu ajalagba*, 'A witch cannot carry a wizard'. This has overtones of male chauvinism and is often used by men to remind women who appear to be very forward of their subordinate place in society (128-129).

Even in traditional Yoruba belief system, there is anti-wickedness divinities in Yoruba land called *Ayelala*, who can do or single out wicked witches for punishment. It is generally believed that this divinity do not pick innocent people. Those singled out to be witches are indeed witches. When they make full confessions and promise not to engage in further evil deeds, they are usually spared. The institution of witchcraft is more or less like that of secret society, because unless one is a witch you cannot understand what they do or carry out their activities. It is only during the confession time that their secrets are usually thrown out to the public thereby making some of their members and their secrets known at the same time.

### **Antidotes to Ward off Witches away**

There are some items that have been revealed that serves as ritual antidotes against the attacks of evil forces of witches. This is because they abhor such items. It has been observed that such items carry in them some spiritual forces that scare witches away. Such items are as follows:

a. Cocoyam: It has been observed that person that involves themselves in the act witchcraft practices does not eat foods that are associated with cocoyam. This is because it is believed in Igbo cosmology that cocoyam has a malevolent spirits to exude from it which is desirous of cocoyam, may cause death. According to Metuh (1999:130) “a cocoyam put under the pillow drives away a witch.

b. Broom: This is a ritual item that significant in neutralizing the potency of evil deeds of witches. It has the power of exorcism and purification in Igbo belief system. It is believed to have mystical power which can neutralize any negative effect in either a person or a place. Whoever, therefore, that touches or uses it would be cleansed of its impurities. The belief is that the spiritual magnet it is capable of extracting impurities from a diseased and unwholesome condition” (Nabofa, 1994:66). Writing in the context of *Igbe* religion, an indigenous religious movement, He went further to explain that it act as weapon:

Which attract and repel both visible and invisible missiles meant for all forms of psychic attacks. ... The broom, apart from its being used for purification and psychic attack expeller, it also symbolizes unity. With the way the components: the broom sticks are joined together with some other symbolic items {especially the cowries} it invokes a sense of unity among those who worship in such a shrine. When placed in a conspicuous place in the shrine, though for purification and exorcism purposes, it still reminds the devotees of their unity and bond of fellowship not only when they come together for worship but also wherever they may be and meet after worship” (Nabofa, 1994:66).

c. Special Charms prepared by a native doctor is believed in Igbo system to catch “a witch red-handed to her transformed form” (Metuh, 1999:131).

d. There is a belief that there are some powerful deities in Igbo cosmology that are known to be horrific and terrorizing to witches. Nonetheless, those dedicated to their service are never attacked by witches according to Metuh (1999:131).

### **The Philosophical Appraisal of Witchcraft in African Ontology**

A Witch is a wise person supposed to possess supernatural powers in consequences of forming a league with devil or evil spirits. According to Metuh “a witch is a person who possesses a special psychic quality which permits her spirit, *Obi*, to leave her body, *aru*, while she is asleep to afflict injuries on other or even to eat their souls. A witch uses no medicines, utters no spells and performs no rites. Her powers are inherent in her personality; she did not have to learn it like learning a trade. In this, it differs from *igwo ogwu*, making of medicine, or *Ikpa Nsi*” (1999:129). A witch projects her evil thoughts directly from her mind, invisibly and without causing and invoking. In the Yoruba context, a witch is normally called *Ajo* and also in Igbo tonal language, context and cosmology, it is called *Amusu* or *Amosu* depending on the difference of dialectics. Then the critical question that comes to mind quickly is: Is witchcraft real? Here, I can tersely say in affirmation yes because information gathered from people who have confessed their bad behaviour for example “a young girl whom I know had a sore on her foot which refused to heal after several years of treatment. People in the village still say that this was because a witch spat into her sore” (Metuh, 1999: 130). It is on this position that Metuh again comments that:

The Igbo say that *Amusu adaghi ebu n'iro*, ‘a witch never attacks an outsider’. The victim must be close relation, a friend or a neighbour. The belief is that a witch carries away a person’s soul, she enters into spiritual communication with it, so it is only those whom she knows well enough to communicate with *ndi oma obi ha*. The second reason is based on the belief that the witch is sometimes forced to contribute her own children, her relatives, or even part of herself, to the ghoulish feast of the witch club, when she cannot find other victims” (1999:130).

Once a witch confessed and promises to leave the craft, she is spared and leave a good life normally. Accusation of witchcraft are made against real persons not imaginary personalities, victims of witchcraft are real. Those who confess to be head of anti-social secret members are real also. The main information concerning witchcraft is gathered from confessions made by the witch themselves. These confessions constitutes largely to the people’s belief about their existence of witches. People ask: If X is not a witch, how could she claim to have done all these things that she claimed that she had done? The witches carry out their evil activities in circullit of shadow form. She must have been sleeping on her bed in her physical body but she is not there spiritually. Witches engage in what one can describe as ‘abstract travel’ as is done or practices in some cultic or secret societies. We have anti-wickedness divinities in Yoruba land called *Ayelala*, who can do or single out wicked witches for punishment. According to Metuh “a charm prepared by a *dibia* can catch a witch red-handed in her transformed form. Some *Arusi* are known to be terrors to witches those dedicated to their service are never attacked by witches” (1999:131).

It is generally believed that this divinity do not pick innocent people. Those singled out to be witches are indeed witches. When they make full confessions and promise not to engage in further evil deeds, they are usually spared. The institution of witchcraft is more or less like that of secret society, because unless one is a witch you cannot understand what they do or how they carry out their activities. It is only during their symbolic confession time that their activities are usually thrown out to the public thereby making some of their members and their secrets known at the same time. Although, there are ways to prevent attacks from witches and the commonest precaution is the use of cocoyam. It is believed in Igbo cosmology that witches do abhor food items prepared with anything associated with cocoyam therapy. According Ikenga Metuh “remedies for witchcraft are many and easily available. The commonest is a simple cocoyam tuber which is believed to be a taboo to witches. A cocoyam put under the pillow drives away a witch” (1999:131).

### **The Concept of Oath Taking in Secret Society as Part of Witchcraft in Traditional Religion**

The Oxford Advanced dictionary Learner’s (Hornby, 1995) defined oath as a solemn or formal appeal to God or big deal to God or to a deity or something held in reverence, in witness of the truth of a statement or the binding character of a promise or undertaking and act of swearing a statement or promise collaborated by such an appeal or the form of words in which such a statement is made. From the above definition, we can see that oath taking have a significant role to play in a secret society like the witchcraft. As it does in association and in the corporate society example in a court of law, it is conventional that a witness must take an oath what he or she is about to say is the truth, also in any high governmental establishment; members take an oath not to divulge the government or administration. Oath taking in secret society is therefore mostly done during the initiation ceremonies of new members at each time, they promise total allegiance to the society to protect the image and tenaciously adhere and also keep the secret of the society and failure to normally cause trouble to them. No wonder then Ikenga Metuh described witchcraft as “club of soul-eaters” through the mediation of the *Igbe* cult dance as a religious communicative system (1999:129).

### **Dance as a communicative system**

The communicative value of music is however more apparent in Africa where music forms a very important part of their rich cultural heritage (Ohadike, 2007:9). Ohadike (2007:9) again argues that “Africans on the Continent and in the diaspora use music and dance to express their feelings and to preserve their culture and history”, and as a communication device, they “serve as a form of record keeping” (Ohadike, 2007:11). Rodney comments that:

Music and dance had key roles in uncontaminated African society. They were ever present at birth, initiation, marriage, death, as well as appearing at times of recreation. Africa is the continent of drums and percussion. African peoples reached the pinnacle of achievement in that sphere. Because of the impact of colonialism and cultural imperialism...Europeans and Africans themselves in the colonial period lacked due regard for the unique features of African culture. Those features have a value of their own that cannot be eclipsed by the European culture either in the comparable period before 1500 or in the subsequent centuries. They cannot be eclipsed because they are not really comparable phenomena (1973:41-42).

Hudgens & Trillo (1990:52) affirms that “nowhere in the world is music more a part of the very process of living than in Africa”, without it “the efficacy of the people’s worship are reduced to nothing” (Akinfenwa, 2013:6). According to Pratt (1914:60) “of these artistic appeals, none is on the whole more penetrating or more intense than music. Nothing that can be urged by those who profess themselves to be insensible to musical impressions, or by those who have become righteously exacerbated by the misuse of sacred music here or elsewhere, can break the force of this general truth. There is no artistic means of getting at the internal springs of feeling in popular heart that can compare with music”. Leonard (1906:429) argues that “the religion of the natives [Africans] is their existence and their existence is their religion. It supplies the principles on which their law is dispensed and morality adjudicated. The entire organization of their common life is so interwoven with it that they cannot get away from it”. No wonder, Shorter (1978:49) affirms that “...Africans are notoriously religious”, while Isichei (1976:24) particularly asserts that “the Igbos are nothing if not profoundly religious, and all accounts of their life reflect the fact”. Stephen Ezeanya (1980:324) posits that in Africa, “life is religion, and religion is life”. Ekeke (2013:3) argues that “this means that religion could not be explained away in Africa and whoever tries it will be seen as a stranger to Africa”. Mbiti (1975:9) asserts that religion is by far the richest part of the African heritage. In this wise, Chernoff describes African religion as a “danced belief” (1999:172), and as a form of worship that is visible and inherently attached to bodily action (Heuser, 2008:35). Buttressing this further, James Early posits that:

Throughout world history sacred sounds have served as a medium for human cultures to raise queries, advance beliefs, give praise, and inspire others to join in exploration of the mysteries of earthly existence and the greater universe. These sacred sound traditions encompass a broad range of expressive forms: melodic and

repetitive vocalizations called chants; sharp, passionate, emotions-filled hums, groans, shouts; percussive, rhythmic hand claps and foot stomps; and extended song, sermon, and instrumental arrangements. Instrumental music, sung prayers, and mystical chants have been used to communicate with the divine, to unite religious communities, and to express moral, political, social, and economic aspirations. Sacred sounds in many traditions are the central means for invocation of spirits. The utterance of particular sounds is thought by many cultures to form a connection to all the elements of the universe. In some belief systems music and sound vibrations are pathways for healing body, mind, and spirit. Among the wide range of human expressive behaviour, the capacity to infuse the joys, sorrows, and humility that characterize religious and spiritual beliefs into oral poetry, chants, songs, and instrumental music is certainly one of the most powerful and inspirational ways all peoples and cultures acknowledge the spirit of the Supreme in their lives (1997:1).

Akinfenwa (2013:7) asserts that “the origin of music and dance is a mystery, but their importance cannot be over emphasized in religious circle”. According to NTL:

In the olden days, during the Stone Age, records show that Africans were mostly wanderers moving from place to place and living inside caves. Their major occupation was hunting for animals which served them for food. When the man comes home in the evening he tells his family stories of his exploits for the day. Imitating the movements of the animals that he encountered in the forest. Some scholars believed that it was from his imitation of the movement of birds that dance was born (1990:20).

Buttressing this further, Wosien (1992:17) affirms that “man was taught how to dance by the animals, which he observed closely and learned to imitate. He depended on them for his food, clothing, tools and weapons, and therefore needed to study their habits and characteristics”. Akinfenwa (2013:7) argues that “people specialized on them and earned their daily bread. Music and dance cannot be replaced by anything in the world. A world without music and dance will face trouble. This is because of the important position they occupied in worship. Man was made to worship the Supreme Being and the worship is not complete without music and dance”. Music infuses all the activities of the African from the cradle to the grave (Hailey, 1957:67). Awolalu (1991:132) affirms that “the Africans are a singing race. A lot of their music is of a religious nature. In these songs, they portray their joy and sorrow, their hopes and fears. In each song there is a wealth of material for the student who will patiently sift and collate. Ritual songs and dancing follow prescribed patterns and a study of them will reveal a lot of the people’s beliefs”. According to Ruth Stone (1994:391) “religious aspect of music is fundamental to the very being of many musical acts and cannot be stripped from the performance. Thus, it is only for analytical ends that we can, to any extent, pull the religious from the performance bundle from temporary scrutiny”. Reaffirming this affirmation, Gorer, (1935:289) cited in Doob (1961:73) posits that Africans allegedly dance for joy, and they dance for grief; they dance for love and they dance for hate; they dance to bring prosperity and they dance to avert calamity; they dance for religion and they dance to pass the time. Mutua (1999:173) argues that “that is why the degradation of African religions should be seen as the negation of the humanity of the African people”. Onwochei (1998:286) explains that “there are so many ways Africans express their musical heritage”. Nketia (1989:119) argues that interacting and rejoicing with music and dance in the context of ritual and worship is also an important aspect of the African concept of religious expression and may be given free reign at religious festivals. It is in this wise that Lucas (1948:110) posits that feasts like the *Ogwa* festival is followed by general merriment, including processions and dances. No wonder Okafor (1994:130) affirms that “the Igbo would appear to be a people perpetually celebrating because in every moon of the 13 moons in the year, some communities somewhere are celebrating in Igbo land”. According to Jafotito Sofola:

Music is used in African lives in various forms even in spurring farming people to action as is done when the farmer is cutting his field; it is used in folktales that is told the children under the night’s moonlight; it is used during wrestling with composition that spurs or disarm the wrestlers as the case may be; it is used in social and religious activities, to name some uses. The music form has its dissonance and consonance, characteristics that make it African music that need not be forced into the Western or oriental moulds which have their own respective characteristics. It is left for the students of African music art forms to conduct researches into them and propagate and preserve them in their distinctive forms having, of course, the possibilities for adventurism as they wish to have (1973:102).

Buttressing this further, Kwasi Aduonum notes that:

In Africa, music is life; that is, it permeates all daily activities. Music in Africa is the soul which is ultimately concerned with various customs and religious practices. The African is born, named, initiated, fortified, fed, nurtured, buried with music. In Africa, music heals the sick, music directs and guides the blind, music comforts the widow, and music stops tribal warfare. Music is in the office ... Finally, music accompanies every single daily activity (1980:19-20).

In furtherance of this assertion, John Mbiti asserts that:

A lot of African music and songs deal with religious ideas and practices. The religious rituals, ceremonies and festivals are always accompanied by music singing and sometimes dancing. Music gives outlet to the emotional expression of the religious life, and it is a powerful means of communication in African traditional life. It helps to unite the singing or dancing group to express its fellowship and participation in life. Many musical instruments are used by African peoples (1991:71).

Music has universal appeal especially African and Nigerian music are sang or produced in local language and that is why Euba (1977:13) argues that “Nigerian tone language usually had its own inherent melodic structure and the imposition of an imported melody resulted in a conflict with the natural melodic structure of the text, thereby distorting its meaning”. The spirituality of sacred sounds, bodily movement, chanting, incarnations, and divinations are literarily, in tandem throughout the African diaspora, no wonder Melville Herskovits asserts that:

The African past must be included under the rubric traditions of the past, whether these traditions are held overtly or not, becomes apparent when the religious habits of Negroes in the Caribbean and South America are anchored to both ends of the scale whose central position they comprise—to Africa, the aboriginal home of all these varieties of religious experience, on the one hand, and to the United States, on the other, where the greatest degree of acculturation to European norms has taken place (1941:224).

However, Tagg (1989:285-298) argues that the distinction between Africans and Europeans are often based on essentialist ideas about music and people which are often ascribed racist stereotypes and assumptions. Buttressing this further, Roman-Velazquez (2006:298) equally made a reference to this assertion by concluding that “racism has often resulted in blacks being thought of as more authentic in terms of musical sexual expression of the body, whilst Europeans have often been associated more with the mind and less spontaneous type of musical performance”.

Apparently, ethnicity basically often linked to national identity is invariably used to equate, shared features or characteristics simply due to a belief in what Shelemay (2001:249) describes “as common ancestry, memories of a shared historical past, and elements in common, such as kingship patterns, physical continuity, religious affiliation, language, or some combination of these”. It is on this position that Ohadike (2007:2) argues that “every sacred drum has a name, and can be conceived as belonging to a particular clan or family unit, albeit a family of drums [sic]. He asserts that “a sacred drum cannot be treated as the property of an individual. Instead, it is a member of a lineage organization. Like any other member of the lineage, it is treated with certain amount of respect, and it enjoys certain rights and privileges. This explains in part why an African clan could go to war if its sacred drum was violated, seized or stolen by another clan” (Ohadike, 2007:2-3). James Clifford idiomatically states that:

Groups negotiating their identity in contexts of domination and exchange persist; patch themselves together in ways different from a living organism. A community, unlike a body, can lose a central organ and not die. All the critical elements of identity are in specific conditions replaceable: language, land, blood, leadership religion. Recognized, viable tribes exist in which any one or even most of these elements are missing, replaced, or largely transformed. The idea of culture carries with it an expectation of roots, of a stable, territorialized existence (1988:338).

Conversely, the sound emitting from the hand fan of the *Igbe* cult as an indigenous religious movement is believed to be the sacred sound of the initiates of the cult in Aguleri cosmology in the sense that it is “created by the people, sustained by the people, and is for the people” (Araki, 2004:214). Nnamah (2002:7) asserts that most obvious is the fact that Aguleri have an organized indigenous religious movement not the typical acephalous society structure commonly associated with Igbo land before the advent of colonialism. Nettl (1983:156) affirms that music like that of the *Igbe* cult “supports tribal integrity when many peoples, whites and other Indian tribes, because of the onset of modernization and Westernization, come into a position of influencing each other’s culture”.

### **Spirit invocation and possession in Aguleri cosmology**

Spirits are unscrupulous creatures in settings in which peripheral and subordinate members of the society notably the initiates of a particular cult like that of the *Igbe* are possessed, whereas, spirits uphold morality in societies where it is those in authority who enter trance (Lambek, 1989:39). Michael Nabofa argues that “it is within the world of classical sound that the elements of traditional cultic ritual have a natural alliance” (1994:38) which invariably calls for spirit invocation and possession. Janice Boddy (1994:407) explains that “these forces may be ancestors or divinities, ghosts of foreign origin, or entities both ontological and ethnically

alien". Spirit invocation and possession is a significant feature of life in the ritual liturgy of the *Igbe* as an indigenous religious cult movement in Aguleri cosmology. During the ritual festival, the recognition of the abiding power of spirit invocation and possession emerges in a variety of circumstances during the pounding sound of the hand fans and is constructed from signs ranging from apparently psychotic breaks to sudden competent expression of trance behaviour during the feast. According to Michael Lambek (1989) some initiates with spirits have to observe different taboos imposed upon them but never enter except when the sound like that of the hand fans is activated, managed and manipulated in ritual circumstances. He argues that "people's ability and circumstances differs, but the main point is that not every spirit will make the same demands upon the host – although, when such is made there is every possibility or tendency that the demands are quite conventional" (Lambek, 1989:42). A close observation of trance behaviour can be seen and interpreted as an expression of the identity or attitude of the spirit and the stage or immediate tendency of its relationship with the host and it is in this situation that altered state of consciousness or the creation of a secondary self is achieved, but they are not determined by them (Frazier, 1922:91).

Spirit possession in Aguleri cosmology during the *Igbe* ritual festival can be viewed, in broad ways or terms, as a symbiotic and symbolic system of divine communication. First, one must have to consider the period of the emergence of a spirit in a particular host, during which messages concerning its individual status are communicated. At this stage, it is during the ritual decoration of the hand fans during the *Ogwa* ritual that certain ritual items like the white chalk is used to imbue it with spiritual potency and symbolic qualities. All these act as ritual mechanism and primordial symbol of spirit ties without which nothing can be done (Shapiro, 1995). Kazuo Fukura (2011: 107-109) affirms that "these are must-have items that constitute a teacher spirit's tray on the altar of a medium". In this situation, the identity of the spirit emerges during the interpretations of signs and a circumstance on the first appearances of the ancestral spirit which emerges during the application of ritual medicine on the body of the hand fans.

Secondly, during the stage of spirit possession, the behaviour of the host's is conventional and highly constrained by the codes of performance [the rhythmical sequence of the sound of the hand fans which goes simultaneously with its dance styles and praises]. Lambek (1989:44) argues that such an experience is equally "symbolically rich and open-ended, both because it does not prescribe particular channels or avenues of behaviour to the onlookers and because it's playful quality, especially the use of sound and dance and the comedic-drama are usually kept apart". This is the reason why Wicker (2000:214) comments that "the sound rhythms of *Mami Water* move her devotees as smoothly and unresistingly as a swimmer carries along by the gentle movement of the current". It is during this stage that the sound of the hand fans breaks that spiritual link or barrier between the worlds of seen and unseen in the extraterrestrial realm, and in this situation, it is believed that the community "are dancing on the shoulders of their ancestors" (Glocke & Jackson, 2011:6), through the mediation of ordered hierarchy from deity to man. Lambek (1989:44) asserts that spirit invocation and possession performances are somehow amusing, intellectually and aesthetically gratifying and satisfying. Spirit behaviour is endlessly fascinating to some people; the parties for spirits held at the last stage of a possession attract large audiences as well as hosts whose spirits would not rise otherwise, and the appearance of a spirit on any occasion produces general interest for the entire community.

In the course of ritual liturgy of order, the identity of the spirit is known or established as separate from that of the human host and given both psychological and social reality. When the initiates are under possession, the people so possessed dramatically through dance behave like the spirit which activate and possess them (Ohadike, 2007:10 & Shuaibu, 2002:62). This is because "the dancing contains elements of both reinforcement and inversion of norms of gender typification" (Rasmussen, 1994:79). Nabofa (2005:348) explains that "the services on the holy day are characterized by dance. The votaries demonstrate their skill in dance, beating their hands and laps with their fans. This causes a great vibration which moves the *Ogwa* and they are all dressed in white clothes – their symbols of purity within and without". No wonder, Judith Hanna argues that such vigorous dancing can lead to an altered state of consciousness because it has a unique potential of going beyond communication by creating moods for divine manifestation (1988:286). Emma Cohen (2007:64) asserts that during this stage it creates a "specific atmosphere which has a decisive effect on the nature of the neurophysiological activity in the brains of group members" through the sound which invokes the spirit that is believed to be around in anticipation of mounting on the initiates that eventually results to altered state. Basically, it is with this assimilation and understanding that William James argues that this mystical states or interlude are very brief and cannot be sustained for a long time (1975:367). Andrew Greeley posits that in this mystical episode, the person consciously experiences his intimacy with the cosmos (1974:65). It is also significant to say here that it is during this period that some onlookers do develop eerie feelings and goose pimples according to the views expressed by some of my participants. However, the public is seen here as a conscious and participatory audience enriching ritual production of the hand fans through the mediation of its sound (Ayu, 1986:22).



Nonetheless, it is the booming sound of the hand fans that calls for spirit invocation and possession because its sound would be compared to the wind, and according to Shuaibu (2002:63) “it is everywhere and no one can tell with any accuracy, just how it feels to be possessed, one knows that it is there that is all”. Here, sound wave is nothing more than a compressional wave caused by vibrations (Lapp, 2006:7). In this mystical process, a current of energy or vibration through the sound stimulate the initiates’ spirit and the meeting point is the point of communion of the initiates by hearing the mystical sound emanating from the deep (Akintola, 1992:18). In this mystical transformation lies the whole secret of where spirit invocation and possession are articulated and managed. As a point of emphasis, at this point the identity of the spirit may be in suspense until the enactment of the final ceremony; it is a by-product of the host’s deep motivation and the actual identity of the spirits of the host’s consociates and predecessors (Lambek, 1989:43).

However, during the ritual ceremony, the deep current of the countless rivulets of *Mami Water* extent their tributaries and confluences in traditional community like the Aguleri, while the drum rhythms of *Mami Water* move her devotees as smoothly and unresistingly as a swimmer carried along the gentle movement of the current (Wicker, 2000:214). Nabofa (1994:39) asserts that at this stage the host is in a frenzy mood, while the divine is believed to infuse the total being of the subject and would enter into an intimate inner communication with the devotee. It is also believed that the possessed person would begin to hear sonorous voices blended with melodious sound emanating from inside the deep. He affirms that at this stage also, the devotee would be enticed and would have a feeling of compulsion to go there. He becomes ecstatic and moves to the shore or to that direction, and endeavours to answer the divine summons (Nabofa, 1994:39). Parrinder (1969:67) affirms that anyone who listens to African prayers must have been impressed by the sonorous rehearsals of divine qualities. It is in this context that Nabofa (1994:10) echoes that the artistic/ritualistic object like the hand fan of the *Igbe cult* is regarded as “the people’s theologians and religious spokesman. This is because it provides the language with which the people’s thinking is expressed”. In this wise, African theology should be understood in the context of African life and culture (Appiah, 1995:119).

This is the more reason why *Igbe* religion attaches more importance to spirit of *mami water* in African Religion and spirituality (Wicker, 2000). According to Wicker (2000:199) *mami water* is the name applied by Africans to a class of female and male water divinities or spirits which possesses their devotees. In this situation, “their bodies often end up signifying order and purity when they are displaced according to morally appropriate norms of containment and control” (Masquelier, 2008: 41). Alyward Shorter (1970:112) posits that during this period “the subject is seized with shaking, sways from side to side, falls down and speaks a meaningless, gibberish, or words of a foreign language already known to him”. Similarly, Danfulani (1999:191-192) affirms that it is during such periods that “some members may be gripped by the spirit and they may speak in tongues. Their involvement with glossolalia demonstrates very clearly their practice of spirit possession, similar to what obtains in many Pentecostal churches today”. Nabofa (1994:40) explains that “experience has shown that it is not always very easy to overpower such a possessed person because of the extra power the divine has infused into him because his body would become slippery and to calm the ecstasy; some symbolic items would be applied in order to placate the divine”. The ritual purification of *Igbe* cult members where mystical sound are produced through the mediating power of sound produced by beating of hands and laps features most prominently is a liturgical ritual site to reconstitute royal authority and enable the spirits to perform ritual blessings over the human populace through act of spirit invocation and possession (Bloch, 1987:272). The authority of spirits is a key feature of their makeup and one that actually plays a significant role in the final sort of ritual communication (Lambek, 1989:45).

Thirdly, there are substantive communications between established spirits and their human consociates, including the internal mystical conversations maintained by adepts, but the conversations established between the initiates and the deities are very paramount (Lambek, 1989:45). He argues that in this way, spirit invocation and possession is treated as natural in the sense that, while it is unusual, an oddity that cries out for explanation, it can, in fact, actually be explained as the direct, unmediated contact or outcome of a material process in the thinking and belief of society like the Aguleri people (Lambek, 1989:47). The most common type of variants of this approach is to assume or believe that spirit possession is a more or less direct contact or mystical manifestation of divine attributes where possession is basically concerned essentially with the enhancement of status (Lewis, 1971:127).

On the contrary, spirits are powerful creatures or mystical agencies, and in their effects upon their human hosts and their demands upon others their ritual power is vividly mediated and manifested (Lambek, 1989:50). But, we should take note of the fact that this power is socially constructed, generated and activated when the sound of the hand fan is played in the ritual festivals like the ritual purification and it also portrays a kind of system of communication through which possession is constituted. It is on this position that Lambek (1989:51&55) posits that spirits through the mediation of sound “act with a power and speak with an authority that transcends the mundane, and humans are not considered responsible for their actions or directives at that particular point in time. This is to view spirit invocation and possession as ritual, but ritual that does not merely

speak, in symbolic language or voice, about society, but actively constructs it". Lambek (1989:55) again affirms that in ritual performance like the ritual purification celebration, "real things happen to real people", because this is where the sound from the hand fan is used to invoke and infect spirit possession on the initiates. *Mami Water* spirit has been identified as the local divinity, responsible for positioning and functioning strategically to alter traditional cultural expectations among its devotee's lives. It has been observed that water devotional ritual attracts people, especially women, who are "extraordinary and creative. They do not easily conform to established norms and they are often marginal, yet highly recognized, in their own communities. Many Mammy Water worshippers are prophets, mediums of the water spirits. As performing artists they express new ideas and forms. Their native doctors are frequently women who possess 'extraordinary powers'" (Jell-Bahlsen, 1995a:30). Jell-Bahlsen again stresses that women in particular still derive much spiritual strength, psychological and economic empowerment from this water spirit despite and against the encroachments of Christianity, Islam, and foreign power structures (2000:39).

Arguably, Ilesanmi (1996:5) asserts that it is during such ritual dance through the sound of the hand fan that "the deity himself possesses some of them, making them perform feats beyond the normal capacity of the generality of the people". It is on this position that Erika Bourguignon (1968:4) asserts that spirit possession through the mediation of sound is apparently dependent on the possibility of separating the self into one or more elements. Put in another way, spirit possession entails a complete separation of mind [or agency, spirit, person, self] totally from the body (Rouget, 1985:325). Similarly, Lambek (2008:246-247) affirms that the agency of the host is frequently represented as withdrawing from the body or assuming a passive role in relation to control the body, which is subsequently occupied or simply animated by the possessing spirit. Thus, spirit possession entails the complete displacement of the host's agency by another agent's, such that a bodiless or lifeless agent effectively takes control of the body – but not the mind of self – of a living being. Cohen & Barrett (2008:247) argues that during the possession episode, the agency of the host is completely replaced by an agency other than the host's. Equally significant is the fact that possessing agent is wholly responsible for the duration of the episode. Spirit possession involves a fusion of an antipode with the spirit or mind of a human host or joining of the body of the medium with that of the spirit entity. In other words, the otherness of possession as it is believed is captivating, mysterious and enigmatic (Cohen & Barrett, 2008:250).

### **The Ritual Power of Sound and the Worship of *Mami Water***

On this position, I can say tersely that sound is very significant for spirit invocation and to summon the divine to attend ritual worship of *Mami Water* by the devotees of the *Igbe* cult. Spirit invocation is achieved through the ritual power of sound that invokes the ancestral spirit during the *Ogwa* ritual festival. During the invocation, incantations are recited and praises are showered on the divinities of the community through the simultaneous pounding of the sound that emanates from the beating of their hands, and laps with their fans. It is from the sound of these musical instruments and its ritual incantations that we would be able to know the attributes, praises, the theogony, powers and capabilities of the object of the worship (Nabofa, 1994:16) through the worship of *Mami Water*. Various rituals recognize *Mami Water*'s power to give countless gifts or blessings, but at the same vein require that the devotees give gifts to others as well as receive them for themselves. Nonetheless, the fears and aspirations of the devotees are equally identified in the course of the sound and incantations. The sound of these hand fans is played and manipulated in such a manner that they easily create eerie feelings on those within the liturgical or ritual ground. By such act, the whole place would be charged, and also surrounded with the aura of reverence, while all these combined with some other symbolic processes that will make the ritual liturgy to be more meaningful and enjoyable (Nabofa, 1994:35).

In fact, the sound of the fans and beating of their hands is assumed to be used to bring order, meaning and co-ordination among the devotees when they begin to express their feelings and joy through ritual dance and drama during the *Ogwa* celebration. According to Akama (1985:34) "this fan, when sprinkled with the kaolin, is believed to have some divine power. This fan is used for healing exorcism by the *Uku* or any of the *Igbe* votaries". During ritual possession dance and singing, the sound produced by the ritual mechanisms in conjunction with other things and conditions will as well "aid to awaken the spirituality in the initiates" (Akintola, 1992:25). Robin Horton (1963:98) claims that through the mediation of its symbolic sound for the initiates, "it means the ability to translate the rhythm smoothly and faultlessly into the appropriate dance-steps". Nabofa (1994:35) argues that "when they have been so aroused they would be so elated that they may have direct contact with the holy. In order to arouse the sense of awe and reverence in people's mind and consciousness, cultic functionaries combine non-verbal communication techniques through the mediation of the sound with spoken words in transmitting their messages and intensions in order to align others". He explains that "different messages are usually encoded into the sound expressions and different onlookers decode different meanings from the symbolic ritual dance and drama" (Nabofa, 1994:35).

## II. CONCLUSION

The impressions created by the booming and pounding sound from the hand fans and hands seem to linger and indelibly remain as a point of reference in the minds of most spectators because according to the views expressed by some of my participants they like it. This is one of the reasons why the presence of a devotee, in whose interest a particular ritual is being performed, is needed. Such is required in order to enable the message of the ritual, which is basically transmitted through the symbolic sound to sink deeply into the inner recesses of the devotee where spirit invocation and possession control the movement between individuals while the spiritual potency of the sound is ritually and spiritually contained. From the above, it has been discovered the devotees of *Igbe* cult, an indigenous religious movement in Aguleri tradition and custom are basically witches who worship *mami* water as their goddess.

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