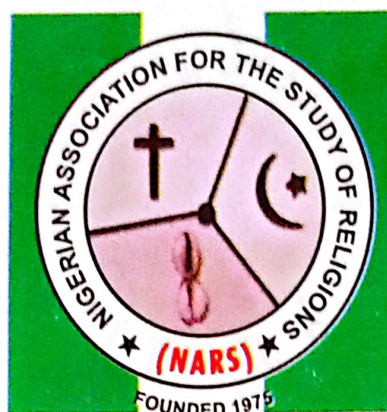


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RELIGION AND INSECURITY: ENGAGING YORUBA INDIGENOUS SPIRITUALITY AS AN ANTIDOTE

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Abstract

Religion and insecurity are two sides of the same coin of a classic African life. It is a concept that has spanned from many centuries ago. Religion in Africa is fundamental to the very life and existence of a typical African man, this is because African religion lays emphasis on spiritual matters believing the spiritual controls the physical including the political, geographical and even economical state of the Africa. Insecurity on the other hand, is one of the major menace that has not only caused set back to the country's growth but has been an impediment to democratic governance and the peace of the nation as a whole. The cases of insecurity originated from the selfish interest of the former leaders during the early years of precolonial administration and spanning through the colonial era even to the emergence of slavery in Africa. This paper set to examine the role of religion in combating the prevailing situation of insecurity through the appropriate use of Yoruba indigenous spirituality as an antidote. This paper would employ the analytical, historical, and the narrative research methods. Finally, this paper suggests that Africans regardless of their religious beliefs should play in maintenance of peace and orderliness in the country, praying for the country and appraising the use of African spiritual means of combat in promoting humanity.

Keywords: Religion, Insecurity, Yoruba, Spirituality, Antidote.

Introduction

In all ages, religion has come to grips with the existence of all human endeavours. Religion at all times plays pivotal role in shaping the thought, perception, approach, feeling and history of humankind.¹ Religion is an organism which has from dateless time in the history of man have been the agent of life itself. No wonder, the study of Emile Durkheim on the Arunta people of Australia shows that religion is the worship of the society.² Thus, religion embraces all aspects of life and it represents wholeness of all existence as well as life itself. Apparently, religion is the keystone or cornerstone of the people's lives and cultures. Religion is far more than a believing way of life in the Nigerian context, where a distinction or separation is not between religion and other areas of human endeavours.³ It serves the aim of building maintaining human society. No doubt, with its consciousness and sensitivity, there is no known society without religion. The fact that Ali Mazrui supports Idowu by stating that, before the arrival of the Cross and Crescent, Africans were at worship.⁴ In other words, he attests to the

fact that before the advent of Christianity and Islam, Africans had their indigenous way of worshipping and approaching the Supreme Being. Dopamu remarks appropriately that, there is no known society where God does not exist.⁵

Many religious organizations in Nigeria fill a critical gap in service provision left by the general failings of state governance and poor funding of public institutions at federal, subnational and local levels.⁶ There exist three prominent religions in Nigerian society of which are; African Traditional Religion (Afrel), Islam and Christianity. What necessitated the arrangement is that African Religion is the indigenous religion of Africans themselves and that before the advent of Islam and Christianity in Nigeria, there exist the religion of Africans which cannot be divulged from a typical African man. African Religion is the religion that evolved from African soil through the overall life experience of the African people. Their religious beliefs and practices permeate every facet of their lives, laden with their cultural, social, political and moral make-ups.⁷ A critical study of Religion in Africa will help one to agree with scholars like Mbiti who believed that the sacred and the secular are intertwined.⁸ The reason is that religion guides all activities of the African life, be it social, political or even economic.

Religion performs many roles which find expression in the agent of maintaining peace and orderliness within a particular geographical setting of which contains both human and material resources. It also helps to create meaning to life. From a critical observation, religion has given meaning to life; making the hopeless to become hopeful and a means of connecting back to God the Supreme Deity of whom all affairs of the universe lies within His reach. Among other roles is the ability of religion to serves as checks and balances in the political landscape of Africa.⁹

Religion in time past has been the canopy of every leadership. Apparently, all leaders claimed to be of one religion or the other of which majority are within the circle of Christianity and Islam yet the persistence of insecurity continues on the rise. African Religion on the same vein can be said to have been of help in the time past as regards the level of maintaining peace and orderliness in the society. Thus, reverence is given to the monarchs who are often regarded as the second in command of the Supreme Deity.

When you ask a child in the Nigerian society to give an assessment on the state of the country, no doubt that his answer would be on insecurity, in fact he will mention sects like *Boko Haram* as the first insurgent causing havoc to Nigerian society. Gone are the days when you can just embark on a journey at any time of the day, the fear of being kidnapped and the demand for ransom from the kidnappers has discouraged a lot of people from traveling. The concept of insecurity is a crosscutting and multi-dimensional concept which has been subject to debates. Insecurity is viewed differently by different researchers, some associating it with how it affects individual lives and existence. The state of fear or anxiety stemming from a concrete or alleged lack of protection or inadequate freedom from danger is seen as insecurity.¹⁰ In another view, Achumba opined that insecurity is a state of being subject to danger, exposed to risk or anxiety.¹¹ A person or thing is said to be secured when not being exposed to any form of

danger or risk of physical or moral aggression, accident, merit or deterioration.¹² Religion by nature detests violence, cheating and acquisition of wealth through illegal and ungodly means. As a matter of fact, Religion is the very foundation of societal morality. The missionaries who brought Christian religion to Nigeria made religious Education and Moral Education compulsory to all students and this helped in no small measure to reduce social vices and the crime rate, most especially in the 50s and 60s. However, immediately after the Government took over mission schools in the Mid-Seventies, things started to go bad.¹³

Lamenting the prevailing insecurity in the country, Nwala of the Believers Capital Assembly said: "It is not funny or unthinkable that the scenario has caused the citizenry to live and feel they are no longer very safe." He wondered why the government seemed no longer capable of securing the people and maintaining peace in the country, and consequently tasked the government to do more by putting in the necessary efforts to address the menace.¹⁴ Many things has been the cause of insecurity in the country some of which are identified as; greed, insincerity, lack of job opportunities, lackadaisical attitude of our leaders, corruption, ethno conflicts, porousness of the border among many others has been the causes of insecurity in Nigeria. And also, I will like to submit that insecurity has been caused by our inability to be true to our confession. Apparently, no religion will encourage violent yet all who causes these havocs and unrests are in one way or the other religiously inclined so to say. Some are even extremists, fanatical and even ascetic to the core. This acclaimed religious life has not been able to convince them to live in peace and harmony, strengthen unity, promoting love and desire for national development.

In Nigeria today, cases of kidnapping, killing among many others have been a prevalent phenomenon in the country. As of 2018 there were 838 reported kidnapping cases in Nigeria. 140 cases were under investigation, while some 176 were charged to court.¹⁵ An average of 13 persons were abducted daily in Nigeria in the first half of 2021, according to a report by SBM Intelligence, bringing to 2,371 the number of persons kidnapped in the country within the first six months of the year.¹⁶ The cases of kidnapping alone are not the issue of insecurity in Nigeria but many are other cases which have been staged some of these are: Banditry uprising, Unknown gunmen attack, Boko Haram insurgent among many others have claimed innumerable lives and properties.

In the view of Bharathi, "Religion is the permanent element in human nature which counts no cost too great in order to find full expression and which leaves the soul utterly restless until it has found itself, known its maker and appreciated the true correspondence between the makers of itself... No man can live without religion. Kofi Opoju went further in his view on religion, to him, "Religion is at the root of African culture and is the determining principle of African life. In his understanding of the relationship between an African and religion, "Religion is life and life is religion."¹⁷

The Yoruba as an Ethnic Group in Nigeria

The Yoruba are one of the largest African ethnic groups south of the Sahara Desert. They are, in fact, not a single group, but rather a collection of diverse people bound together by a common language, history, and culture. Within Nigeria, the Yoruba dominate the western part of the country. Yoruba mythology holds that all Yoruba people descended from a hero called *Oduduwa* or *Oduduwa*. Today there are over fifty individuals who claim kingship as descendants of *Oduduwa*. During the four centuries of the slave trade, Yoruba territory was known as the Slave Coast. Uncounted numbers of Yoruba were carried to the Americas. Their descendants preserved Yoruba traditions. In several parts of the Caribbean and South America, Yoruba religion has been combined with Christianity. In 1893, the Yoruba kingdoms in Nigeria became part of the Protectorate of Great Britain. Until 1960 Nigeria was a British colony and the Yoruba were British subjects. On October 1, 1960, Nigeria became an independent nation structured, as a federation of states.¹⁸

As many as 20 percent of the Yoruba still practice the traditional religions of their ancestors. The practice of traditional religion varies from community to community. For example, a deity (god) may be male in one village and female in another. Yoruba traditional religion holds that there is one Supreme Being and hundreds of *orisa*, or minor deities. The worshippers of a deity are referred to as his "children." There are three gods who are available to all. *Olorun* (Sky God) is the high god, the Creator. One may call on him with prayers or by pouring water on kola nuts on the ground. *Esi* (also called *Legba* by some) is the divine messenger who delivers sacrifices to *Olorun* after they are placed at his shrine. Everyone prays frequently to this deity. *Ifa* is the God of Divination, who interprets the wishes of *Olorun* to mankind. Believers in the Yoruba religion turn to *Ifa* in times of trouble. Another god, *Ogun* (god of war, the hunt, and metalworking), is considered one of the most important. In Yoruba courts, people who follow traditional beliefs swear to give truthful testimony by kissing a machete sacred to *Ogun*. *Shango* (also spelled *Sango* and *Sagoe*) is the deity that creates thunder. The Yoruba believe that when thunder and lightning strike, *Shango* has thrown a thunderstone to earth. After a thunderstorm, Yoruba religious leaders search the ground for the thunderstone, which is believed to have special powers. The stones are housed in shrines dedicated to *Shango*. *Shango* has four wives, each representing a river in Nigeria. The Yoruba who practice other religions are divided about evenly between Muslims (followers of Islam) and Christians. Nearly all Yoruba still observe annual festivals and other traditional religious practices.¹⁹

Traditional Security System among the Yoruba

The African Traditional Religion promotes security by not condoning stealing, injustice, immorality and dishonest attitude etc. In traditional Yoruba society, there was the concept according to Dopamu called "agogoewo" (the forbidden gong). When it was sounded, criminals, evil-doers, adulterers law breakers and robbers shivered with terror because they would die soon.²⁰ Nigeria needs "agogoewo" today. It should be taken to the ministries, institutions,

Assembly, government houses and other places of financial mismanagement, corruption, poverty, bewitching and 419. Such measures may return sanity to the society. The Yoruba system of protection is vast and rich and these can be seen in the numbers of available charms and their irreplaceable uses in the Yoruba world. Since it has been established that Africans generally believe in the superstitious world of which this has been proven to have a place in the charms available to a typical Yoruba man.

It is thereby expedient to examine charms in Yoruba as a way of believing in the unseen Deity. The practice of magic and power can be traced to a key understandable belief in the Yoruba tradition of which cannot be separated from the belief system in prominent Yoruba society. Naturally, charms and amulets were essential for survival in the precolonial period. They served different purposes: for protection, for fortune seeking, for winning wars, and for conquering enemies. Against the general assumptions that surround fabrication of charms and amulets in the contemporary period, possessing and using charms and amulets then had no correlation with piety, holiness, evil, or fetish, as claimed today. Because of their ease of use and ability to surmount the elements, charms become a necessary tool in precolonial society and culture. What modern society cannot achieve in terms of modern technology was achieved through the use of charms and amulets. There are charms (*Karinké*) that can speed up travel, which was important in an age where people walked long distances to their destinations.²¹ There is the *egbé* charm that has the ability to make a man disappear in case of disaster and chaos. In addition to these two, the *aw'ra* charm repels bullets. One would not also overlook the functioning roles of the *Amotekun* group in the reduction of insecurity in the country.

The Yoruba Indigenous Spirituality

Harold Turner gives a six major framework for understanding of African traditional religion. According to him, they include a sense of kinship with nature, man is finite, weak and impure and he is in need of powers not of his own in the universe. There are spiritual beings in the universe that are more powerful than man is. He has access to tap from such spiritual powers for blessings and protection against evil forces. Others are the belief in the reality of the afterlife, which leads to the cult of ancestors and the fusion of the physical and the spiritual in explaining realities of life in the universe.²² The Yoruba's religion permeates the socio-political and economic orientation of individuals and the community. It can be recognized in their societal values and norms, behaviours, the economy, politics, religion, morality, myths, proverbs, dances, arts, symbols and songs that uphold through succeeding generations, have spread over countries.²³ One of the reasons why Yoruba religion is still much alive is the practice of magic and medicine. Medicine men and women, native doctors, diviners and magicians are increasing in numbers because they enjoy patronage from traditionalists, Christians and Muslims.²⁴ Idowu declares that "magic serves man's egocentricity and serves as a shortcut to spiritual bliss."²⁵

Yoruba believe so much in the use of charms of which cannot be denied as it effectiveness can be seen immediately. Charms which constitute both the incantatory and the non-incantatory composite are effective for protection, request and or supplication.

1. *Gbeugbein*

This is more of a hypnotizing charm. The person under the spell doesn't really know what he is doing. It is used in compelling people to do the most impossible things. Things they would naturally not do or refuse to do. It is somewhat difficult to prepare but there are some simple formulas too, however they also vary in degree of potency. The powerful ones that I know have in them as part of its ingredients the rope that a man hanged himself with. To illustrate its power I would narrate an incident that happened which was manipulated by the use of *Gbeugbein*. "A friend once used it to call a stubborn but pretty lady into his room. (Normally she would have shunned him right off). When she got inside he commanded her to strip, which she instantly did, but he didn't touch her. Three days later the girl came back to her senses, she confronted my friend and an argument broke out. It was settled but after that incident the girl avoided my friend from then onwards. Our forefathers used it when they were attacked by a gang of thieves; they just commanded them to fight (each other) or hand over their weapons."²⁶

2. *Sigidi*

Sigidi is a small statue, or effigy, that is usually made of clay or wood and is used to harm enemies through a frightening ritual. *Sigidi* must first be likened to the enemy through either a physical or symbolic resemblance. However, if physical characteristics are not known, then the name of the enemy may be used as well. Once the *sigidi* is prepared, the final stage of the ritual may begin which "involves inviting the soul of the enemy into the effigy and then destroying the latter. The destruction of the effigy is expected to cause some neuro-physical damage [within the enemy]." The purpose of a religious object like *sigidi* in communities is to provide a means for social control. Some cultures, including Yoruba, believe in witchcraft and use it as an explanation when something unexplained happens, such as an illness. If a Yoruba person believes that there is an object that has the power to harm him, or even kill him, he will remain within the social norms so that no one will be tempted to use this object on him.²⁷

3. *Magun*

A proverb about *magun* defends chastity and good moral conduct by stating that, "A *kiḡbe* je, ka ma *ben magun*", we cannot be celibate and still fear *magun*. Only those who have a penchant for other people's wives need to fear being killed by *magun*. A sexually responsible man has no need for such fears, for indeed, "only the guilty hearts are afraid, since they are the ones that need judges". The potency and virility of *magun* is exemplified in another Yoruba proverb which says, "magun ki duro sadake, abo *ḡo kiḡbe nu isa*" *magun* does not reside quietly in the human body (male body) as a sliced snake will not remain still in a hole.²⁸

zealously persecuted as *magun*. *Magun* does not kill willfully without a justifiable cause. *Magun* is not a disease but mystical device or a magic to expose or punish the man who meets another man's wife sexually. *Magun* is common among the Yoruba, Togo, Azande and Bunyoro people. Its forces can be geared towards productive, protective, and destruction channels. The power of *magun* remains constant and the same on the victims. In other words, the general effect of *magun* remains the same with no regards to social or political standing. *Magun* is a killer with no respect for the status of the victims, in as much as the victims flout the taboo of sex.²⁹ Abraham in his Dictionary of Modern Yoruba defines *magun* as Magic drug which has adverse effect on the adulterous man causing him to fall over three times or crow like a cock and die.³⁰

4. *Kanoko*

Kanoko linguistically would mean "shorten the road". *Kanoko* was [and perhaps still is] the Yoruba answer to the challenge of time and space when you travel on a road that is unending because of its great distance. What the Yoruba did in the ancient times was to actualize an esoteric science closely guarded by the elders, but made available to families who must travel on foot to a destination across many villages or towns. It would all depend on the distance that *Kanoko* took you through. In your sleep you 'cover' the road.³¹ Ogunyemi asserted that Yoruba people's ancestors were very creative, saying, "Our fathers created *kanoko* (a medicine that shortened long distances in those days) for their use thus it rivaled the white man's airplane."³²

Wawu submitted that, another means of identification with the *Oduduwa* race is the staff of office presently used which is known as "*Kanoko*," a metallic sceptre in the shape of the tree leaf to which tiny piece of metal are connected and able to produce a scintillating sound when shaken. "The staff was used then to shorten a long distance journey without using any means of transportation."³³

5. *Ayeta*

Ayeta is the Yoruba bulletproof. It is the medicine that takes an enemy's gunshot to miss him. As a preventive measure, the Yoruba, especially those living in the rural areas, ensure that their personal items which may be used by enemies are kept away from the reach of the evil people. Many still wear proactive charms. Thousands are repeatedly sacrificed at key points of the body so that different medicines can be rubbed into their bodies. The use of charms is particularly common among politicians, armed forces personnel, human activists and people are exposed to violence and dangers of their job.³⁴ In the early Yoruba community, the traditional bulletproof is usually composed of some magic which may be in form of incantation and men of those time are usually boastful of its efficacy. This is seen in the numbers of wars engaged in during those days and the outcome of the survivors. It is expedient to say this traditional bulletproof is not as expensive as the modern day bulletproof.

6. Oath Taking

Oath taking, according to Odumakin, is a distortion of value in politics to the extent that it transfers allegiance from the system to an individual, who for raw ambition or depravity, decides to take the place God in the life of the oath taker.³⁵ Okorie sees oath taking in the traditional sense as a situation where absolute loyalty or adherence to certain agreement are conditionally prescribed and administered in the beneficiaries of the agreement.³⁶ This expected that whoever has taken such oath will not escape the punishment or sanction of a certain supernatural force or deity if the oath is flouted. Nwankwo sees oath taking as a "statement or assertion made under penalty of divine retribution for intentional falsity." This, according to Nwankwo, implies that "if the gravity of an offence committed is high and defies possible human solution, the accused is presented before the divinized spiritual forces for exoneration or punishment."³⁷ Apparently, in the Yoruba community, oath taking which is called *ibura* is taking very crucial in determining the veracity of a matter. The relevance of oath taking among the Yoruba was for check and balance in the traditional Yoruba setting. If our so called leaders are mandated to go through the traditional method of oath taking before taking the leadership position, it will enable them to do their job appropriately in combating insecurity as well as other vices in the society.

7. *Ifa* divination

From the ancient Yoruba community, the *Ifa* is used in prying into the future and also investigating incidents of the past. It is important to note here that, whenever there is a calamity or disaster or a problem the *Ifa* is consulted for possible solutions. This system however, is so appreciative in the Yoruba community, *Ifa* is the eye of God, the light for men and way for a turbulent situation.

Yoruba Spirituality as an Antidote

Due to the insecurity of life and property in Nigeria, individuals and groups have developed means of protecting themselves through magic.³⁸ Harnischfeger, an educationist, social scientist and anthropologist, stresses in his article, State Decline and Return of Occult Powers: The case of Prophet Eddy in Nigeria, which many African countries, especially Nigeria, are moving towards state collapse.³⁹ In Nigeria, life is becoming unbearable and there is social, political and judicial injustice everywhere. He explains that because of insecurity, many Nigerians have opted for magic and witchcraft as a means of self-defense and acquiring wealth.⁴⁰

Throughout the Globe, security has been considered a first order value worth preserving. Evidence abounds in Nigeria where every government places security as her priority in the list of her agenda for year's budget. Whatever way one defines security, there is no consensus on the definition of security. However, it should be noted that insecurity or any event that poses fear or loss of life and property, most times, happens without prior notice. In view of sudden happenings of terror attacks and the efforts to avoid loss of life to such ugly incidence.⁴¹ The use of Yoruba *Afeeri*, a person can be saved during attacks of any form. It is not

...the person far away from the consequences of the matter how sudden the incident could be. Many people have been saved from fatal accident, armed robbery, terror attacks and other such dangerous cases with the work of this charm in Nigeria.⁴²

Numerous identities four major reasons why oaths are taken; for the establishment of truth of what is said; for the maintenance of good human relations; to maintain the secrecy of an institution or an organisation and they are taken when criminals are being sorted out.⁴³ The oath is a fearful ritual and most often words that connote calamity and deaths are used to make pledge, stating that a person will keep to one's part of the agreement. The Yoruba indigenous belief in oath taking has proven to be effective in pressuring cases in the time past and if employed along or taking differently aside the English oath system, it will help to reduce the idea of being unfaithfulness of people in position of authority. Some divinities such as *Ogun* among others cannot condole unfaithfulness.

Insecurity in any form keeps a community destabilized. Nigeria as a nation has been enmeshed in a fire fox insecurity leading to hundreds of deaths of innocent individuals including security personnel, political officers and diplomats. The security challenge has assumed formidable dimensions forcing the country's political and economic managers and, indeed the entire nation, to rue the loss of their loved ones, investments and absence of safety in most part of the country.⁴⁴ Divinities are invoked in ancient Yoruba community to find solution to a pressuring issue and to fight back their oppressors. During wars, Divinities are invoked to be the primary fighter of that war in order to ensure victory. Perhaps one would say that if divinities have been invoked as regards the various militants and or insurgents we have in this country there might have been a way out.

We are not alien to the level of insecurity in our Country, and women are usually the most disadvantageous. In most cases, men are killed while women are married off within the camp of the insurgent. The use of *magun* as a Yoruba method in curbing adultery or fornication helped in those days though with its side effects. However, the practice then created fear in the heart of many and had deterred them from being a partaker of such atrocious acts. If propounded in Nigeria for instance, it may help to reduce the molestation given to women in our contemporary society.

There have been testimonies as regards the use of *ayeta*, the Yoruba traditional amulets which has been proven to be effective most especially for sudden gunshots and attacks. *Saturday PUNCH* learnt that the use of traditional "bullet-proofs" among members of Nigeria's security forces is not limited to the policemen, especially SARS operatives, who face danger most of the time. Among local vigilance group, especially the *Oodua* People's Congress, it seems to be a thing of pride to be protected. *Saturday PUNCH* spoke with the Head of Operations, Vigilante Group of Nigeria's Lagos Mainland Local Government branch, Mr. Ishola Agbodemu, who believed he might have lost his life without the protection of his gunshot-repelling charm. "The use of traditional bullet-proof called 'ayeta' is ... because of

Conclusion

The nature of the Yoruba belief in *Olodumare*, divinities, spirits, ancestors and magic all point unequivocally to one basic fact, that is, the Yoruba have a spiritual heritage that shapes their theology about the spirit world in relation to the reality of life. This belief has a great influence on their societal and individual behaviours. The Yoruba religion is used here as an example to illustrate the religious worldview that forms the basis of the whole Nigerian community and which is an integral part of its social structure. This religion, like other African religions, concerns itself with the here and now.⁴⁶ In Nigeria and other third world countries, where there are strict legislation against possession of firearms by individuals, the recognition of these devices by the government may provide a protective option for law-abiding citizens; against crime-minded individuals who acquire and go about with arms by illegal means.⁴⁷

From every investigation, it can be said that people are afraid of these Yoruba indigenous spiritual beliefs and practices because of its potency and effectiveness thus no one wants to toil with it. The Yoruba spiritual beliefs and practices should be encouraged. This can be seen in the roles of the *Amotekun* group, they rose to fight against insecurity in the Southern part of Nigeria. The kidnapping, banditry, unknown gunmen among many others cases would have been solved and can still be solved if these practices are encouraged.

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