

Witchcraft as Social Metaphor: Exploring the Supernatural Beliefs Among the Ogoni and Ikwerre of the Niger Delta

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<https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/jb.v31i2.4>

Abstract

This paper explores the underlying philosophy, beliefs, and practices surrounding witchcraft among the Ogoni and Ikwerre ethnic groups inhabiting the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. Throughout recorded history, humanity has embarked upon a rational journey to identify solutions to the myriad vicissitudes and afflictions that have plagued human existence. Belief in supernatural phenomena such as witchcraft has conventionally furnished reasonable explanations for tragedy and occurrences deemed odd or inexplicable through conventional epistemologies. Within these cosmologies, witches are frequently perceived as enemies of societal equilibrium, capable of inflicting ill health, misfortune, and diverse forms of affliction upon communities. However, while beliefs related to witchcraft and the supernatural may serve as metaphors for powerful forces or social dysfunction, they simultaneously constitute autonomous systems of signs, symbols, and meanings that can potentially generate tangible positive effects for adherents, with historical origins rooted in indigenous cultures. This paper uses the descriptive methodology to argue that witchcraft, as a construct dependent on human agency, is not inherently immoral or detrimental. Rather, the central issue lies in the improper application of knowledge, experience, and intelligence derived from witchcraft practices toward selfish ambitions, such as harming others for personal advantage. The paper concludes that if oriented toward serving the greater good, advancing human society, and promoting human dignity, witchcraft merits encouragement, provided it is harnessed ethically through proper use.

Keywords

*Magic,
Philosophy,
Religion,
Sorcery,
Spirit,
Witchcraft*

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Introduction

The subject of witchcraft is both significant and problematic in history. Throughout human history, most civilisations and groups have imagined specific types of malicious persons who are allegedly capable of accessing or displaying supernatural powers of immense evil. Witchcraft was widespread for most people who lived in Europe, America, and Africa during the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries, where supernatural intervention was an everyday part of their lives.

British social anthropologists working in Africa had long been fascinated with witchcraft. Evans-Pritchard's necessary research on witchcraft in Africa, published in 1937, sheds light on the sociology and cultural history of the continent before and after colonisation. Witchcraft has been a component of the people's culture and beliefs before the arrival of the colonial masters. Evans-Pritchard focused on the Azande tribe of southern Sudan and uncovered three distinct types of magic. Witch doctors, diviners, and oracles used good magic to foresee the future and protect against ill magic. Other folks were harmed by evil sorcery. This type of magic was characterised by the use of material objects in the casting of spells and the targeting of specific individuals. A third category, witchcraft, was defined by Evans-Pritchard as an internal, hereditary power passed down from parents to children. According to legend, it appeared as a little black bulge in the witch's stomach. One of the major battles during that period devolved into what was known as witch-hunting. Witch-hunting was motivated by a variety of factors, including religious concerns as well as economic and commercial concerns.

Ekwunife (2011) noted that witchcraft is an African occultic science through which persons (males, females, genders) with highly domineering propensities coupled with greed physically and mysteriously afflict victims with the help of hidden or familiar contact instruments to subject them to the witches/wizards selfish wills. Quarcoopome (1987) described witchcraft as the belief in possessing some supernatural powers by which, in African mentality, everything wrong or bad in society, evil or harm, can be affected and a good deed is done. Thus, in the African psyche, everything is wrong or bad in the community and the world, and,

most notably, various afflictions originate in witchcraft. There is no kind of illness or hardship at all that may not ultimately be attributed to witchcraft. When natural explanations fail to satisfy, the social basis of witchcraft is invariably invoked. In other words, witchcraft is a living social force that has torn the fabric of unity in several villages, communities, generations, families, friends, and other locations. Fear and suspicion come from a true sense of judgment and are the negative influences. When people experience misfortune, they begin to accuse one another, blaming it on friends, relatives, or even family members they believe are witches.

Furthermore, in a community where witchcraft is prevalent, witchcraft impacts an individual's social relationship with his fellow human beings due to the abovementioned arguments. Because of the fear of being infected with witchcraft, children rarely receive edible goods or presents from anyone beyond their immediate (nuclear) family circle. In a similar spirit, members of such communities tend to become introverts and lead solitary lifestyles. There are several examples of children rebelling against their parents and blaming them for their problems. While some young people have gone insane to protect themselves from witchcraft, others have spent their precious, and God-given lives in diabolic and, in most cases, horrible, untimely deaths (Owete & Gbule, 2014).

While it is safe to say that all human societies have been plagued by the activities or fear of witches at some point in their history, witchcraft as a social pandemic is now largely prevalent in indigenous cultural settings such as those of Africa, Asia, Latin America, and their respective Diasporas in the Western world. Witchcraft of the most destructive and vengeful kind continues prominently in both African and Western societies, where the philosophical outlook is profoundly magical (Russell, 1972), preserving the notoriety of witches as agents of Satan employing evil abilities to vilify and destroy individuals and their environments (Nadel, 1952; Thomas, 1997; Kielburger, 2008). Witchcraft, in other words, is a feature of African indigenous religion. Owners of this power are the most dreaded in most African communities. The fact that most Africans are afraid of being bewitched if they return to their hometowns implies that, despite modernity and

societal progress, the belief and practice of witchcraft are still alive and strong. In recent times, the arrival of Christianity and the spread of Islam did not appear to have substantially impacted Africans' belief systems in witchcraft. To oppose the effect of witches and occult power, several African Instituted Churches (AICs), Pentecostal, Neo-Pentecostal, and Charismatic churches hold prayer revivals and deliverance gatherings (Gbule & Odili, 2015).

Western academia has frequently presented witchcraft notions out of context and highlighted their relationship with damage, as Mbiti (1969) noticed in African religion and philosophy, resulting in a fundamental distortion of African faiths. While witchcraft beliefs can sometimes be understood as metaphors for political forces and social ills, they must also be understood as separate systems of signs and meanings with their historical trajectories rooted in local cultures. Beliefs in witchcraft are beliefs in systems of power derived from unseen forces. For those people who believe in supernatural powers, those forces are pretty accurate and are not merely metaphorical allusions to other phenomena. Therefore, the central argument in this study is to establish the relevance of witchcraft as a practice that could aid the advancement of human societies, and the achievement of human worth and dignity, by its proper use, regarding the Ogoni and Ikwerre of Niger Delta. The study discovered that witchcraft, as a human agent, is not inherently evil; instead, the problem is the improper use of the knowledge, experience, and intelligence obtained from its objectives, such as harming others for personal gain. This must be criticised in its entirety in this regard.

This paper is based on long-term fieldwork between two ethnic nationalities – Ogoni and Ikwerre – of Niger Delta, Nigeria. The ethnographic triangle technique explored the significance of witchcraft practice by merging the three corners of documentation and oral interviews. To ensure accuracy and neutrality, the research questions were addressed using data derived from primary sources, which included data obtained during interviews. It also provides interrogation and follow-up questions on accused members and alleged victims of witchcraft practices. This method assisted the researcher in gaining insight into their activities,

mainly through observing and listening to confessions, interviews and responses, as well as studying historical traditions, beliefs and practices, myths and symbols, as they all convey essential messages about witchcraft. Secondary data was gathered from books, journals, periodicals, newspapers, university research initiatives, and available archive materials.

The Concept of Witchcraft

The term “witchcraft” refers to a wide range of events. Its significance changes depending on the historical and cultural context. The noun *wicca* (sorcerer) and the verb *wiccan* are derived from Old English (magician or to cast a spell). The ancient definition of witchcraft corresponds to what anthropologists call sorcery—using rituals to alter the path of events. The etymological basis of the word “witch” was traced by Ilega (2001) to the Anglo-Saxon “witan,” which means “to know.” “Craft” refers to a skill. To him, witchcraft meant the ability or trade of the wise. This means that there is no comprehensive and sufficient definition of witchcraft. This is the case because of its connection to magic. Some communities and researchers find little distinction between the two, while others see regions of diversity. Mbiti (1969) sees no difference between the two. This could be because the name “witch” comes from the old English word “wicca,” which meant “a person who does magic.” Also, both witches and sorcerers have the same goal: to bring evil to the world.

On the other hand, the Yoruba are aware of the distinction between the two but lump them together with other evildoers. Both are given the moniker *aye* (the world). In this context, the world is a concentration of the world’s destructive powers (Idowu, 1976). Even communities that perceive the two as one, according to Parrinder (1954), feel they have areas of divergence. The two are not the same, according to Alana (2002). A witch is among the Yoruba, whereas a sorcerer is called *Oso* or *Ologun Ika* (the one with wicked charms).

In the Ogoni religious philosophy, the concept of man as a composite of body and soul is intricately related to the idea of witchcraft. In the psychic realm, a

man's soul is separated into two parts: one that animates the human frame, shape, or structure, and the other that may transform into anything, such as air, cat, or snake. When a witch is on a particular assignment or errand, whether good or bad, they send out the bush soul, which can float invincibly around the town until it reaches the location where the deed must be performed, and it returns home to its owner as soon as the act is completed. Witchcraft is regarded as a force that cannot function on its own without the presence of a human possessor due to this subjective ability. This echoes Tempels's (1959) theory of the vital force. According to Tempels (1959), Bantu ontology is governed by interacting essential forces. The fundamental notion under which being is conceived lies within the categories of forces. Force in the Bantu notion is inseparable from the definition of being. Tempels (1959:90) argues that: "This concept of separate beings, of substance which find themselves side by side, entirely independent one for another, is foreign to Bantu thought. Bantus hold that created beings preserve a bond one with another, an intimate ontological relationship, comparable with the causal tie which binds creature and creator". Tempels (1959:95) further argues and insistently that "all creatures are found in a relationship according to the laws of a hierarchy. Nothing moves in this universe of forces without influencing other forces by its movement. The world of forces is held like a spider's web of which no single thread can be caused to vibrate without shaking the whole network". This kind of metaphysical interaction among beings transcends the mechanical, chemical and psychical interactions. In agreement with Placid Temples, the Ogoni believe that reality exists in everything and every being in the universe. It is in virtue of this reality that everything is force; this forms the basis of traditional Ogoni and Ikwerre metaphysics.

In other words, through their (witch's) techniques of communication and movement, such as astral projection or soul travel, witches claim knowledge beyond the ordinary ability of finite man. As a result, a witch can know what is happening in another world even if she is not physically present. Witches can also be aware of the thoughts of someone far away from them without using their senses. This explains why they are rarely stuck when on a mission. Witchcraft, as a

force, makes no distinction between good and evil. The individual who is endowed with this force is the one who manipulates it to achieve their goals. As a result, without an agent or a person to put this energy into action, witchcraft would be a dormant and ineffective force. As a result, most individuals in traditional Ogoni and Ikwerre societies regard witchcraft as a low-cost weapon or way of bringing about the change they desire.

Another view of witchcraft is a psychic skill in which supernatural abilities are generated from a combination of particular plants, tree barks, or any other element with magical powers. Unlike astral travel, which requires a significant focus, witchcraft allows the user to leave his “actual” self with far greater ease. There is also the idea that witchcraft involves applying knowledge, techniques, and abilities to natural laws. It serves as a source of power and esoteric knowledge of the mundane and transcendental worlds, with the notion that true practical power is wielded through politics and mysterious means with metaphysical significance.

People’s belief in mysterious powers helped them find solutions when things went wrong. People wanted to know who to blame for disasters and diseases, not just how they occurred and were generated. People were able to acquire responses that satisfied them as being adequate. Such reactions aligned with the universe’s perspective, which acknowledged the existence of countless invisible forces that people could access. People were less likely to steal, be impolite, commit crimes, or purposefully annoy their neighbours and family when worried that their neighbours or relatives might use witchcraft against them. The concept became a technique for calming tensions between family members, neighbours, and community members. Witchcraft was associated with illusions or preconceptions in Ogoni’s traditional society. People in the communities have long been afraid of witchcraft since witches wield supernatural abilities and are constantly repulsed from committing evil.

Witchcraft has had some advantageous outcomes in both Ogoni and Ikwerre traditional societies. The first is recovery from and deliverance from strange illnesses and ailments.’ Witchdoctors are people with this field of expertise. In Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* (1958), Okonkwo invites a witch doctor to free his

daughter Ezinma from the Ogbanje demon. Witchdoctors are experts in spiritual things who converse with supernatural beings and employ mysterious talents to heal rather than harm. Robert Priest (2022) attempts to characterise witch doctors.

Numerous cases from today's Africa demonstrate how some lives have been preserved through witchcraft. One Ogoni respondent who shared his experience mentioned that he had once become ill. He claimed a witch doctor was invited following medical professionals' unsuccessful attempts to heal him. The witch doctor revealed the name, type, and cause of the poison and the name of the poisoner, who also happened to work at the same establishment. In addition, he recovered within six weeks (Nekabari 2022, oral interview). Witchcraft facilitates the protection of life. Before and now, in Ogoni and Ikwerre traditional societies, people inject, ingest and swallow charms. They also wear amulets, talismans and charms around their neck, ankles, genitals and waist for protection from known and unknown and seen and unseen evil. One important thing to note is that the amulets, talismans and charms are prepared through witchcraft and by witch doctors.

In some circumstances, witchcraft lowers crime rates in society. People fear the African deities more than they do God. When one deity is involved, the offender will immediately fish themselves out without waiting for the deity to do that, unlike when something is taken from society, and someone pulls out the Holy Bible or Holy Koran for oath-taking. One of the African worldview assumptions that allow Christians to continue to seek the help of diviners and witch doctors is the view that witchcraft powers can be used for good in society. This view suggests the possibility that positive mystical powers can continue to help protect those who have supposedly made a total commitment to Jesus Christ. This belief causes some Christians to wear charms and amulets, take medicine, or have the prescribed concoction rubbed into their bodies (Nyabwari & Kagema, 2014). Some also keep dry bones, snakes, and birds on the rooftops of their houses or tribal marks on private parts of their bodies. Such dual allegiance among some Christians is grounded in African religious thought that regards the metaphysical world as a

moral. Spiritual forces, traditionally, were seen as intrinsically neither good nor bad, although their power could be channelled for moral or immoral purposes.

Witchcraft in Philosophical Thought

Philosophers, especially Western philosophers, have regarded witchcraft as a minor facet of the philosophy of the mind and witches as ontological illusions. The treatment of ‘things not seen’ has always been a source of debate in philosophy, even metaphysics, with philosophers unclear whether to assign joy or grief to them. The philosophy of mind has ever been a subject of deep interest. That department, which leads to a belief in “things not seen,” has, more than any other, promoted happiness or increased the misery of the human race. (Mitchell & Dickie 1839: p.85). While no philosopher can conclusively establish or refute the reality of witchcraft, various philosophical viewpoints can be used as stepping stones for validating or invalidating the phenomenon. Plato’s philosophy, for example, is thought to have been more accepting and forgiving of the idea of witches than Aristotle’s, which grew more popular in the 13th and 14th centuries. Platonic thought allowed for a natural, morally neutral magic between divine miracles and demonic delusion, but Aristotelianism dismissed natural charm and denied the existence of occult natural forces (Ngangah, 2020, p. 167).

According to his epistemological assessments, Ngangah (2020) argues that the veil of magic behind which witches live and practice their art accounts for a significant portion of the mystery surrounding them. As a result, any attempt to comprehend witchcraft must first penetrate this “veil of ignorance,” which necessitates acquiring necessary knowledge regarding witchcraft and witches’ way of action. However, how is this even possible? There are two primary sources of knowledge: sensory perception or experience (empiricism) and the application of human intellectual faculties or reason (rationalism). Any other type of knowledge, whether inferential, revelational, mystical, or intuitive, can be categorised as empiricism or rationalism (Ezedike, 2013). The difficulty is that we do not know where to put our occult knowledge. Such claims of expertise are frequently classified as revelational or mystical knowledge in religious settings. Apart from

the confessional statements of persons who claim to be involved in witchcraft, it is not easy to make any knowledge claims regarding it.

Some of the problems that need to be answered in this regard are: Does claiming knowledge always entail that what is claimed exists? Can knowledge assert that it can sometimes go beyond what is to encompass what is made by language? How can we be sure we know what we say we know? However, specific pro-indubitability criteria, such as objectivity, clarity, verifiability, impartiality, and absolute justifiability, must be applied to justify any knowledge claim. Knowledge must be distinguished from mere belief, opinion, observation, and even the traditional “justified true-believe” criteria, which is not indisputable in this and other situations. These elements make defining witchcraft knowledge problematic (Ozumba, 2001). The underlying difficulty with the concept of ‘believe’ is that it does not allow for the analytical clarity and exactitude of expression we would like to see in determining human capabilities (Needham, 1972). The difficulty is that we do not know where to put witches. Who sets the objective criterion by which we can justify our claims? Is it the individual, society, religious adherents, philosophers, or scientists who provide justification, or do we seek a neutral and unbiased abstract standard of reason? Do we fall back on Quine’s relativistic principle of indeterminacy? These are the kinds of questions that beg for answers.

There is a tendency to reject witchcraft due to a primitive group’s inability to rationalise certain natural or strange happenings. Evans-Pritchard, an ethnophilosopher who has undertaken extensive studies in this area, does not believe that such supposed ignorance is inevitably underlying witchcraft beliefs. In his research on the Azande, he claims that “witchcraft belief in no way contradicts empirical knowledge of cause and consequence” (Evans-Pritchard, 1937, p.17). According to Evans-Pritchard (1937), witchcraft is a system with its natural logic. This explanatory framework provides solutions to inquiries about why certain events happen to specific people at specified times. It does not negate their grasp of an event’s empirical cause and effect. Instead, it addresses the root of the problem.

An event's 'ultimate cause' does not always have to be logical. After the physical investigation has failed to produce 'ultimate' answers to persistent questions about why certain occurrences happen to certain people at specific times and conditions, such a reason is likely to be sought. The idea of determinism, initially formulated in the 18th century by the French scientist and philosopher Pierre-Simon Laplace, sheds considerable but limited insight on witchcraft. Laplace (1902) believed that if an all-knowing observer can precisely know the location and speed of every particle in the universe, such an observer can accurately anticipate the future (Solomon & Higgins, 2009). Although such rigorously scientific thinking has little to do with witchcraft, there are determinism variants framed by other philosophers that are relevant to the topic. Some of these Western deterministic beliefs are similar to the concept of destiny in many African cultures (Deezia, 2020), a separate issue we will not cover in this study. We must underline that while witchcraft has cause-and-effect characteristics, Africans are unlikely to believe it is the only cause of an incident. Those who recognise witchcraft as a reality of the African experience are interested in how "witchcraft pulls a man into relationships with occurrences in such a way that he receives injury," Evans-Pritchard (1976) argues.

Witchcraft as a Spiritual Affair

We are informed that witches meet up with 'spiritual' people late at night. As a result, no one can openly demonstrate the actuality of their encounters. We find it difficult to accept that people's souls might leave their bodies to attend a meeting. Although their bodies remain at home, this is a generally held concept. Even if it were conceivable, because witches' actions and behaviours are not verifiable in this mortal world, it is plausible that their power is also limited to the spiritual realm. I am speaking from a logical standpoint here because no one suggests that!

It is even more unfathomable that someone may be completely unaware of who they are, as witches are. A suspect is often unaware that she is a witch, and when she denies it, she does it honestly and innocently. As previously said, some accused folks confess guilt out of fear, while others do so because they genuinely

believe they committed the claimed crimes in their dreams. This is hardly surprising because many unusual notions appear in dreams, and many astonishing things occur. You dream that you get wings and fly, that you kill or are killed, that you meet multiple people at once and overcome them, and that close relatives assault you violently, and you defeat them all. We could go on about dreams for a long time. Goals resemble a tape recorder that replays your thoughts and often fulfils your unfulfilled aspirations. As a result, it seems to reason that in your dreams, the neighbour with whom you had a heated disagreement in the evening and against whom you had planned vengeance before going to bed chases you with a dagger or even a rifle.

As a result, the resemblance between witchcraft and dreams is so close that they can sometimes be misconstrued. Witches are reported to practice cannibalism, and humans are said to be attacked by witches and afflicted with horrible ailments. This is done spiritually; the victims' bodies are not injured; the souls are metaphorically consumed. No blood has ever been found when witches confess to preserving the blood of their victims in a specific location. Ordinary individuals, on the other hand, find only water there. As a result, mortals cannot witness witches at work because their work is solely spiritual.

Antidotes to Ward off Witches

There are many preventive strategies against witchcraft activities among the Ogoni and Ikwerre of the Niger Delta. Vigorous fragrance plants and amulets are commonly used as witch repellents. These are some examples of such plants:

Garlic

According to oral tradition, Garlic, a member of the lily family, has long been considered an effective witch repellent among the Ogoni and Ikwerre of the Niger Delta (as witches cannot stand its smell). Garlic has long been used in the healing process in Ogoni (Barikui 2022, oral interview). Garlic has been linked to preventing diseases such as heart disease, diabetes, infection, and cancer. So, since Garlic can combat sickness, it could treat Vampires of the illness that has rendered

them immortal. Garlic is one of the witches' most vehement foes. Garlic strings are hung behind the door and windows to defend the house. While adults carried garlic cloves in their pockets or bags, children's foreheads were rubbed with Garlic and garlic cloves were placed beneath the baby's pillow to keep witches and evil spirits at bay. Garlic has long been considered a deterrent to witches and evil spirits. People rubbed Garlic on children's foreheads to keep themselves safe, ate Garlic, or wore it around their necks. Garlic was thought to keep blood-sucking witches and evil spirits at bay since it deters some blood-sucking insects.

Bitter Kola

Bitter Kola, also known as *Garcinia kola* Heckel (Clusiaceae) or *gara-gara* among the Ogoni indigenous people, is a tropical flowering plant that produces brown, nut-like seeds that can be found in western and central Africa. It is covered in a brown to dark brown peel. Before eating, the peel is removed. When consumed, it leaves a bitter taste in the tongue. Its name is derived from this bitterness. Because all of the parts of this highly favoured species can be utilised as medicine, it is known as the 'wonder plant'. Its seeds, the tree's most valuable part, are often consumed to prevent or cure stomach ailments and for their characteristic astringent flavour (Anwuri 2022, oral interview). Headaches, laryngitis, bronchitis, malaria, abdominal pains, and gonorrhoea can all be relieved by chewing the seeds. Traditionalists believe Bitter Kola possesses spiritual abilities and, when used properly, may ward off witches, evil spirits, and setbacks and failures. Our forebears allegedly did this, but it appears to be dying away today, most likely due to a lack of information. According to traditional beliefs, Bitter Kola can repel witches and evil spirits and be anti-poison. It is worth noting that, unlike kola-nut and others, Bitter Kola does not occur in progress-related rituals. When you observe a spiritualist executing a tradition with Bitter Kola, you can be sure it is a sign of negativity. It is used in special protective rituals to keep enemies at bay. It is also used to break spells cast by witches and evil spirits, among other things.

Cocoyam

Cocoyam is a generic term for several tropical root and vegetable crops in the Arum family. Cocoyams are herbaceous perennial plants of the Araceae family, mainly grown for their edible roots. However, they are edible in all portions of the plant. Cocoyams grown for food are classified as belonging to either the genus *Colocasia* or the genus *Xanthosoma* and consist of an enormous spherical corm (swollen underground storage stem) from which a few large leaves emerge. It has been observed that persons who participate in witchcraft rituals avoid foods containing cocoyam (Mmejim 2021, oral interview). According to Ogoni cosmology, cocoyam exudes evil spirits who want to consume it and may cause death. The Ogoni hang cocoyam from the house's entry beam and place it under the pillow to keep witches away.

Costus afer Ker-Gawl (*C. afer*):

Costus afer, often known as 'bush sugar cane', 'monkey sugar cane', or *Ting* among the Ogoni, is a rhizomatous grass. Malaria, measles, diabetes mellitus, arthritis, and stomach disorders can all be treated using almost any part of this plant (Nwideede 2021, oral interview). In West Africa, for example, the succulent stem is chewed to fill thirst and relieve cough and sore throat. The weak and dehydrated sufferer is said to gain strength by chewing the young, fragile leaves. An infusion of the inflorescence is used to alleviate stomach problems. In Ogoniland, the leaf sap is used as an eye drop for eye disorders and a nasal drop for headaches and malaria. The stem sap is used to treat urethral discharges, venereal infections, and jaundice and to prevent miscarriage (Gbaradeekor 2021, oral interview). The Ikwerre ethnic group in Rivers State uses it in several ways. The leaves are claimed to be an effective remedy for fever and malaria when boiled with leaves of *Carica papaya* (pawpaw), citrus species (orange), and *Mangifera indica* bark (mango). In the past, the stem and juice were used to treat coughs, measles, and malaria (Chindaa 2021, oral interview). *Costus Afer* is thought to have supernatural power when used as a cane to flog or whip a witch or wizard. It is said to immediately redeem and exorcise the possessed person's body of the evil spirit.

Broom

Brooms are ceremonial materials that reduce the potency of witches' wicked activities. In the Ogoni belief system, they hold the power of exorcism and purification. Broom is said to have supernatural powers that may counteract any adverse effect on a person or a location. Whoever, therefore, touches or uses the broom would be purged of its impurities. "It is said that the spiritual magnet can remove pollutants from a diseased and unwholesome state" (Nabofa, 1994, p. 55). Traditional psychiatrists in Ogoni utilise the mystical broom to cure madness by beating the insane repeatedly with the ritual broom. After that, they give the insane person some herbal medicine. The ritual broom flogging removed the evil spirit that possessed the individual. The ejection of all sorts of mental attacks from the witch kingdom on the sufferer is symbolised by the whipping of the mystic broom. Nabofa, however, noted that it acts as a weapon in the context of Igbe religion, an indigenous religious movement:

In Ogoni and Ikwerre's traditional systems, unique charms produced by a native doctor are thought to catch a witch red-handed in her altered form. There is also the concept that in Ogoni and Ikwerre cosmologies, several powerful deities are known to be horrifying to witches. Those who are dedicated to their service, however, are never attacked. Other items and plants that contain spiritual qualities that repel witches include Oda and Charcoal, Crude oil and Palm Cannel oil, Okazi rope Oziza seed, etc. Some of these plants or weeds are difficult to eliminate from croplands and serve not only as a form of protection but also as a means of retribution against the person who caused the harm in the first place. As aromatic plants are burned, and the cleansing and protective force of the smoke emerges, the usage of amulets and vegetal materials during religious ceremonies cannot be overstated. The ancient use of plants hung behind doors of houses and stables to ward off witches and rituals for treating evil eyes that afflict humans, animals, or even goods was disclosed. Even today, in rural Ogoni and Ikwerre communities, there is a definite link between popular religious and magical beliefs and people's relationships with the environment, particularly plants.

Conclusion

While the validity of witchcraft cannot be proven scientifically or legally, the essence of witchcraft can be grasped and explained by observing and describing the apparent and indisputable effects of witchcraft attacks. Mbiti's (1969) argument that the physical and spiritual aspects of the same universe are simply two dimensions of the same universe has some truth in it. When Africans see, feel, or hear the visible and physical world, they see all the invisible universes. What has not been acknowledged is that, besides the influence of African traditional religions, the devastating repercussions of witchcraft, which victims across Africa commonly experience, are a significant reason Africans cannot ignore the power of spiritual forces in their lives.

The aforementioned clarifies our discussion on the idea of witchcraft in African philosophy. According to the data provided in this study, witchcraft is a reality in Africa and both an aid and a hindrance—a bipartite phenomenon—beyond all obscurity and opacity. It is a “vice” that helps to stabilise traditional Ogoni and Ikwerre cultures and serves as a means of crime prevention. It has been and still is utilised for social advancement, wealth accumulation, disease and danger protection, the power to divulge secrets, and the ability to predict the future. As a human agent, it was maintained that witchcraft is not inherently evil; instead, the problem is the improper use of the knowledge, experience, and intellect gained from its selfish reasons to damage others for one's benefit. It must be criticised in its entirety in this regard. However, suppose it is oriented toward the common good, the advancement of human society, and the enhancement of human worth and dignity. In that case, it must be supported and harnessed by its proper use.

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