

PRAYER AND MAGIC: A POTENT PARADOXICAL RITUAL IN AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION

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ABSTRACT

Prayer and magic are two interrelated phenomena that sometimes are misinterpreted. Prayer could be offered to the deity (vertical prayer) or human (horizontal). Whichever one, prayer is a practice of religious communication style to appease a super force (corporeal or incorporeal) and as such, it's potent when well ritualized. The concept of magic has been a misconceptualized phenomenon that many untutored minds have conceived over the years. Magic could be good or bad, (white and black magic), just the same way prayer could be for good or bad. Prayer and magic are important elements in African traditional religion and they are very potent before the ritualization. The ritualization process could be familiar or unfamiliar to a non-adherent of the religious tradition. Based on this, the researcher ventured into a circumscribed scholarship to bring to the fore "Prayer and magic: a potent paradoxical ritual in African traditional religion." The paper is designed qualitatively in a historical and descriptive grand style. Findings are the structural breakdown such as the classical anchors that instilled the magic consciousness in both terms (prayer and magic) as the basis for the thematic debate. The finding factually opined that the potency of prayer and magic in African society curt across divination, incantation, alchemy, astrology, sorcery, necromancy, spirit mediation, and others.

Keywords: *Ritual; African traditional Religion; Prayer; magic; prayer& magic;*

INTRODUCTION

Prayers could be vertical (human to God) or horizontal (human to human) in whatever ever, prayers are key to strong convenience and such not to be joked with. In most cases, prayers are carried out in a mysterious way which sometimes results in what could be conceived as magic. Some people say magic is "let my wish be done" while prayer is "let your (God) will be done" whereby dichotomizing prayer from magic, whichever both prayer and magic are strong elements in African traditional religion that are used to create and increase the potency at rituals in traditional society. This is why we tend to investigate prayer and magic as potent paradoxical rituals in African traditional religion. In achieving this singular aim, this paper interrogates religion; African traditional religion; ritual; ritual and religion; ritual in African traditional religion, prayer; typologies of prayer; prayer as ritual; the potent of prayer in African traditional religion; magic; nature and scope of magic; elements of magic; typologies of magic; black and white magic: A dichotomizing factor of magic witchcraft; Rites and condition of the performer of magic; magic in African traditional religion; functions of magic in African traditional religion. The above sub-themes will be carefully discussed to justify the theme understudy to create comprehension at the apex of the mental illumination.

Religion

Religion is a difficult concept to define, not only because the objects of religion are invisible spiritual beings, but also because it is conceived differently by different people. A minimal definition of religion by E.B. Taylor (in Ikenga-Metuh, 1987, p 3), reads 'religion as the

belief in spiritual beings.' This minimalist definition has been critiqued on the basis that "the object of religion need not be restricted to spiritual beings, presumably personified supernatural beings with the quality of life... [as] this would exclude impersonal supernatural powers (called Mana, Orenda or Chukwu, Oluwa, Ubangiji or Nyama) which appear to be behind the objects of worship found among some peoples" (ibid, p 13). To this end, Ellis and Ter Haar (2004, p 14), however, cite Taylor approvingly, defining religion as "a belief in the existence of an invisible world, distinct but not separate from the visible one, that is home to spiritual beings with effective powers over the material world... implying the belief, common to most religious traditions, that effective communication is possible between the human and the spirit worlds".

In the attempt to define religion, Wright (1971, p 439) proposes that:

Religions have secular and spiritual aspects, the secular being most frequently observed and reported in connection with political and social institutions or behaviour. The spiritual aspect and the internal development of a belief system are comparatively inaccessible but highly significant. Popular beliefs, as well as more formal ideological and theological tenets, fall under this category.

While acknowledging that religion always has a social dimension that needs to be studied and arguing that religious thought plays a key role in political life in Africa because the spirit world is considered the ultimate source of power, Ellis and Ter Haar further assert that "it is essential to study in the first instance the ideas that motivate human action" (2004, p 14). To this effect, Tamsin Bradley (2007, p 7) seems to agree by suggesting that religion can be "understood as providing beliefs relating to a spiritual or supernatural sphere. The source of these beliefs is a concept of the sacred. The sacred origins of ideas and values ensure that they possess an authority that restricts the degree to which they are challenged. The sacred is experienced by the believer and is often described in terms of a relationship with a divine being or spirit". This explanation of religion relates to the concept of culture. Bradley (op. cit. p 7) argues that the study of religion cannot be divorced from the study of culture, partly because religion is "treated as a space within which ideas are expressed that detail how people should lead their lives" (ibid, p 6). Culture, in turn, absorbs the varied religious beliefs of a people and translates them into the sociopolitical and economic spheres in the lives of the people.

While religion is anthropologically perceived as a 'conceptual framework' for providing a greater appreciation of the world and the humans who inhere in it, culture is seen as the "mechanism by which religious beliefs are translated into social structures and practices shaping behaviour and determining how people relate to the world and each other" (Bradley, 2007, p 7). According to Mbiti (1991a, p 7), culture covers a broad range of things, such as the way people live, behave and act, as well as their physical and intellectual achievements. Culture manifests in a people's art, literature, language, dance, music, drama; the style through which they build their houses and dress; the way they organize socially and politically; their religious ideas, ethics, morals, and philosophy; the way their customs, economic life, and institutions of people are structured, and their values and ethics. People's identity is bound up with their religion and their membership in various social groups. In Africa and Nigeria in particular, the primary social groups are based on kinship and ethnicity, as well as co-residence – more recent identities such as those associated with contemporary national boundaries, are less salient for most. There exist many forms of religions in Africa and even the world at large, but in the case of circumscribed scholarship, this work will be particular about African traditional religion.

As asserted earlier, for this paper, African Traditional Religion is discussed in terms of beliefs and practices without necessarily providing a separate space for discussing prayer and magic as core aspects of the religion and culture as distinct conceptual entities. This is largely because these elements of religion are found in almost every sphere of Africans' lives and societies. In

scholarship case, African traditional religion, according to Mbiti (1991a), can be found in (a) rituals, ceremonies, festivals; (b) shrines, sacred places, and religious objects; (c) art and symbols; (d) music and dance; (e) proverbs, riddles and wise sayings; (f) names of people and places; (g) myths and legends; (h) beliefs and customs; etc.

One may deduce from the above that African traditional religion is an integral part of life, so much so that it has largely shaped the social life, political organization, economic activities, the practice and growth of other religions, and, most importantly, the culture of African societies. These factors in turn have informed the religious tradition.

African Traditional Religion

African Traditional Religion according to Stamer (1995, p 121-125), as cited by Wotogbeneka (2014), despite its diverse forms of expression, is:

“...a global framework of life, encompassing every human situation and governing the whole of society. It is closely linked to the ancestral soil and places each African both in the succession of the generations (the ancestors), in its relationship with its fellow creatures, and its productive activities.

Everything is religious because the direct relation with God is rarely explicit but the belief in one God, who is the Creator ... underlies everything else. Although, God does not intervene in the day-to-day affairs of life; rather the cosmos is governed by other invisible forces, good or evil, from whom it is possible to win favours through the ritualized experience of the ancestors. Strict observation of the rites and taboos and total solidarity within the group are the best guarantee of group survival and the transmission of life to numerous descendants. Seen from the outside, constraint and fear seem to be the dominant notes of traditional African religion, but this would be to forget that it offers an overall framework of security in an often very hostile environment, where only the survival of the group ultimately counts”.

Mbiti (1991a, p11-13) proposes five interrelated elements of African traditional religion as thus:

- **Beliefs** - these are essential parts of African traditional religion, expressing how and what Africans think of the universe and their attitude towards life, and connected with the belief in God, spirits, human life, magic, and life after death.
- **Practices, Ceremonies, and Festivals** - these manifest in the way people express their beliefs and include prayers, sacrifices and offerings, ceremonies, rituals, and the observance of various customs.
- **Religious Objects and Places** - these are objects and places regarded as holy or sacred, which are rarely used except for religious purposes. While some of these objects and places could be man-made, others are taken from the natural environment, such as trees.
- **Values and Morals** - these are religious ideas that provide directions to people on how to lead their lives and how to relate to one another. They include issues such as love, justice, decency, crime and punishment, character, good and evil, and integrity.
- **Religious Officials or Leaders** - these are individuals, mostly trained, who conduct religious matters, such as ceremonies, sacrifices, rituals, formal prayers, and divination.

Mbiti defines African traditional religion, in Ikenga-Metuh (1987, p 17), as institutionalized patterns of beliefs and worship practiced by various African societies from time immemorial in response to the 'Supernatural' as manifested in their environment and practice.

Although, it should be highlighted that this definition elucidates African traditional religion as encompassing beliefs and practices that originate from Africa and have existed since the beginning of Africa's known history. Despite the variation in the peoples, societies, linguistic

groups, and cultures of Africa, the above definitions point to certain commonalities in the ontological and cosmological perspectives of Africans across the region. These commonalities, according to the Ashanti people of Ghana in Jacob (2000, p 12), are manifested in two ways: "first, within the form of the rites and rituals practiced, and second, - but not always - within the content of these same rituals and rites". It is on this basis that more and more authors are embracing the idea of African traditional religion being a single religion, which has basic features that underpin the wide spectrum of African religious practices. These features are the concept of one supreme God, the deities, spirit forces, and the living dead/ancestors.

As these represent the fundamental features underlying African traditional religion, it is useful to re-echo Mbiti's (1969) as cited by Iheanacho (2010), comment that Africans have a distinct religious ontology, an ontology which is 'anthropocentric', in that everything is perceived in terms of its relationship with people. For instance, God is the creator and sustainer of humankind; spirits provide explanations for the destiny of humankind; while the animals, plants, and other natural phenomena provide the environment to support humanity's existence and with whom humanity establishes a mystical relationship. For Africans, this anthropocentric ontology is a complete unity that nothing can break up or destroy. To destroy or remove one of the above structures is to destroy the whole of existence including the destruction of the creator, which is impossible. One mode of existence presupposes all the others, and a balance must be maintained so that these modes neither drift too far apart from one another nor get too close to one another.

Humans get close to the deities through some defined process. Among these is the ritual process.

Ritual

Human beings are sometimes described or defined as basically rational, economic, political, or playing species. They may, however, also be viewed as ritual beings who exhibit a striking parallel between their ritual and verbal behaviour. Just as language is a system of symbols that is based upon arbitrary rules, the ritual may be viewed as a system of symbolic acts that are based upon arbitrary rules.

Ritual is part and parcel of human socio-religious activities. Rituals exist in politics, sports, agriculture, religion, and other forms of human social relationships.

The intricate, yet complex relationship between ritual and religion can be seen in the history of various attempts to explain ritual behaviour. In most explanations, religion becomes a necessary factor in the theory concerning the nature of ritual, and the specific form of religion that is tied to explanations of ritual is the language of religion. Both myth and ritual remain fundamental to any analysis of religious studies.

Ritual and Religion

The earliest approach was an attempt to explain the ritual, as well as religion, utilizing a theory concerned with historical origin. In most cases, the theoretical axiom of religion was also assumed as an evolutionary hypothesis that would explain the development of ritual behaviour through history. The basic premise, or law, for this approach, was that the ontogeny (development of an individual organism) recapitulates phylogeny (evolution of a related group of organisms), just as the human embryo recapitulates the stages of human evolutionary history in the womb—e.g., the gill stage. The solution to explaining the universal scope of ritual depended upon the success in locating the oldest cultures and religions. Scholars believed that if they could discover this origin, they would be able to explain contemporary human rituals.

In the search for an origin of ritual, research turned from the well-known literate cultures to those that appeared to be less complex and preliterate. The use of the terms primitive religion

and primitive cultures comes from this approach to seeking an answer to the meaning of ritual, myth, and religion. Various cultures and rituals were singled out, the sacrifice of either men or animals becoming one of the main topics for speculation, though the exact motivation or cause of sacrificial ritual was disputed among scholars of religion and culture. Among such scholars is W. Robertson Smith, a British biblical scholar who first published his work in the ninth edition of *Encyclopædia Britannica* (1875–89), sacrifice was motivated by the desire for communion between members of a primitive group and their god. The origin of ritual, therefore, was believed to be found in totemic (animal symbolic clan) cults; and totemism, for many authors, was thus believed to be the earliest stage of religion and ritual. The various stages of ritual development and evolution, however, were never agreed upon. Given this origin hypothesis, rituals of purification, gift-giving, piacular (expiatory) rites, and worship were viewed as developments, or secondary stages, of the original sacrificial ritual.

Ritual behaviour, entails an attitude that is concerned with the sacred; and sacred acts and things, therefore, are nothing more than symbolic representations of society. The African society is not void of this; the traditional African society is a ritual-based society which is why her religious practices are centered on rituals.

Rituals in African Traditional Religion

African ritual action is based first and foremost on the belief in existential reality besides the physical world. According to Momoh (2000), the hierarchical structure of African characterization of giving credence to the existence of existents and reality outside the perceptible, physical world but which interact with the physical world in a kind of communal spiritualism use. Meanwhile, the universe is a unified whole with dual complements, the physical and the spiritual. Actions performed then in the physical world invariably have spiritual inspirations and causations, this is the reason why the employment and efficacy of rituals among the Africans are premised on the African world view of harmonious monism, complementarity, and integrated cosmology. In African traditional religion, rituals action, therefore, pre-supposes an integrative connection between the ritual symbolic action physically performed and the desired effect or consequences.

This cosmological conception influences both the African pattern of thought (logic) and the African perception of reality (epistemology). This Anyanwu (2017) and E. Edeh (2015) prefer to call "duality" to distinguish it from Western dualism and to refer to the notion of dialectics where two things functionally different are seen as essential and incomplete members of the whole to form a harmonious monism. This logic according to Anyanwu (2017), accepts the co-existence of opposing realities, each complementing the other. It denies absolutism, and monolithism and completely diffuses the problem of dualism as evident in the Cartesian philosophy. This Anyanwu's submission is premised on the belief that "the world including (x) has a missing link, which is something other than the thing (x). The thing (x) then persistently yearns for and struggles to capture this missing link. This is achieved at the time of complementation at which point (x) realizes itself (Ijiomah, 2015). By implication, the physical is complemented by the spiritual and both can work harmoniously to achieve any desired effect. Both the physical and spiritual realities can influence and cause each other to action.

To properly understand the relationship among the various kinds of beings, then the notion of force as the fundamental causal and uniting factor is very important. It is the permeation of force or spirit in all things that is responsible for whatever exists. Force is here understood as life, energy, power, dynamism, strength, or what P. Tempels (1969) technically referred to as vital force. Whatever exists, from the lowest to the highest being has a force. Every existence then exists in virtue of force, hence, different kinds of existence are a fraction (or function) of the degree of the life force in different beings. In Africa, there is a supreme Spirit or Force, who

is God, the force in the deities and the spirit of the ancestors, then the embodied spirit in man. There are also spirits in animals, animate beings as well as inanimate beings. To get to the Supreme Being, man must go through the intermediary of ancestors and minor deities. This dynamism of spirits explains why the Africans pray and talk to trees, rivers, mountains, stones, wood, and others, in this way, the Africans believe the spirit which is the fundamental substance in reality can be harnessed and manipulated to their benefit. To this end, prayer becomes very essential in the traditional belief and practice social block.

Prayer

This is the most common act of worship in African Traditional Religion. Through prayers, the worshippers can communicate either directly or indirectly with God, the divinities, and the ancestors. It is often said that prayers, like the making of sacrifices and offerings, are at the heart of African religious life. Consequently, you can see people praying almost every time in every place.

Though people often pray directly to God, it is important to note that it is the priest that does community prayer because it will involve using the various liturgical names and attributes of God or the divinities during such prayers. There are prayers of thanksgiving in which people give gratitude to God; supplications in which people ask for material blessings; prayers of protection in which people ask for protection against sickness and death, victory over enemies, and long life; and prayers of dedication in which belongings and children are dedicated to God.

Types of Prayer

Prayer is the raising of one's mind and heart to God or the requesting of good things from God. At an even more basic level, a prayer is a form of communication, a way of talking to God or the saints, just as we talk to family or friends.

Prayer, however, could be typologized into five basic types. Here are brief descriptions of each type of prayer:

1. Blessing and Adoration (Worship)

In prayers of adoration or worship, people exalt the greatness of God and acknowledge their dependence on Him in all things. The liturgies of the African traditional region are full of prayers of adoration or worship. They have private prayers. In extolling the greatness of God, they also acknowledge their humility.

2. Petition

Outside of communal prayer, prayers of petition are the type of prayer with which they are most familiar. In them, they ask God for things they need—primarily spiritual needs, but physical ones as well. The prayers of petition always include a statement of adherents' willingness to accept God's Will, whether He directly answers the prayer or not. The Africans acknowledge that God's plans for them are more important than what they desire.

Prayers of expiation, in which adherents express sorrow for their sins, are one form of prayers of petition. The first form is because before they ask for anything, they acknowledge their sinfulness and ask the deity for forgiveness and mercy. The Confiteor or Penitential Rite at the beginning of its liturgical process.

3. Intercession

Prayers of intercession are another form of prayer that appears to be a petition, but they are important enough to be considered their type of prayer. Intercession is a prayer of petition which leads us to pray as our ancestors did. In a prayer of intercession, one is not concerned with its needs but with the needs of others. Just as we ask the ancestors to intercede for us, we, in turn, intercede through our prayers for our family members, friends, colleagues, and

others, asking the deity to shower mercy on them by answering their requests. Also, a Prayer of Parents for their Children. **Thanksgiving**

The prayer of thanksgiving is a very important one in African traditional religion. Perhaps it is the most neglected type of prayer by adherents, but not with the priests and priestesses. Though, for Christians, the Grace Before Meals is a good example of a prayer of thanksgiving; in African traditional religion, before libation and incantations, thanks are firstly said. This is because *Ekele Dike na nke omere, omekwa ozoh* (Ibo), which connotes "if you thank the king for what it did, it does more." **Praise**

Prayers of praise are the acknowledgment of the deity (God) for what It is to us. In an oral interview with Amadi Okeke (17/03/2022), a chief priest, praise "lauds God for Its own sake and gives It glory, quite beyond what It does, but simply because It is. It shares in the blessed happiness of the pure of heart who love God in faith before seeing It hereafter. Prayers of love or charity are another form of prayers of praise to the deity. It is the expression of one love for the deity, the source and object of all love. Every average African traditional religious adherent is highly immune to praise addiction.

Prayer as Ritual

In Africa, poetic prayer can be distinguished from ceremonial prayer. The first, like all of the liturgical prayers, contains three essential parts: the invocation of the god, a justification for fulfillment (e.g., sacrifices offered, favours given and received), and a conclusion that formulates the request. Normally, the ceremonial prayer followed a ritual pattern: breaking of kola nut, the prayer proper, then sacrifice and libations. The prayer initiated the liturgical action; without it, there could be no ceremony. Prayers often were transformed into incantations or invocations, a characteristic of African religion.

According to Turner (2006), African prayers begin with an invocation of divinity. Addressing the god is of capital importance. The prayer itself generally takes two forms, depending on whether it implies a request or is simply limited to praise. The prayer of request has a juridical pattern in which the offering, as a contractual element, dominates. The offering is what jurists call a bail bond, a guarantee. The prayer of request's effectiveness depends on a precise formulation, with parallelisms, solemn repetition, and accumulation of synonyms. To Hollis (2010), the verb *Precor* ("I pray") is reinforced by many synonyms. Prayers of praise developed out of meditation or experiences of religious elevation and utilized various patterns in both public and private ceremonies. For Hollis, an example of collections of prayers of praise is preserved in the *Verba Pontificia* ("Priestly Words").

Another form of prayer is the *votum* ("vow"), in which a person undertakes to offer to the divinity, in exchange for divine favour, a sacrifice, the building of a temple, or other such offerings. To Wellace (2006), it is a kind of bargain in which is still felt the prudence of the peasant who has experienced failure. This *vota* ("vows") become more numerous than other prayers the farther one goes from the historical origins of Rome. The most solemn form of the vow is the devotion ("act of devotion"), by which a chief offers himself to the divinity to obtain victory.

Being careful not to put you in the dark, prayers have great potency in African traditional religion.

The Potent of Prayer in African Traditional Religion

Prayers in African traditional religion have great potency. Though, prayers in African traditional communities usually take various forms. This may differ from place to place but certain patterns may seem general in most cases. Mbiti

(1969) as cited by Wotogbe-Weneka (2014), echoed that:

African traditional prayers generally include praise, thanksgiving, a declaration of the state of affairs in which the prayers are offered, and requests. Such prayers always have concrete intentions and people do not 'beat about the bush' when saying their prayers. They request such things as good health, healing, protection from danger, safety in traveling or some other undertaking, security, prosperity, preservation of life, peace, and various benefits for individuals. For the community at large, prayer may ask for rain, peace, the cessation of epidemics and dangers to the nation, success in war or raids, the acceptance of sacrifices and offerings, and fertility for people, animals, and crops.

Prayer is one of the things that made the old people go to their elders; but since these elders are dead, they are to be found at the grave or the crossroads at night. Before this, note that the patterns of prayer to ancestors in many African societies share some similarities with the pattern of prayer to God (deity) in some world religions. For instance, a typical pattern of ancestral worship looks like a copy of many psalms in the Christian religion.

African traditional religious adherents believe that for her prayers to be potent, they must be practical (ritualized), and as such, it adopts some symbolic representations to communicate the ancestor or deity. Mystical or magical pieces of evidence are some of the things that convince an adherent that his prayers have reached the transcendental world.

Magic

Although magic has an ambiguous relationship with African religion and society, it is rooted in the main institutional, social, and intellectual traditions in African history. Moreover, modern attempts to arrive at a universal definition of magic reflect a Western bias. In particular, 18th- and 19th-century views on cultural and historical evolution set magic apart from religion and science. In a model developed by the British anthropologist Sir James Frazer (1854–1941), magic is characterized as an early stage in human development, superseded first by religion and then by science. The debate over the relationship between magic, religion, and science that dominated much of the discussion about magic throughout the 20th century is evident in the fieldwork of anthropologists, the theories of sociologists of religion, and critiques by postmodernists. Consequently, research in comparative religions, history, and anthropology in the second half of the 20th century moved away from the evolutionary model toward more context-sensitive interpretations, while other studies developed new models for cross-cultural comparison. Nonetheless, the magic-religion-science model retains considerable interpretive power, and the dichotomies used to distinguish magic from religion or science are pervasive in popular discourse.

According to Baglari (2015), magic is a concept used to describe a mode of rationality or way of thinking that looks to invisible forces to influence events, effect change in material conditions, or present the illusion of change. Within the African tradition, magic in its way of thinking is distinct from scientific mode; however, such distinctions and even the definition of magic are subject to wide debate. Magic has its nature and scope in Africa.

Nature and Scope of Magic in Africa

Practices classified as magic include divination, astrology, incantations, alchemy, sorcery, spirit mediation, and necromancy. The term magic is also used colloquially in African popular culture to refer to acts of conjuring and sleight of hand for entertainment. The purpose of magic is to acquire knowledge, power, love, or wealth; to heal or ward off illness or danger; to guarantee productivity or success in an endeavour; to cause harm to an enemy; to reveal information; to induce spiritual transformation; to trick, or to entertain. According to Baglari (2015), the effectiveness of magic is often determined by the condition and performance of the magician,

who is thought to have access to unseen forces and special knowledge of the appropriate words and actions to manipulate those forces.

Typologies of Magic

There are different typologies of magic but phenomena associated or confused with magic are becoming scholarship cum research issues for scholars. Some of these phenomena issues include forms of mysticism, medicine, paganism, heresy, witchcraft, shamanism, Vodou, and superstition. Magic is sometimes divided into the "high" magic of the intellectual elite, bordering on science, and the "low" magic of common folk practices. According to Onwuka (2020), there is a distinction between "black" magic, used for nefarious purposes, and "white" magic, ostensibly used for beneficial purposes. Although according to Baglari (2015) these boundaries are often unclear, magical practices have a sense of "otherness" because of the supernatural power that is believed to be channeled through the practitioner, who is a marginalized or stigmatized figure in some societies and a central one in others.

White and Black Magic Saga

White magic has traditionally referred to the use of supernatural powers or magic for selfless purposes. According to Baglari (2015), Practitioners of white magic have been given titles such as wise men or women, healers, white witches, or wizards. Many of these people claimed to have the ability to do such things because of knowledge or power that was passed on to them through hereditary lines, or by some event later in their lives. White magic was practiced through healing, blessing, charms, incantations, prayers, and songs. To Miller (2010), concerning the philosophy of left-hand path and right-hand path, white magic is the benevolent counterpart of malicious black magic.

Black magic has traditionally referred to the use of supernatural powers or magic for evil and selfish purposes; or magic associated with the devil or other evil spirits. For Jesper Aagaard Petersen (2009), black magic is also sometimes referred to as the "left-hand path", (its right-hand path counterpart being benevolent white magic). In modern times, some find that the definition of black magic has been convoluted by people who define magic or ritualistic practices that they disapprove of as black magic.

Like its counterpart white magic, the origins of black magic can be traced to the primitive, ritualistic worship of spirits as outlined in Robert M. Place's (2009) book, *Magic and Alchemy*. According to New World Encyclopedia (2014), unlike white magic, in which Place sees parallels with primitive shamanistic efforts to achieve closeness with spiritual beings, the rituals that developed into modern black magic were designed to invoke those same spirits to produce beneficial outcomes for the practitioner. These black and white magic saga in the universe and Africa in precis. This calls for the dichotomization of black and white magic.

Black and White Magic: A Dichotomizing Factor of Magic and Witchcraft

The view of magic as pre-religious or nonscientific has contributed both to subtle distinctions between magic and other practices and the recognition of subcategories of magic. Notably, anthropologists distinguish magic from witchcraft, defining the former as the manipulation of an external power by mechanical or behavioral means to affect others and the latter as an inherent personal quality that allows the witch to achieve the same ends. However, the line between the two is not always clear, and according to Onwuka (2020), in some parts of the world, an individual may operate in both ways. Similarly, the distinction between "black" magic and "white" magic is obscure since both practices often use the same means and are performed by the same person. Scholars also distinguish between magic and divination, whose purpose is

not to influence events but to predict or understand them. Nevertheless, the mystical power of diviners may be thought to be the same as that behind the magic. Ultimately, Baglari (2015), opines that despite these distinctions and the variety of unique roles that practitioners play in their societies, most end up classified under the universal term magician. Often even religious figures such as priests, shamans, and prophets are identified as magicians because many of their activities include acts defined as "magical" by modern scholars.

In the end, distinctions between magic and religion or science are harder to make in practice than in theory; scholars, therefore, use labels such as magico-religious to describe activities or persons who cross this artificial dividing line. Similarly, Onwuka (2020) states that the boundary between magic and science is permeable since the modern scientific method (observation and experimentation) evolved from forms of scientific magic such as alchemy and astrology. Thus, the evolutionary model, which draws sharp distinctions between magic, religion, and science, cannot account for the essential similarity between various phenomena. Moreover, dichotomies that define magic concerning other phenomena are reductionist, often ignoring the meaningful structures and beliefs that inform these practices in their native context.

Elements of magic

There exist two elements of magic according to Schmidt (2006); the spell and material. These elements have separate operation modules and cosmological contextualization. A brief discussion of the two elements is thus:

Spells

The performance of magic involves words (e.g, spells, incantations, or charms) and symbolic numbers that are thought to have innate power, natural or man-made material objects, and ritual actions performed by the magician or other participants. According to Petersen (2009), a spell or incantation is believed to draw power from spiritual agencies to accomplish magic. Knowledge of spells or symbolic numbers is often secret (occult), and the possessor of such knowledge can be either greatly revered or feared. In some cases, the spell is the most highly regarded component of the magical rite or ceremony.

Material

Much anthropological literature refers to the objects used in magic as "medicines," hence the popular use of the term *medicine man* for the magician. To Miller (2010), these medicines include herbs, animal parts, gemstones, sacred objects, or props used in performance and are thought to be potent in themselves or empowered by incantations or rituals. In some cases, medicines that are intended to heal are physiologically effective; for example, the poppy is used widely as an anesthetic, willow bark is used by some Chinese as an analgesic, and garlic and onions were used as antibiotics in medieval Europe. Other medicines that are meant to cause harm, such as toad extracts and bufadienolides, are, in fact, known poisons. Other materials according to Robert (2009), have a symbolic relationship to the intended outcome, as with divination from animal parts. In scapulamancy (divination from a sheep's shoulder bone), for example, the sheep's bone reflects the macrocosmic forces of the universe. In sorcery, a magician may employ something belonging to the intended victim (e.g., hair, nail parings, or a piece of clothing) as part of the ritual. The rite itself may be symbolic, as with the drawing of protective circles in which to call up spirits, the sprinkling of water on the ground to make rain, or the destruction of a wax image to harm a victim.

Rites and Condition of the Performer of Magic

In as much as magic is based on performance, ritual and the magician's knowledge and ability play a significant role in its efficacy. The performance of magic also presumes an audience, either the spiritual forces addressing the patient-client, or the community. Both the magician and the rite itself are concerned with the observance of taboos and the purification of the participants. To this end, magicians, like priests presiding over religious rituals, observe restrictions on diet or sexual activity to demarcate the rite from ordinary and profane activities and to invest it with sanctity. This may be the reason why Miller (2010), states that modern magicians' success with entertaining audiences is dependent primarily on their performance skills in manipulating material objects to create an illusion.

Magic in African Traditional Religion

It has been universally acknowledged that human beings are aware that they needed to be aided by supernatural powers to cope with the complexities, complications, and riddles of their existence. Humans require succor, deliverance, and the mastery of environmental circumstances. To meet the needs of this existence, human beings have recognized two principal powers. The first is the divine power which is approached via submission and appeal and the other is the power of the elemental spirits which is approached by harnessing and tapping it to use for their ends.

According to Wagnalls (2014), in tapping the elemental power, the technique through which the elemental powers can be controlled is sought out. This is what is called magic in Africa. It is worthy of note that in Africa, you cannot talk about magic and medicine without talking about religion.

As it has been in the ancient world, medicine has been closely associated with religion basically because the priest most times doubles as the divine healer. For example, among the Babylonians, Ea who is the father of Marduk is the father of all physicians. Medicine in Africa is also seen as having its root in religion. Medicine is seen as having its source in God and operated through a tutelary divinity.

Most traditional doctors in Africa often claim to have been taught the art of medicine by the divinities or in a dream or trance. Some claim to have been carried away by the whirlwind for a period ranging from seven days to seven years to be taught the art of medicine.

Finally in Africa, magic, and medicine in African traditional religion according to Kunin and Miles (2006), as cited by Owete, Gbule, and Odili (2012), often go hand in hand because:

- The same divinity has both magic and medicine under his portfolio. For example, Osanyin and Agwu are among the Yoruba and the Igbo respectively.
- The same word is usually used to cover the two phenomenon
- Medicine often involves specifications of time and rituals

on the forgoing, religion places central function in the midst of both to regularize them in the society.

Functions of Magic

Foremost among the many roles magic plays are its "instrumental" and "expressive" functions.

Instrumental Function: based on the attempt to influence nature or human behaviour, magic's instrumental function is measured by its efficacy in achieving the desired result. Anthropologists especially Baglari (2015) identified three main types of instrumental magic: the productive, the protective, and the destructive.

- i. **Productive magic** is employed to solicit a successful outcome from human labour or nature, such as a bountiful hunt or harvest or good weather.

- ii. **Protective magic** aims to defend an individual or community from the vagaries of nature and the evil of others. The use of amulets to ward off contagious diseases or the recitation of charms before a journey are examples of this protective function.
- iii. **Destructive magic, or sorcery**, is intended to harm others, often is motivated by envy, and is socially disruptive. Consequently, the use of countermagic against sorcery may relieve some social tension within a community.

Magic's Expressive Function results from the symbolic and social meanings attached to its practices, though its performers may not necessarily be aware of this function. Magic can provide a sense of group identity through shared rituals that give power or strength to members. At the same time, according to Onwuka (2020), it can isolate the magician as a special person within or on the margins of society. Magic can also serve as a creative outlet or form of entertainment. It is, therefore, inseparable from the total system of thought, belief, and practice in a given society, especially, the African socio-religious worldview.

CONCLUSION

In as much religion and its elements are difficult to define, contextualize because of their nature. This study was able to justice to prayer and magic: A potent paradoxical ritual in African traditional religion because of the adoption of a phenomenological approach in the light of the insider perspective. Both prayer and magic are ritual practices in African religion in that their essentiality cannot be undermined by adherents as their daily or regular ritual life is characterized by either prayers or magic.

The study typologized prayer into five and clarified the concept of magic not just by etymologization but also by dichotomization of the black from the white magics.

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