

African Conventions of Witchcraft and Divination: Justified Claims or Mere Chance and Manoeuvres

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Abstract: *African conventions of witchcraft and divination as indigenous epistemological apprehensions, sit at the crossroads of socio-moral epistemology, culture, psychology, logic, and traditional religion. Notwithstanding, most African worldviews handling of them is as a social institution (with justified claims) and isolated instances of manipulation possibilities. This paper argues that witchcraft and divination in African indigenous knowledge constitutes to an extent justified claims rather than swift dismissal of them as sheer manipulation or manoeuvre. From an African epistemological viewpoint, it reveals practices embodying internal logic, causal theories, and sustainable communal verification measures. Significantly, this phenomenon highlights anthropological curiosity and serious indigenous African philosophical inquiry legitimizing knowledge conceptualization vis-à-vis decolonization of knowledge acquisition claims. However, this research targets distinction of legitimate traditional knowledge acquisition from exploitative manipulation. Thus, addressing the problem: how justified are claims of witchcraft/divination apropos evidence or verification; establishing authentic from fraudulent practices? Importantly, the significance of this study highlights the need for epistemic decolonization (challenging western rapid tagging of African thought as pre-logical), considering divination functions as a scientific paradigm, examining the significance of ethical and social orders, and differentiating authentic from inauthentic witchcraft/divination claims and practices. This paper enhances a framework of foundations and conceptualization of witchcraft/divination, and challenges suggesting it as mere chance and manipulation. However, a few perspectives and prospects illustrate potentials of working on aspects of chances and manoeuvres, in order to be accommodated as reliable means of knowledge acquisition.*

Keywords: African Conventions, Witchcraft, Divination, Justified Claims, Chance, Manoeuvres

1. Introduction

African conventions of witchcraft and divination parade consistent justifiable claims. This acquits it from prejudiced judgment as unfounded epistemological contentions. Yet, diligent studies are essential ascertaining their epistemological foundations and justification; restricting everything to epistemological configurations. Accordingly, divination in African worldviews as elsewhere rests on belief in some supernatural influence; with diviners scrutinized as encompassing knowledge or abilities to know from three principle sources: God, ancestors, and evil spirits. In most African traditions and culture, God is envisioned as the creator spirit or supernatural being capable of controlling supernatural forces. In addition, as commonly held, scores of diviners possess capacities of knowing things and events via God's inspiration. Consequently, God is believed to endow such persons as agents for detecting and solving problems; regardless of sources of their knowledge. In relation to witchcraft, diviners are awarded knowledge of certainty's series of truth claims; using specified means during divination processes, obtaining required information or results connected to witchcraft allegations and practices.

Furthermore, philosophical assessment of views concerning witchcraft in African cultures portrays witches as acting unconsciously, unaware of the ill they cause in most cases, and driven by irrepressible urges. Therefore, although they act malevolently, recurrently, the accused (persons often not cognisant of their evil acts) readily assume responsibility; vindicating attributed accusations. Bartholomew Abanuka concords, asserting that belief in evil spirits as a source of knowledge to wicked-minded diviners is very common and dreaded. He thinks witchcraft and divination claims

(common phenomena), are incommunicable in words for outsiders to judge (ABANUKA Bartholomew, 1994: 73).

Although epistemic, hermeneutic and critic-logical approaches are unavoidable, epistemic justification, ontology, and rationality components are quite essential in this study. Hence, interrogations target how diviners acquire knowledge and display evidences; utilizing verification, and coherency models to assess findings. Thus, since African realities are largely spiritually populated (ancestors, forces, vital forces), witchcraft and divination claims from the ontological axis to an extent are justifiable. However, despite plethora of trending debates justifying claims of witchcraft/divination as mere chance and manipulation, we shall concentrate on evaluating four essential factors. First, is the significance of epistemic decolonization that necessitates keen attention. This position discharges positivist labelling of indigenous African conceptualization of witchcraft and divination as pre-logical. Second, divination in for instance *Ifa* (Yoruba of Nigeria) and *ngam* (Nso' of Cameroon), constitute similar scientific paradigms to western epistemology; entertaining theories and inquiry methods championed by expertise interpretations. Hence, there are grounds justifying the fact that diviners do not in every circumstance, manipulate their clients; evidence of application of systematic hermeneutics exists. Third, in relation to ethical and social orders, numerous witchcraft/divination accusations and verdicts may not be regarded as arbitrary manoeuvres; justified mechanisms subsequently illustrated, exist for frequent regulation, explanation of misfortune and social cohesion maintenance. Lastly, this study distinguishes authentic from inauthentic claims and practices connected to witchcraft/divination. Consequently, established philosophical criteria entreated in this study, afford arguments for differentiating genuine from

inauthentic divination practices that discredit witchcraft/divination conventions as mere manoeuvres.

Therefore, while valorising divination and witchcraft as accommodating justified epistemological allegations, their hoisting of instances of chance and manipulations discredit integral awarding of complete epistemologico-logical excellence. Therefore, while acknowledging ramifications of claimed knowledge from divination and contrasting scenarios of witchcraft, through foundations and conceptualization (understanding witchcraft/divination in indigenous knowledge and epistemological implications of witchcraft/divination vis-à-vis justified claims), isolated challenges of both as mere chance and manoeuvres (implements and chance and manipulation powers), require careful exploration of the analytic versus hermeneutic methods. Consequently, highlighting justified claims of witchcraft and divination particularly in African cultures, alongside unwarranted cases of manipulations, attract perspectives and prospects to reconcile extremes of prejudiced classification as pre-logical and abuses or schemes of epistemological manoeuvres. Finally, a synthesis and conclusion avails possibilities for further research that could be extended by the rich bibliography.

2. Foundations of Conceptualization of Witchcraft and Divination

African worldviews and cosmology are inseparable from epistemological concerns. It is noticeable that belief in invisible and mystical forces condition people to consult diviners when evil expressed in witchcraft) is suspected; frequently suspects are family members and neighbours. Diane Ciekawy associates witchcraft and divination conceptualization to social anthropological allegations and ethico-epistemological features (Ciekawy Diane, 1998: 1011). Like Ciekawy, Michael Marwick interprets the same concepts as consisting of social functions (Marwick Michael, 1965: 318), with Laurenti Magesa weaving it to engross mystical powers that affect socio-moral and spiritual life (Magesa Laurenti, 1997: 422). In Bantu worldviews, divination and witchcraft engage extrasensory perceptions, esotericism, and spiritism. Although Ciekawy and related authors frame divination as a critique of western rationalism and secularism (Ciekawy Diane, 1998: 1023), it should not be misconstrued as justifying archaism or remaining in the dark ages and extension of pan-experientialism without vindicated declarations. Hence, foundations and conceptualization of witchcraft permit us to structuralize this section into two interwoven parts: understanding witchcraft and divination in indigenous knowledge and epistemological implications of witchcraft and divination vis-à-vis justified claims.

2.1 Understanding Witchcraft and Divination in Indigenous Knowledge

At first sight, witchcraft and divination in African thought are not scrutinized as mere superstition or divorced from reason. They are epistemological and ethical systems (socio-moral epistemology), strictly embedded in culture and implored to explain misfortune and maintenance of social order; generating knowledge about the visible world.

Unfortunately, despite knowledge loss appropriate of early prejudices against, moral authority in relation to testimony, animating sheer volumes of information about aberrations dismissing validity claims of witchcraft and divination, indigenous epistemology continues to rely on them. Philip M. Peek articulates this intimating that:

Throughout Africa, whether in the city or in the countryside, no matter the religion, sex, or status of the individual, questions, problems, and choices arise for which everyday knowledge is insufficient and yet action must be taken. The information necessary to respond effectively is available, but often only through a diviner. That is why divination continues to provide a trusted means of decision-making, a basic source of vital knowledge. (PEEK M. Philip, 1998: 171)

Evidently, as moral authorities' vis-à-vis testimony, diviners guard a trusted system in African socio-moral epistemology; enclosed in standardized processes for deriving truth facts and dependably learned discipline based on extensive bodies of knowledge. Although diverse and entertaining inaccessible information, diviners as moral authorities trail set routines; imploring implements and promulgating taboos with self-explanatory mechanisms. Similarly, Emmanuel C. Eze supports reliance on diviners as justificatory:

Divination sessions are not instances of arbitrary, idiosyncratic behaviour by diviners. A divination system is often the primary institutional means of articulating the epistemology of a people. Much as the classroom and the courtroom are primary sites for the presentation of cultural truths in the United States of America, so the diviner in other cultures [African] is central to the expression and enactment of his or her cultural truths as they are reviewed in the context of contemporary realities. (Eze C. Emmanuel, 1998: 172)

Thus, localizing divination sessions involves reliance on objects, words, and characters of diviners highlighting testimony validations' process enforced by social interaction and imploration of oracular knowledge. Although testimonies from diviners largely represent deterrent measures, their role of tracing causes when things go wrong, cannot be minimized. According to Mbiti, "they find out which spirit may be troubling a possessed person; what it wants and what should be done to stop the trouble" (Mbiti S. John, 1977: 156). Hence, if witnessing is credible, illustrating diviners' invested inherent powers to tap or control mystical forces, in methods causing the invisible to become visible (testimonial evidence), justifies their claims.

Equally, it is amazing how African epistemological declarations regarding witchcraft and divination are vindicated as exceeding mere superstition and accredited with systematic frameworks elucidating causality, validating knowledge, and establishing social harmony. In other words, caution is necessary restraining the viewing of witchcraft/divination practices via western empiricist laboratories; accommodating African philosophical arguments that implore rational arguments interpreting a "holistic universe," interlocking spiritual and physical

realms. Sophie B. Oluwole in agreement solicits epistemic justification for indigenous knowledge; at variance that poor reasoning causes dismissive attitudes toward witchcraft conceptions. In her estimation, we should not lose count of the fact that witchcraft represents “a psychic/spiritual manifestation of energy, possessing unique internal consistency, and empirical reality” within African lived-experiences (OLUWOLE B. Sophie, 1992: 99). Alongside Oluwole and others, agreement is presumed of scientific paradigms not constituting sole arbiters justifying existence or possibilities.

2.2 Epistemological Implications of Witchcraft and Divination Vis-à-vis Justified Claims

Following after views on conceptualization of witchcraft/divination, is an endeavour to establish how it is produced, disseminated, and justified from these avenues. Here, we notice an intimate connection between witchcraft/divination as means of knowledge acquisition, and aspects of certitude versus skepticism.

2.2.1 Witchcraft/Divination as Means of Knowledge Acquisition

As aforementioned, diviners allegedly acquire knowledge from three principle sources: God, ancestors, and evil spirits; practically imploring divination of casting lots, cowries and related objects, and spider divination. Through inspiration, diviners use objects to obtain required information. On parallel terms, Eze once more spotlights aspects of Yoruba divination, commencing with the diviner (*babalawo*) “the father of ancient wisdom;” to whom clients approach in quest of solutions to specific problems: personal, medical, social, political, and religious. He intimates that the diviner seeks information from god (*Ifa*) who assists in divination (EZE C. Emmanuel, 1998: 40). Therefore, divination revolves around practices of interpreting omens, leading to discovery of the gods’ will in natural phenomena, backed-up by testimony. For instance, casting of lots (*Njoo se tangin* in Nso’ Cameroon), involves kola nut peelings; cut into five pieces that correspond to external senses of sight, hearing, touch, smell, and taste. This explains why diviners’ interpretation of casted lots expresses aspects of smelling, feeling, and tasting; summarized into seeing and hearing. In this connection, John S. Mbiti underscores the capacity of seers (diviners) as people with natural powers aiding them to “see” or perceive things not ordinarily known by other human beings (Mbiti S. John, 1977: 157). In this light, Abanuka asserts that seers are often people with a sharp capacity for both foresight and insight into things, with some of them receiving revelations in visions and dreams, in addition from intuitions. For example, African societies are alluded to for having famous seers (diviners) predicting events that were realizable: the coming of Europeans, building of railways, the flying of airplanes, and so on (Abanuka Bartholomew, 1994: 130).

Additionally, Eze in another dimension, confirming aforementioned opinions about casting of lots, validates divination as a technique of knowing with certainty:

A divination system is a standardized process deriving from a learned discipline based on an extensive body of

knowledge. This knowledge may or may not be literally expressed during the interpretation of the oracular message. The diviner may utilize a fixed corpus... or a more diffuse body of esoteric knowledge. (EZE C. Emmanuel, 1998: 171)

Notwithstanding aforementioned variations confirming diversity in divining processes, defined routines through which otherwise inaccessible information or knowledge is supposedly obtainable are relevant. Mbiti sums up the role of diviners and significance of detecting objects to obtain reserved information and knowledge as follows:

Diviners tell who may have worked evil, magic, sorcery or witchcraft against the sick or barren. They find out [using cowries and related objects], which spirit may be troubling a possessed person, what it wants, and what should be done to stop the trouble. Diviners use divination; a method of finding out the unknown, by means of pebbles, numbers, water, animal entrails, reading the palms, throwing dice, and many other methods. It takes a long time to train in the different methods. Diviners like other religious leaders, often have their own language...getting in touch with spirits directly or through mediums (Mbiti S. John, 1977: 156).

Mbiti’s view attesting to various objects’ significance and reliability to obtain reserved knowledge, use of coded language, and the fact that as a craft the duration of training is long, suggests possibilities of diviners possessing certain knowledge when dealing with unseen forces of the universe.

2.2.2 Certitude Versus Skepticism

This illustrates witchcraft and divination practices or processes as depicting potentials of certain knowledge and skill; recognizable in most African communities as real within their worldview. Overwhelmingly, diviners (seers) doubling as traditional healers are believed to perform formal roles in diagnosing causes of illnesses, discovery of missing persons/articles, naming misfortune causes, searching destinies, laying out correct paths upon departure for journeys, and career choices. Consequently, testimony and witnessing attest to justified knowledge claims of these realities. Generally, African socio-moral epistemology highlights testimony beyond mere acquisition of beliefs; exceptionally isolating witnessing as means of admitting knowledge via others’ expressions. This is predominantly within communitarian contexts; corroborated by Jennifer Lackey from another spectrum other than African perspectives:

[Fewer] consensus, however, are found when questions about the nature and extent of our dependence on the word of others arise. Is our justified reliance on testimony fundamentally basic, for instance, or is it ultimately reducible to perception, memory, and reason? Is trust or some related interpersonal feature of our social interaction with one another, essential to the acquisition of beliefs that are testimonially justified (LACKEY Jennifer, 2011: 71)?

The forgone lines suggest that testimony, a valorisation instrument in African socio-moral epistemology, identifies

puzzles whether testimonial knowledge inevitably gains acquisition through variable diffusion from speaker to hearer, or generate vindicated epistemic characteristics of its own genre and right. Hence, acknowledging justification of meteorologists' weather/climate predictions (constructed on western science), while rejecting the same trajectory of rainmakers in African divination is discriminatory. Unquestionably, reliability and trust in lived experiences from rainmaking training as Mbiti avers after diligent learning of the art, leads to observation and interpretation of weather conditions (MBITI S. John, 1977: 158). Thus, in several instances, rainmakers through observable weather changes have noticeably prevented rain from falling in particular locations/occasions; needing no extraordinary metrological predictions to certify claims of rainmaking divination processes.

In another dimension, Barry Hallen's epistemic justification, applying Anglo-American analytic philosophy to Yoruba knowledge (*imo*) and belief (*igbagbo*) validates divination claims insisting that:

They reveal Yoruba's as placing higher premium on firsthand, verified observations (*imo*), rather than second-hand accounts. Surrounding such frameworks, specialists like diviners (Babalawo) act as critical epistemological agents. These evaluate claims, evidences; systematically separating true insight from mere speculation (HALLEN Barry, 1986: 98).

In correlation, Elias K. Bongmba and associate thinkers while justifying claims of African witchcraft/divination conventions, analyze the Wimbun of Cameroon witchcraft (*tifu*) as a "deeply entrenched philosophy of power and intersubjectivity." Accordingly, he dismisses preconceived ideas regarding it an illusion; insisting that verified testimony uphold this as a "complex social reality and an explanatory tool." He further highlights a "critical contextualism" method; insinuating that witchcraft for the Wimbun (a common phenomenon in Cameroon), accounts for majority of moral and physical life anomalies (Bongmba K. Elias, 2001: 2446-2447). This constitutes an epistemic functional system that complements dealing with others.

At this point, it is significant to once more make recourse to Mbiti's accenting of "mystical power" (portrayed by witchcraft/divination) as a neutral universe resource in African cosmology. In his estimation, while witchcraft engages destructive employment of such powers, divination, its positive counterpart is for investigative use (MBITI S. John, 1969: 25). This and similar arguments in African worldviews esteem mystical reality afford comprehensive responses why misfortunes locate particular people at precise moments. Subsequently, this qualifies as irreplaceable illustrative frameworks in which comparatively, Western science simply responds to "how" not "why" specific events occur. Hence, divination in African conventions due to communal validation, stands out as a legitimate source of oral and written authority; acting as a repository of history (hero myths), philosophy, and cosmology. In an important sense, divination rituals have severally led to restoration of social order; demonstrating moments in which accused

persons have confessed, restitution paid and conflicts resolved.

3. The Challenge of Witchcraft and Divination as Mere Chance and Manoeuvres

The narrative changes at this stage, putting aside justificatory claims and flipping the page to plethora of instances exemplifying African Witchcraft and divination conventions as entertaining manipulations and mere chances. In order not to belabour the point, this section is limited to exploring witchcraft/divination: implements and chance indicators, and instances of manipulation and power manoeuvres. Although we may not strictly implore standardized analytic epistemological tools on every aspect of witchcraft/divination in African indigenous knowledge, their knowledge claims to some extent are limited apropos justification criteria. This is consequent of deviation from truth-discovery principles to operation as social and psychological manipulation mechanisms championed by unscrupulous diviners.

3.1 Witchcraft and Divination: Implements and Chance

An application of justification including belief and truth features qualify witchcraft and divination conventions as mere chance and manipulation. By employing random or calculative methods (throwing cowries, casting lots/bones, and palms reading), diviners exhibit probabilistic results that witness interpretations lately succeeding facts. By concentrating on epistemic standpoints frequently, divinatory rituals and witchcraft indictments are deficient of reliable belief-forming mechanisms. Ronald A. Remnick challenges them on depending on: systematic ambiguity, cognitive biases, and social coercion. First, he avers that through systemic ambiguity, there is utilization of vague and unchallenged assertions indiscriminately adapting to whichever outcome. Second, cognitive biases in divination practices lead to exploitation of human tendencies that entertain confirmation prejudices void of rationalization. Lastly, he holds that leveraging community power dynamics as well as fear and imploration of authority to impose views, causes social pressure to substitute objective evidence in several instances (Remnick Ronald, 2014: 2044).

In spite of Evans-Pritchard's endorsement of divination objects or implements (cowries and related object/spider divination), corroborating unique features spread all over African epistemology; portraying outright exhibition of emotional reassurance that qualify it as mere chance and manipulation. He insinuates that critical justifications and strict enforcement of traditional conventions aligned with aforementioned objects make it difficult to separate beneficial spiritual practices from antisocial sorcery (EVANS-Pritchard, E., 1967: 19). Three dimensions invalid claims revolving around witchcraft and divination: the practice itself, roles in traditional conventions and social standings. For instance, careful study illustrate divination as implored in traditional medicine as seen in ancestral and botanical knowledge to be protective, healing and resolving communal challenges (high status in public service). However, its application to witchcraft as linked to sorcery, is interpreted as "destructive manipulation of cosmic forces (causing

illness, poverty, and misfortune). This inconsistency becomes an inversion of socio-moral epistemological norms; discrediting it as mere chance and manoeuvres. As an illustration, spider divination or consultation (*ngam woo Schwengin*) in Nso', is accompanied by telepathy activities (*sho'ngang*). The execution is often prior to clients' departure for journeys, displaying varied objects (shaped pieces of bamboo blades), the previous night at the entrance of spider holes. The next day, diviners/clients visit the scene to interpret objects; facing particular directions and their relation to each other, which enable diviners with alleged "second spiritual senses" and reserved knowledge, to approve or cancel journeys. Because similar occurrences hardly produce the same results, such become mere chance and invalid justification of certainty claims.

3.2 Manipulation and Power Manoeuvres

Overwhelmingly, divination diagnoses apropos witchcraft accusations are associated with land disputes, inheritance squabbles, socio-political rivalry, and examination or business failures. It has been proven in several instances that such allegations ensue from utterances coincidentally matching subsequent occurrences. Equally, those tagged "guilty" are often vulnerable persons (elderly women, widows, and outsiders) who cannot defend themselves. In addition, most diviners employ secret informants and hidden apprentices who simulate and wrongly acknowledge effects and causes; others secretly implanting items around homes for later extraction and extortion of money from clients.

At this point, it is incumbent to further investigate witchcraft allegations enclosing anthropological implications curving from various societal sectors. The challenge revolves around separating this art from magic; their alignments with mysticism pose doubts in relation to science, philosophy, and rationality. Unfortunately, consensus regarding cognitive skills of Western science due to their clarity in most circumstances, demonstrate logical and coherency superiority to traditional knowledge skills. Notwithstanding, Dismas A. Masolo defends this, upholding "that the West was a highly rational place, while traditional societies lived a more poetic, mystical, less rational and more restricted world of thought" (MASOLO, Dismas 1995: 125). However, there are some aspects of consistency in witchcraft allegations as demonstrated in Masolo's referencing of Evans Pritchard:

Evans Pritchard's argument is that although the Zande method and process of corroboration by means of the poison oracle [*benge* poison oracle] are rational from the point of view of consistency, they are, however, mistaken from the point of view of the scientific [context independent] notion of reality (Ibid).

Established on the above representation, descriptions of personal knowledge vindicating victims of witchcraft accusations suggest that deeply ingrained convictions determining interpretation of experiences are yet to become relevant. The problem arises in relation to scientific objectivity (truth-value and power over the physical world) as playing a major part; something frequently deficient in witchcraft allegations. Consequently, the long-standing preoccupation is the hair-splitting differentiation of sorcery

from witchcraft; with reluctance confronting it with modern occultism. Coherency in beliefs, truth-values, and certainty encircling knowledge claims in witchcraft/divination allegations illustrate aspects of manipulations.

Nevertheless, the benchmark rests on the fact that many of them rather frequently use common sense and imagination to arrive at desired results, than claimed truth from the invisible world. Incidentally, it is common belief, that diviners manipulate the intelligence of their clients during diagnosis to obtain desired results. In this way, diviners are believed to have the capacity of obtaining esoteric knowledge of how to go about divination processes using particular objects. However, common belief of web of diviners crisscrossing clients and exploring extracted details or knowledge, challenges justification of their knowledge claims. This deprives divination of truth or certainty. D. Q. McNerny enumerates three of such elements (firm assent, absence of rational fear of doubt, and objective motives (MCINERNY D. Q., 2007: 293), strictly lacking in the process of divination and interpretation of indirect sacred symbols in African indigenous knowledge.

4. Perspectives and Prospects Reconciling African Indigenous Witchcraft/ Divination Justified Claims and Manipulations

The significance of this section is to pave the path for ameliorating challenges of witchcraft and divination portraying them as mere chance and manoeuvres. In effect, while acknowledging justification and legitimating of historical-anthropological and cognitive-ethnographic epistemological claims, incidences of manipulation attract suggestions that endorse witchcraft and divination conventions. It is quite feasible via perspectives and prospects, reconciling extremes of witchcraft/divination justification claims and reworking limitations that qualify them as mere chance or manoeuvres. Evidently, initial evaluation of witchcraft and divination practices utilizing coherentist and foundationalist instruments, illustrate knowledge resultant from both as largely illusory. Although the manufacture of this ensues from manipulating epistemic susceptibility of inquirers, this phenomenon must not become an alternative epistemology source; rather, there is need recuperating manipulative belief systems engulfing them, and stepping-up aspects significant in enforcing social order or emotional reassurance. There are several dimensions that could constitute prospects, but the following three: relevance of oral tradition or lived experience, contextualization of cultural paradigms, and impact of causality vis-à-vis logic are crucial in our research.

4.1 Relevance of Oral Tradition or Lived Experiences

In indigenous epistemologies, individuals as well as communities practicing witchcraft/divination passionately consider them as uncompromising systems of knowledge; not merely magical claims, tricks, manipulative schemes as it may seem. According to Evans-Pritchard, arguments outstandingly portray divination as explaining why misfortune happens to particular persons at particular times. It gives acceptable causes, blame, and paths to resolution, with many severally following it to success and certain ends

(EVANS-Pritchard, 1976: 88). Therefore, since this reduces anxiety and assigns meaning to random or unplanned events, strategies to minimise manoeuvres should be implored to properly channel oral tradition and lived experiences that ameliorate dimensions of social diagnosis, psychological functions, empirical investigated records and their efficacy.

In conjunction with testimony and moral authority allied to communitarian framework and oral tradition, African communitarian epistemology accentuates interconnectedness; alongside shared knowledge and values, as shaping understanding. In an important sense, community-based validation of testimony underlining witchcraft and divination conventions acts as knowledge claims vindicator; simultaneously ensuring knowledge's alignment to shared experiences and values (belief, truth, and justification). For instance, justification and validation in African worldviews (Nso' particularly) involves four facets: proximity (*ngayen*), the person closest to happenings; announcer (*ngasui/nga'fihiti*), the informant who communicates the act or deed; self-manifestation (*vinjen*), uncompromising actor with childlike innocence; and witnessing (*bin nsah*), in judicial cases involving ecological infringement. Jimoh admits of this connotation; adding that the component of "cosmotheandricity" underscores interconnectedness of the divine, human, and cosmic realms in relation to divination practices. In his estimation, knowledge validation goes beyond human experience derivation; reiterating the fact that knowledge and testimony in African communitarian epistemology, explicates features of knowledge justification (JIMOH K. Anselm, 2023: 243). Thus, elders' lived experiences as testimony become genuine in justifying witchcraft and divination claims.

In another dimension, it is essential paying close attention to empirical orality anchored for centuries on communal observations, with complex oral corpuses apropos African witchcraft and divination conventions. In this connection as Asamoah Gyadu in agreement with indigenous African epistemology observes the fact that minds support the "hegemony of science over practices in oral cultures," does not discredit the reality of witchcraft and divination allegations (GYADU Asamoah, 2015: 87). Although these systems sustain features of moral authority and testimony but are limited in standardized rationality, their epistemic invalidity due to instances of reliance on cognitive manipulation, biases, and social control, could be improved upon in relation to justified true belief.

4.2 Contextualization of Cultural Paradigms

With Peter O. Bodunrin, we hereby propose alternative paradigms rejecting western empirical monopoly that disagree with psychic/spiritual dynamics of African witchcraft and divination practices. Unflinchingly, Bodunrin sanctions these forces as operating under distinct and valid cosmological-epistemic laws (BODUNRIN O. Peter, 1989: 2029). On this interpretation, witchcraft is regarded as a manifestation of mystical forces, equally believed by the Nso', as inborn in persons (*soem ye bvem*), inherited (*soem ye kfee/vitsoe ve yi-in*), and acquired variously. Hence, instead of rushing to employ epistemic reliabilism criticism against divinatory methods, verifiability and falsifiability

principles of Karl Popper could be relevant in exploring indigenous knowledge claims in witchcraft/divination.

As a form of communal knowledge, witchcraft/divination in African worldviews includes manifestation of mystical forces, frequently alleged to be inborn, inherited, or acquired. For some people, it functions without individual consciousness or control over it. However, it is mostly believed that witchcraft and black magic upon combination, result to evil; whether deliberately or involuntarily on the part of the witch or magician. Witchcraft and evil magic as essential elements in communal knowledge are to be examined in unison with problems of evil. Intrinsically, malignant actions are often represented by the concept of witchcraft. For instance, the Nso' concept of *virim vee shuy* (daylight witchcraft) derives from and depends on humanity as their origin. In conjunction, Christian Mofor asserts:

The use of the term *virim* merely dramatises the gravity of malicious actions. This includes incestuous relationships, the killing of fellow men, poisoning of alcohol or food, pollution of a spring or other communal water-supply, arson [setting fire to the homes or the compounds of fellow men], and the deliberate damage of crops in other people's farms, killing of their goats, sheep and other livestock (MOFOR Christian, 2008: 192-193) to one's evil delight.

Imploring the Nso' expression *virim* (witchcraft) in the above context implies knowledge and potentials of exerting negative forces on others. It also focuses attention on grave consequences, following transgression of the world's conduct for both individuals and entire communities. Although more of a metaphysical contagion, witchcraft in African world-views lacks full exploration; upheld in most circles as "an imaginary offence or impossibility." Many opine that knowledge about such a reality is remote; with witches not having actual existence or capacitated to act as often claimed. However, African investigators attest to the fact that actual belief of Africans in this context is primordial. Investigations in this domain severally are astonishing apropos encountering believers in witchcraft and descriptions of encounters with witches (*arim*) for the Nso' and their night activities (*virim vee vitsoe*). This makes belief in the existence of this urgent reality indisputable. Mofor demonstrates the capacity for possessing knowledge and mystical power in Nso' that includes willing evil in witchcraft:

Soem which, in the world of the Nso', refers to *virim* in the strict sense signifies the evil use of supernatural powers against family members (*afir*) and neighbours (*wir vee nte' or wir vee gwane*). These powers are thought to be possessed by malicious spirits or forces (*vibay ve bi vi* (evil spirits), *viyoy ve bi vi* (evil souls or spirits) or *anyuy* (evil gods) and their malevolent human agents. A number of reasons commonly account for this. The association of mysterious powers and actions in the night (*vitsoe*), contained in the expression (*virim vee vitsoe*) (witchcraft of the night), this highlights 'mystical' or 'hidden' nature and operations of pernicious spirits or powers; than the time usually associated with activities of a *rim* (witch) or *arim*

(witches). This implies that *rim woo vitsoe* or *arim vee vitsoe*, that is, 'witch' or 'witches of the night' can 'carry out' *virim vee vitsoe* (witchcraft of the night) even during the day (*e shuy*) (MOFOR Christian, 2008: 197-198) unperturbed.

Here, it is essential to avoid vague and generalized statements; focusing attention on implications of claimed knowledge and possibility of recognizing such occurrences. This spans African worldviews, not only the Nso'; acknowledging modes of thinking determining links between concepts and associated individuals or communal experiences. Consequently, the predominant ethico-epistemological features alongside occult overtones cannot be minimized about witchcraft allegations. Thus, apart from African traditional religious influences, ferocious witchcraft effects experienced by victims cannot be waved aside; since spiritual forces are believed to exert or influence daily living. Therefore, aforementioned or unmentioned segments pointing to testimonies of practical manifestations, whether recorded by trust-worthy or unreliable researchers, demonstrate indicators of credible insights.

4.3 Impact of Causality Vis-à-vis Logic

Ensuing from contextualization of cultural paradigms, this segment devotes attention to exploring impact of causality in relation to logical epistemological defences, so significant in overturning manipulation features discrediting witchcraft/divination claims. Mbiti admits the importance of reconsidering the interconnectedness of causality and logic. His argument in accord with several authors justify reasons why via witchcraft/divination, "bad things happen to bad people;" seemingly substantiating western material science gaps (MBITI John, 1977: 98). Contrary to prejudiced Western opinions qualifying African witchcraft/divination beliefs as "backward and irrational," Evans-Pritchard and related epistemological frames boost avenues of rationality of causation open to exploration in indigenous knowledge (EVANS-Pritchard, 1989: 34). This argument is accurate in pointing to witchcraft/divination practices as operating on "highly sophisticated mystical causality systems." Anthony Appiah Kwame despite his criticism of spiritualistic causation intertwining witchcraft and divination as knowledge acquisition processes avails level-grounds for further exploits:

The 'why' versus the 'how': if a granary collapses due to termites, a community understands how it happened [empirical science]. However, if it collapses precisely when a specific person is sitting under it, divination is implored to answer why it happened to that specific person at that exact time (KWAME A. Anthony, 2006: 401-402).

The above citation adequately avails opportunities for understanding dimensions of cosmic balance exhibited by witchcraft and divination conventions. Thus, diligent conventions governing divination, such as aforementioned of the Yoruba Ifa system and the Nso' Ngam system, can be improved upon to become justified mechanisms for diagnosing spiritual friction, restoration of cosmic order, and maintenance of social equilibrium in African epistemological

thought. However, this would not be realized without occasionally instances of prejudice and hasty generalization.

Consequently, an amelioration of tenets, aimed at minimizing manoeuvre instances of witchcraft and divination as reliable knowledge claims, is necessary. A thorough examination of divination processes and techniques reveals rich elements for knowledge acquisition. This is essential for progress of epistemological contentions in African thought; connecting to B. Blanchard's proposal of the "coherence theory" as test for truth facts' appropriateness (BLANCHARD B. R., 1965: 139). A strict application of this to divination interpretation would lead to elimination of prejudices and misgivings about divination as a process of knowledge acquisition. Rather than concentrating on limitations, the exploration of the following, gives credence to African epistemological views: quest for explanatory theory and unity in diversity, causal context and common sense, complementary role of common sense, abstraction and analytic implications, puzzling observations and familiar phenomena, theoretical models and foundational belief patterns, cognition and para-psychological concerns.

In another measurement, divination and witchcraft conceptualization and methodology need careful consideration of African cosmologies tending towards proliferation; a common tendency in Western cosmology as well, not fast condemnation. Horton reassures:

The same body of modern work gives the lie to the old stereotype of the gods as capricious and irregular in their behaviour. For, it shows that each category of beings has its appointed functions in relation to the world of observable happenings. The gods may sometimes appear capricious to unreflective ordinary man. Nevertheless, for the religious expert charged with the diagnosis of spiritual agencies at work behind observed events, a basic modicum of regularity in their behaviour is the major premise on which his work depends. (HORTON Robin, 1998: 182)

Once clutched, the above-mentioned intellectual functions' application to divination and witchcraft as "puzzles formerly posed by mystical thinking," disappear and objective truth-facts surface. Subsequently, African traditional mystical theories enveloping witchcraft/divination conventions would effortlessly be contextualized; bearing in mind the fact that western epistemic thoughts face comparable justification claims. The bonding between cause and effect are rich grounds for comprehending perspectives and prospects of divination and witchcraft as enveloping aspects of justified claims, minimizing mere chances and manipulations. Despite the fact that causation incorporates discrete joined events, making it highly problematic, there is a justifiable relationship between the first event, the link, and later events. Aforementioned divination and witchcraft contentions in African thought do not vary from other metaphysical causation considerations; basing argument on the fact that this involves relation between two events holding when, given that one occurs, producing or determining and necessitating the second.

5. Conclusion

An account of African conventions of witchcraft and divination display justified claims and significant epistemological ingredients. In agreement with philosophical claims, they are epistemologically justified; exhibiting varied means of knowledge acquisition. In its raw and initial state, divination and witchcraft akin to modern concepts or models suffer criticism from inability providing explanatory coverage and certitude, inviting invested diligent study. Rather than scrap them off as lacking rationality and logical coherency, researchers should give it successive modifications that enlarge its scope and coverage, such as enlisted in the prospects above. Hence, witchcraft/divination claims must be freed from sole considerations as “irrational beliefs;” contextualized as social cultural systems serving specific socio-moral epistemological functions within communities. Their justification stems from adherence via coherent frameworks of causality; identifying misfortune, illness, conflict, and failures as consequent of invisible human agencies than simply chance and manoeuvres. Therefore, since divination constitutes a regulating mechanism for meaning and decision making, its relevance is felt through provision of responses in areas formal institutions and scientific explanations display insufficiency. Their significance in offering epistemological, anthropological, and psychological relief in uncertain circumstances cannot be underestimated.

Notwithstanding the credibility of witchcraft and divination as containing justified epistemological claims, significant aspects of manoeuvres. Generally, elements of fear, false accusations, and occasional false spiritual/mystical authority attributed to diviners, and vulnerability of clients seeking solutions, discredit these conventions. Thus, severally, this leads to economic exploitation, social control, and interpersonal conflicts settling avenues; becoming a belief and influence tool, rather than an epistemological concern for exploration. Yet, we may not explain the persistence of witchcraft and divination conventions merely from the stance of empirical verifiability. Any critical analysis of this phenomena exceeds truth and falsehood parameters; noting that beliefs surrounding them enjoy cultural logic sustenance according rational and legitimate epistemological worldviews. However, despite their fulfilling of social cohesion and epistemological justificatory claims, judicious checks on aforementioned manipulations are necessary. Furthermore, significant altering of divination and witchcraft conceptions to include extra-sensory perceptions (study of communications without known sensory organs), and psycho-kinesis (study of physical events occurring without involvement of recognized motor organs), is mandatory. Indirectly, this ameliorates divination and witchcraft justificatory claims, which alongside paranormal experiences constitutes the bulk of challenges in African thought.

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