

Responding to new Imageries in African indigenous Spiritualities

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Abstract: As a result of rash and incorrect assumptions, African spiritualities have been adulterated, bastardized, and multiplied. Academic studies in African spiritualities "were mostly conducted by Europeans and Americans who were extremely biased and primarily focused their scholarship on comparing African religion with Christianity and Islam. I will approach the new images of African spiritualities from two perspectives: the conflict between religion and spirituality, and the demonization of African spiritualities. The goal of this study is to present a new picture of African spirituality from two perspectives: the tension between religion and spirituality, and the demonization of African spirituality. The study's findings indicate that there is a complicated phenomenon that disfigures African spirituality. In both indigenous spirituality in Africa, and in spirituality created by Africans in the diaspora, the problem of portraying demonic African styles and perspectives in expressing mundane and non-mundane realities seems accepted. There are three aspects in analyzing this: historical-racial, media-social, and ideological. These aspects cross over on the point of African religion versus spiritualities.

Keywords: African Spirituality; African Diaspora; Christianity; Demonization; Demystification; Religion; Westernization.

Abstrak: Sebagai hasil dari asumsi yang gegabah dan salah, spiritualitas Afrika telah dipalsukan, dirusak, dan digandakan. Studi akademik dalam spiritualitas Afrika kebanyakan dilakukan oleh orang Eropa dan Amerika yang sangat bias dan terutama memfokuskan penelitian mereka untuk membandingkan agama Afrika dengan Kristen dan Islam. Saya akan mendekati gambaran baru spiritualitas Afrika dari dua perspektif: konflik antara agama dan spiritualitas, dan demonisasi spiritualitas Afrika. Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk menyajikan gambaran baru spiritualitas Afrika dari dua perspektif: ketegangan antara agama dan spiritualitas, dan demonisasi spiritualitas Afrika. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa ada fenomena yang rumit yang menodai spiritualitas Afrika. Baik dalam spiritualitas pribumi di Afrika, maupun dalam spiritualitas yang diciptakan oleh orang Afrika diaspora, masalah penggambaran gaya dan perspektif setan Afrika dalam mengungkapkan realitas duniawi dan non-duniawi tampaknya diterima. Ada tiga aspek dalam menganalisis hal ini: sejarah-ras, media-sosial, dan ideologi. Aspek-aspek ini melintasi titik agama Afrika versus spiritualitas.

Kata Kunci: Spiritualitas Afrika; Diaspora Afrika; Kekristenan; Demonisasi; Demistifikasi; Agama; Pembaratan.

1. Introduction

African spiritualities have experienced adulteration, bastardization, and proliferation due to rash and erroneous assumptions. If the indigenous framework of relating to the other world, ancestors, and spirits lacks purity and authenticity, what exactly distinguishes African spirituality? Academic studies in African spiritualities "were mostly conducted by Europeans and Americans who were extremely biased and primarily focused their scholarship on comparing African religion with Christianity and Islam (Burgess, 2009; Kretzschmar, 2008; Mazama, 2002; Thomas, 2015). As a result, the various subsequent discourses and developments on African spiritualities have always occurred in the context of Christianity or Islam. However, as a religious construct, African Spiritualities represent an inner and outer harmony of all existential realms. It is unique and should be addressed as such.

Those who claim affiliation with African spirituality, especially those outside the indigenous African territories, have diverse portraits of what African spirituality is. The supposition that mere interests, curious explorations, or affiliation towards the idea of African spirituality suffices for one to assume a knowledgeable or representative stance on African spirituality calls for concern.

In understanding 'African spirituality as a religious corpus per se, a specific religion like Christianity or Islam, a unique form of mundane-transcendent relationship of African origin with its rituals and ordinances' (Nweke, 2020), perhaps we should clarify what ways one can relate to African spiritualities.

The difference between being a respecter or proponent of African spiritualities, a practitioner, or an African spiritualist must be respectfully clarified. It is not enough to have a totem, heirloom, or a special object belonging to deceased parents of African descent for spiritual connection. To practice ancestralism or conjurism, or feel the presence of spirits does not make one an African spiritualist. Ancestralism or conjurism is not peculiar to Africans. African spiritualities are socio-culturally bound. A community develops its mode of relating to its ancestors and the gods, harmonizing the interconnectedness of everything. Each community has its spiritual exclusiveness through its relatedness to the ancestors in the underworld who oversee the ephemeral world. Hence, to be buried in one's ancestral land was necessary so that one can rest in the company of his/her ancestors. So, a practitioner identifies with the community, the ancestors, and the ritualistic processes of the spirituality he/she practices. A spiritualist is initiated into the privileged group, selected or inherited, from which, most times and against all efforts, he/she cannot evade. A respectful interest in African spiritualities is welcome if one is neither a practitioner nor an initiated spiritualist. However, to project or proffer imageries of African spiritualities begs the question of what African spirituality one is practicing. From which indigenes is the spirituality one lays claims? Have the indigenes of the spirituality recognized, initiated, and accepted the person as a member of the community, talk less as their spiritualist? An individual spirituality of an African person is not an African spirituality, especially within the context of African spirituality as a unique religious corpus with its rituals and ordinances.

I will address the new imageries on African spiritualities from two angles, the tension between religion and spirituality, and the demonization of African spiritualities.

2. The tension between Religion and Spiritualities

Since the era of New-Ageism (the 1970s-80s), a distinction between religion and spirituality has been created as necessary to enable the dawn of a new time, the era of spirituality. Religion was considered obsolete and unwanted. Spirituality should assume the responsibility of providing the outer/metaphysical inclinations of man (Nelson, 2009, p. 278). A lot of distinctions were created; that religion is normative and rigorous, institutional and political, ideo-culturally limited, and contributive to the evil in the world. Spirituality, on the other hand, is supposed to be inclusive and open, liberating and adventurous. Personal spirituality became sensational and anyone who wanted could join or create one (Carlisle, 2009, p. 102).

This distinction gradually developed into an ideological division by which both are described as incompatible (Kaufman, 2017, p. 315), and religion needs to be subdued for spirituality to reign. *I am spiritual, but not religious* became a common phrase. The process of distinguishing religion from spirituality, which by now has developed into a discord, was multifaceted. By the end of the 20th century, science was appropriating spirituality into the secular worldview, but at this time, without any offensive anti-religious consciousness. From the field of medicine and psychiatry/psychology, the need to annex spirituality away from religion into the domain of science came with the awareness that spirituality is as much a realistic dimension to a normal human being as a biological or social dimension. But more importantly, that one can claim affiliation to spirituality without religion, and even, as a critique of religion. 'Some proponents of spirituality criticize religion by maintaining that people can attend church services, for instance, and perform the rituals without experiencing any spiritual emotions' (Sim, 2017, p. 200). The argument was, that people are spiritual, whether they are religious or not (Culliford, 2011, p. 12). By the beginning of the 21st century numerous works on Psychology and Spirituality started flooding the market like John Swinton's *Spirituality and Mental Health Care* (2001), George Vaillant's *Spiritual Evolution* (2008), Frank Parkinson's *Science and Religion at the Cross Roads* (2009), and so on.

A more consequential distinction came from the socio-philosophical angle. The distinction made between religion and spirituality from this angle was more of a division, a separation of the good and promising spirituality from the negative religion.

One difference between religion and spirituality is the presence of institutional support in the former and its lack or a greater emphasis on the subject's personal experience in the latter... Another difference is that some subjects find religion negative in comparison to spirituality because they feel constrained by the objects of transcendence, dogmas and rituals integral to religious institutions, whereas spirituality is free from such constraints (Sim, 2017, p. 200).

After a decade into the 21st century, ascribing negativity to religion in comparison to spirituality became normality (Estes, 2013, p. 156). Esotericism, New-Ageism, neo-paganism, etc., all form a new consciousness of spirituality drawing elements of the spiritualities of Hinduism, Buddhism, Daoism, and so on. It became appealing to individuals to be decisive in their spiritual relationships because they can choose what or not should be their spirituality. In this trend, the revival of Afro-spiritualities was also entangled.

African Spiritualities versus Religion

In talking about African spiritualities, some thinkers juxtapose it against religion as the better futuristic option (Jagire, 2011, p. 189). The discourse around this appears to be an attempt to justify African spiritualities against the question of its purpose. But pitching itself against religion cannot be the purpose of African spiritualities. The patriotic defensiveness and noble intentions behind such attempts are understandable. After all, foreign religions are contributive to the ordeals of Africa. However, those who represent African spiritualities now by presenting it as an anti-religion movement are simplifying it into an ideological instrument of liberation against the tyranny of foreign religion and its institutional grasp in Africa. However, they are indirectly asserting the claim of 'European and American scholars that African traditional religion is primarily a prolegomenon to Christianity and Islam' (Thomas, 2015, p. 6). Despite the historically, political, economic, and psychologically substantiated antagonism against religion within the African context, one still has to ask some questions: Is this what African spirituality is? Is this what it should become, mainly an ideological front against religion?

Religion can be identified from different facets. It is as such difficult to proffer an all-encompassing definition of religion (Oviedo, 2019). But for this study, let us consider religion from the perspective of bureaucracy. Religion could be seen in a 'hierarchical structure that is normative and determinative' (Torry, 2014, p. 34). Being normative and determinative has been used against religion in favor of the free-spiritedness and openness of spirituality.

However, the proponents of African spiritualities versus religion are, perhaps, overlooking some vital points. Being determinant and normative are factors of the institutionality of religion. A lot of the progress through various epochs, differentiated by orientation, mentality, sci-technical sophistication, and so on, was achieved by the religions creating and determining standards of values. Christianity (Catholicism), for example, has the normative and determinative factors to thank for its socio-political influence in the world, from its longevity to its structural organization. A religion has to be relevant and influential to the social realities of the people if it is to matter (Agbaria & Obeid Shehadeh, 2022; Campolo, 2008; Martin, 2007; Okon, 2012). To do that, religion has to be determinant of the values, of what is right and wrong, of vices and virtues. Otherwise, it becomes a private thing. And whenever or wherever religion becomes identified as a private thing, it is because it has lost its social influence, and if it loses its social influence, it begins to decline. Christianity, as an instance, despite its abuses and historical-political sordidness, could not have become so decisive in the world without the capacity to be socially relevant to the existential matters of the people. It shaped and patterned time, produced a social consciousness of free will, good and evil, the nature of human beings, and so on. And this capacity comes from its inner normative structure of rightness and wrongness, even when they were not objectively valid. It is, therefore, necessary not to deny African spiritualities of normative and determinative factors, rendering them irrelevant in the existential realities of the societies, only so they would not share similar qualities with religion. Because if African spiritualities should necessarily be part of the progress in Africa, then it needs these elements of religion for the socio-cultural reformations. Hence, Adogame (2022, p. 100) suggests, 'as a category of analysis for the study of societies, religion is, therefore, quintessential to our understanding of African cultures in a global context'. The anti-religion imagery of African spiritualities is, therefore, not constructive.

Secondly, there is an implication that African spiritualities, especially those created in the diaspora, are not structured, as opposed to structured religions. This is false and there is no data to show that African spiritualities do not operate within the frames of a structure. Instead, scholars like Peter Paris (1995, p. 33) or Kameron Carter (2008, p. 415) write about 'deep structures of African spirituality' (Zuesse, 1991, p. 170). These structures, despite or because of the loss of some substantial specifics, were expressed in different forms. If anything, an African spirituality is bound to a rigorous structure of its indigenusness; a harmonious pendulum that swings between the transcendent and the immanent. African spirituality is not a bunch of unguided cocktails of abracadabra by anybody stereotyped on dressing and worship style. This idea of no structure, where anybody becomes or does whatever he/she wills, with no structural process of determination and normative standardization, is an appealing creation of the new proponents of African spiritualities. It is intended to absolve people of the responsibility that religion would have held them to. An African spirituality has its origin and through its origination, a process or structure develops. I have witnessed, first hand, an initiation process of a *dibia*, a servant of a deity, in my part of Igbo land. It is an indescribable experience. Traditional worshipper or not, no one who witnesses such a process would not be irritated over the new imagery, making simple of such a realm too deep and spiritual, like the realm of African spiritualities. Although the structures and process were not written down originally, but rather transmitted orally through discipleship and personal vocation to a deity, it still cannot be reduced to an unstructured phenomenon.

African spiritualities should not be subjected to the identity and conceptual limitations embedded in terminologies and names (Adogame, 2022, p. 100). It is no more a religion than a spirituality in the contemporary consciousness. These terms, religion and spirituality, are all foreign and do not properly capture the authentic feelings that inebriated a certain form of relating to the divine by any African indigenous group. Yet, there are elements of both religion and spirituality in the African spiritualities. It is of no help to categorize African spiritualities as non-religious spiritualities. They should not be used against religions too. They could and should be seen in religious institutionality, functioning within a full structural process, determining what is right or wrong, and exerting great influence on the social life of the people.

There is another context in which African spiritualities are used to counter-oppose religion. Christianity, as it was missionized to Africa in the 18th/19th-century phase, embodies a whole package of the western cultural, social, political, and economic mentality of the people who, for various interests, dubious and honorable, brought it to Africa (Akron, 2013, p. 177). The missionaries did not come to Africa to become Africans, but rather to make Africa an extension of their religio-cultural territories. So, each part of Africa inherited the cultural Christianity that construed their missionary country and the divisive church politics in Europe. Till now, the Christian churches suffer scars of the interdenominational scuffles they inherited from their colonial-missionary masters.

Against this backdrop, it is understandable that the African sees Christianity as an effective cultural expansion of the West. 'Western culture is Christian; and Christianity is imbedded in western culture' (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2022; Carro, 1997; McGlasson, 2012, p. 48). Christianity thus remains, not just a reminder of his/her conquered spiritual consciousness but also an institution that furthers westernism. This is why Christianity is understood as the pinnacle of the deification of westernism. To place it against African spirituality becomes ideologically easy and somewhat appealing. As such, African spiritualities are to usurp the mental and spiritual submission to colonial culture, to westernism. And in the diaspora, they became sources for survival and sustenance through predicaments of westernism.

To survive the unparalleled dehumanizing experiences of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and the conditions of existence for the slaves in their lands of captivity, there was a need to develop spirituality, similar to the spiritualities of their ancestral lands, but now with a different motivation, a different cause of relation to the spiritual world, and therefore, a different religio-spiritual confluence (Raboteau, 2001, pp. 51–53). There are Obeah, Umbanda, Candomble, Santeria, Voodoo, etc. These are all mixtures of different religious elements and for various interests. In Africa, the spiritualities balanced the realms of sky, earth, and beneath the earth, controlled the individual and social harmony in the community, and restituted mutual enrichment between humans and nature. In the land of slavery, the developed spiritualities sought survival, protection, and vengeance. The synchronization with non-African religious elements and the survival destructive-protective interests in these spiritualities raise the concern to what extent they should be considered authentic African spiritualities. That was what Raboteau meant when he claimed that 'in the United States, the gods of Africa died' (Raboteau, 2001, p. 86).

So, to oppose religion for spirituality, Christianity is considered a repressive culture that urged a monumental evil on Africa (Bascom, 1988). However, it would appear that the contextual need now to synonymize religion (Christianity) with westernism is to identify it as an enemy of African spiritualities. But even if one was to be indifferent to the positive developments achieved in and through Christianity in Africa, the aim of reviving African spiritualities should not be to wage an ideological war against Christianity. It adulterates the spiritual-social cultural origin of these spiritualities which might even predate Christianity.

African spiritualities are also used as an augmentation to some pastoral religious deficits. Even in this age of multi-religiousness, there is a disheartening impulse when people subscribe affinity to African spiritualities, but only in addition to their allegiance to Christianity. This is not a critique against the desire to experience and use other religious/spirituality options. For I too, am a Christian. 'First, African spirituality can be understood as that spiritual-cultural disposition, that spiritual consciousness that lies beneath any religious expressions' (Nweke, 2020). I know that there is a depth of spiritual consciousness in the average African, which he/she expresses in whatever religion/spirituality he/she practices. It is there when he/she sings, prays, invokes, etc. Tate calls it the 'Africanization of Christianity' (Tate, 2005, p. 192). However, there is rather a development that is following sad historicity in which Africanism is at best, an addendum. In what important sphere of human existence is Africa or Africanism leading in relevance? One could argue the many factors that have created and maintained the concerning answer to that question. But, if we are indeed meaningfully thematizing African spiritualities, and such a discourse is overwhelmingly indulged by

people who are foremost Christian or Moslem intellectuals or New-Ageists, and not real practitioners of the spirituality or spiritualist, then it is a distressing image.

I opine, therefore, for a prudence of presentation in representing or promoting African spiritualities. The honesty about its depth, the clarity that one is a sympathizer trying one or two elements in African spiritualities, but is not a foremost practitioner or an African spiritualist is very important. Otherwise, this new imagery where anybody can practice African spirituality distorts the spiritualities.

On the demonization of African spiritualities

The phenomenon of demonizing African spiritualities is a complicated one. Both in the indigenous spiritualities in Africa, and the spiritualities created by Africans in the diaspora, the problem of depicting as devilish the African style and perspective of expressing worldly and unworldly realities seems accepted. There are three aspects of analyzing this: historical-racial, media-social, and ideological. These aspects cross each other on the religion versus African spiritualities point.

Historical-racial

For a very long time and up until date, the mainstream picture of Africa in the mindset of the average person in the world is the picture projected by foreign media. 'In the twenties and thirties, the then media outlets speak to the forces that inspired a ratcheting up of interest in and the demonization and criminalization of "voodoo"' (Cooper, 2017, p. 44). It is even more so that people in Africa accept and depend on the pictorial narrative of foreigners to develop or confirm a mindset or knowledge of their immediate surroundings. This tendency of validating the narrative of the foreigner has its historical root. During the pre-slavery contact between Europeans and Africans and at the onset of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, the Europeans described Africans as black devils, soulless creatures, and other bedeviling attributes. They needed to convince and condition themselves, intellectually and emotionally, of the devilish nature of the Africans, and so create the psychological immunity that would numb their conscience for this type of slavery, and justify their treatment of the black people as less than animals. Slavery has always existed as far back as history could record in different parts of the world. But the success of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, the effectiveness with which it functioned with such brutality and for such a long span, was partly because the bedeviling narrative of Africa and Africans convinced most people. Hence, it was successful to alter the hitherto traditional concept of slavery from indentured servitude to a chattel form of legalized human trafficking.

The trans-Atlantic slave trade was not supposed to last for four centuries. It was thought and planned to be a perennial politico-economic structure, so a social-psychological engineering was necessary. 'Paradoxically, by virtue of European incursion, a worldwide awareness of African culture developed, however misguided' (Olupona, 2004, p. 191). After centuries, the African is still fettered in this engineering that he needs the foreign narrative to adjudge his/her realities.

More important than the social engineering was the religious one. Religion, Islam and Christianity, were also very essential to the realization of pre/post slave trade demonization of the Africans. Christianity provided the psycho-mental disposition on which centuries of indoctrination taught the black man that Jesus, the savior, was white, and the devil, who used to be white as an angel, became black. The standard portrait of a white St. Michael standing on the head of a black devil on the ground with his sword of fire to strike him is more than an arbitrary picture. Its message implies that the white is more technologically advanced, more sophisticated to enslave others, better in human and intellectual strides, than the blacks. Without the ideological-religious element, no social engineering would have been able to sustain such an inhumane structure, openly practiced, over such a long time. Thus, African spiritualities became synonymous with satanic spirituality, in contrast to Christianity, the religion of the conquering savior.

By reducing “voodoo” to a *mélange* of African spells, magical charms, ritual sacrifice, and drumming, and by publicizing and embellishing violent crimes assumed to be linked to voodoo, this new wave cast whatever African spiritual practices that survived slavery as a disturbing racial caricature (Cooper, 2017, p. 44).

Such demonization has remained part of the narrative of African spiritualities. This bedeviling narrative was perfectly engineered that till now, even the average African, and even more the European, must consciously struggle against the consciousness that Africa has more to darkness and Europe has more to light. And yet ‘a new Western-trained African elite continued the colonial process of missionary propaganda and racist misinterpretations that demonized African culture and religions’ (Olupona, 2004, p. 191).

Media-social

I grew up watching the depiction of the black person through Hollywood, especially within the American context, as a poor, wretched criminal, who would rape any white woman at any given opportunity, and at his best, can entertain in music or sports. And when there was something to be watched about Africa, it was something like “The Gods must be crazy”. African spiritualities were hardly presented at least neutrally in films, without any involvement in some bad magic that hurt someone. This is very important to note, because if one does not understand the power of Hollywood or motion pictures in general in influencing what should be known and how it should be known, one might underestimate how effectively it can propagate a narrative.

In Africa, on the other hand, Nollywood, the most popular African film industry, is even doing a better job than Hollywood in demonizing African spiritualities. While Hollywood may no longer be portraying African spiritualities in conflict with Christianity, and making Christianity, the light, conquer the darkness of African spiritualities, Nollywood, the Nigeria Film industry, is doing that unapologetically. ‘Traditional Igbo spirituality is demonized by people who have little knowledge or understanding of it’ (Tsaaior & Ugochukwu, 2017, p. 74). One must however be critical in critiquing Nollywood because it mainly reflects and projects in motion pictures the apparent and observable popular culture of social negativity over African traditional spiritualities. And it is not only Nollywood. ‘In Africa, the public demonization of traditional African religions is a central part of the message of the Pentecostal movement’ (Horsfjord, 2022, p. 19). Christianity and African spiritualities are pitched against each other, and Christianity conquers the evil African spiritualities. The average African grows up absorbing this narrative from both inside and outside Africa, that his/her ancestry and indigenusness are diabolical and evil. He/she is deprived of any authentic, balanced, and contextual projection of his/her heritage as an African. This imagery of African spiritualities, as a representation of evil, diabolic powers that do no good but malevolence, and cannot stand against the good powers of Christianity, has to stop.

Firstly, it is historically and factually very wrong. Historical because the fundamental factor that construed, coordinated, and sustained African societies was their spiritualities. Some scholars even argue that ‘Christianity and Islam are incapable of sustaining the African’s appetite for religion’ (Thomas, 2015, p. 6). Factual because the concepts of God and Satan are different in the African spiritualities. Every natural and supernatural force has its purpose. There is chaos when it is not used for its purpose. There is harmony when it is used for its purpose. Let us take the concept of Satan among the Igbo people, for instance. When Christianity arrived Igbo land, it met a phenomenon that confronted its evangelizing narrative; the Igbo people do not have a concept of the Judeo-Christian Satan, because no force challenges the Supreme Being (Chi-ukwu), but every force has its purpose and usage. But because the devil’s position was necessary for the missionary theology, to serve as the anti-Christ against whose contrasting categories the light of Christ can be accepted, the missionaries sought for the likeliest force in contradiction to Jesus Christ. As such, they adopted *Ekwensu*, and made it the Satan for the Igbo people (Okoye, 1987, p. 142). Hence, the Igbo consider *Ekwensu* as the biblical Satan/devil. *Ekwensu* was a god known for violence, war, deceit, and trickery (Metuh: 1987:

165). It was revered, feared, and summoned in extreme needs. It was mainly invoked, like other gods, to serve its purpose, in wars or bargains and challenges. There were festivals of *Ekwensu* in Igboland with military displays (Ezigbo: 2010, 224). Some communities pledged allegiance to *Ekwensu* as their God, and assume its name for its protection or in appreciation of its goodness to them. They are called *Umuekwensu* (The kindred of *Ekwensu*). Only recently, some of these communities are deliberating changing their community identity since it would appear that Christianity has made *Ekwensu*, irrevocably, the Judeo-Christian Satan. Thus, there is no fact to it that African spiritualities are evil and malevolent, any more than one can lay such a claim on Christianity or Islam.

Secondly, diabolical imagery of African spiritualities and traditional values is very contributive to the moral decadence and psycho-social defeatism of African people who have become conditioned to look inwards with awe and disgust and to see their indigenusness with animosity and antipathy.

Objectified and demonized people absorb the negative representations assigned to them and can begin to experience and exhibit a self-loathing. People tend, under the influence of poor self-esteem, to abandon their traditional ethical codes, discard their customary social prescriptions, and abandon their moral identities (Hamblet, 2008, p. 155).

Ideological

There is one more thing to clarify. We must consider that African spiritualities have never been all glory, peace, and harmony. The sensational narratives of harmony, inclusiveness, and peace, as if these are all there is to African spiritualities are part of the new presentation and promotional narratives of spiritualities in this age. There were hurtful, sordid, and destructive aspects of life that the African spiritualities could not protect the people from. Rather, it could be argued, the spiritualities enabled them. There was human sacrifice, killing of twins, and bad usage of charms. My father told me stories about how difficult it used to be to associate with people because of the rampant anti-social and evil deeds of some people, like poisoning of food or drink, or even kidnapping and selling of other people's children. Their parents brought them up with a strict sense of insecurity because a woman who had 8 children could be survived by merely one or two. People lived in constant fear and tension. Bad magic was used to cause damage to individual and social lives, and such magic was part of the spiritualities. It was through the influence of Christianity that this sad past was overcome (Ilo, 2012, p. 99).

However, this is the normal story of every other religion and spirituality. All have their abuses and dark pages. If we understand the abuses and destructions in other religions, we would also understand the abuses in African spiritualities. Hence, there is no reason for over-protection or misrepresentation of African spiritualities. The imagery of an innocent and obliging African spirituality is not a complete portrait. Whatever has human factors, has a propensity to human failures too.

However, there is still an aspect of which one has to be wary. I opine for balanced imagery of African spiritualities as a phenomenon with unique strength and flaws, but I do not subscribe to the current call for a demystification of African spiritualities (Drucker, 2003, p. 70). Again, therein is the problem of the dichotomy between being true to originality and adulterating into subjectivism in African spiritualities.

What do we mean by the demystification of African spiritualities? There is the understanding that demystification is a positive effort to educate people about their prejudices and stereotypes of African Religion (Wahyuni & Nurdin, 2022). Because of the scarcity of information, there is a need to educate and dispel the fear people have been conditioned to have about African spiritualities (Siedlak, 2018, p. 5). This is neither exactly the aspect of 'demystification' I meant, nor something I would disagree on. What I meant is rather the concept by which the tenets of African spiritualities are subjected to exposure and incompatible interpretations by incongruous interests seeking to simplify the 'mysteries' in the spiritualities. The problem is that African spiritualities are mystical. Mystery is a component of mysticism, which is a vital part of African spiritualities. It is the mysteries in the mysticism that protects the cult of the chosen spiritualists. The belief in that transcendental experience

that cannot be explained or educated upon, and the prerogative to protect these experiences are core aspects of African spiritualities.

To be an African spiritualist, most times, one is chosen for it, and one has to accept and undergo the initiation ceremonies. The spiritualists, at least, must adhere to some level of mysticism, limiting the possession of certain knowledge and consciousness to a chosen group. The persons inducted into this group are responsible for protecting the knowledge from the general sphere. Mysticism does two things: It protects the core tenets of the religion or spirituality from abuses and misinterpretations. The smaller the group of persons orientated and trained for a particular aim, the lesser the abuses and misinterpretations of that aim. Secondly, it arouses interest and attracts respectful attention. 'In many world religions, mysticism attracts adherents from all classes in a society. As a result, mysticism has often proved to be a revitalizing force in a number of world religions' (Nimtz Jr., 1980, p. 172). Human beings tend to lose value for whatever is common and easily accessible. If any religion/spirituality becomes open to multifariousness in interpretation and usage, then it loses its uniqueness and attractiveness.

African spiritualities is a complex corpus of spiritualities from a very large and multi-diverse continent. Its structure is open and flexible to individual and family usage. That is why individuals and families have their personal and private deities in one corner of their room or compound. But this is part of a larger community spirituality. As an analogy, there are different devotions to saints that individuals practice in the Catholic Church. They differ in the styles of worship. Yet, they are all part of one unison; Catholicism. African spiritualities could be seen similarly. For this complex system to function in unity, it needs a stable center, a fulcrum, otherwise, it dissipates into diversities and communal life becomes impossible. This stable center is the cult of the initiated spiritualists who are bound by the connection to the indigenes, mysticism, and the responsibility of protecting and providing stability to the system. Individuals can educate and explain their spiritualities, but not turn African spiritualities into personal learn-by-doing workshops. Demystifying African spiritualities tends to expose the inner tenets for a variety of interpretations and usages. It would only lead to the adulteration of the spiritualities, cheapening of its tenets, and deconstruction of its authentic system.

3. Conclusion

The adulteration, bastardization, and proliferation of African spiritualities are the results of unguarded and misguided conceptions. If there is no purity, no authenticity to the indigenous framework of relating to the other world, ancestors, and spirits, then what exactly makes the spirituality African? The academic studies in African spiritualities 'were mostly conducted by Europeans and Americans who were extremely biased and primarily focused their scholarship on comparing African religion with Christianity and Islam' (Thomas, 2015, p. 6). Thus the various ensuing discourses and developments on African spiritualities have always occurred within the comparative context with Christianity or Islam. But African Spiritualities, as a religious construct, represent an inner and outer harmony of the whole existential realms. It deserves to be addressed in its uniqueness, not in comparisons. It has survived against all odds—colonialism, slavery, and demonization by the preachers of Semitic religions (Tuso, 2014, p. 153), but the challenges from within, especially the promotion of false or misinterpreted imageries of it, could be its bane.

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