

WITCHCRAFTS AND COUNTER-PATRIARCHAL HEGEMONY IN SELECTED NIGERIAN DRAMA

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Abstract

*This paper explores the notion of witchcraft controversy in ancient and modern societies to gauge the range of gender relations and also assess the existence or non-existence of patriarchy repository in the evolution of witchery as a devised leverage against women's aspirations. This endeavour, thus elicits pertinent questions among which include: how did pre-literate societies especially Yoruba conceptualised witchcraft? In what way does this concept reflect gender relations, especially the level of patriarchy in these societies? How has this concept evolved through the ages into the modern world? How has this concept been denoted in their culture especially in their literature and drama? Interviews and literary works are used to compliment plays such as Ahmed Yerima's *Mojagbe* and Wale Ogunyemi's *Kiriji* in the analysis of the status of witches and witchcraft. The paper argues that just like the concept of 'tibtire' (good and bad; positive and negative) exists in Ifa, the witches and wizards represent both the positive and the negative in the world and the witches with their crafts have proved their mettle in both. It further maintains that Africans have been overzealous in their condemnation of witches just as they do with other aspects of their culture due to Eurocentric acceptance and religious intoxication without interrogating the positive contributions these supernatural women could exert on the sociopolitical realms of development. The paper's contribution lies in its modest exploration of this controversial topic to pave way for more profound research by scholars in anthropology and other multi-disciplinary fields. It thus recommends that witchcraft practice among the Africans, Yoruba in particular should be seen as a phenomenon that has both positive and negative supernatural activities deployed and practiced by the female gender, as a way of asserting their essence and deconstructing patriarchal hegemony in male dominated societies.*

Keywords: Witchcraft, Tibitire, Patriarchy, Aje, Yoruba.

Witches/ Witchcraft: Origin and Etymological Connotations

From the Western perspective, the word 'witch' originally means 'to know' and 'witch craft' is thus "the craft of those who know". It therefore connotes the arts of 'the wise one'. And the practice of witchcraft was seen as a magical phenomenon invoked for magical rites which ensured good luck, protection against diseases, necromancy, casting of spells and so on. From the Western perspectives, it is difficult to trace its origin, but a case of necromancy was reported in the Bible, especially in I Samuel: 28. The phenomenon became pronounced from around 1000 AD when the practice of witchcraft invoked the wrath of priests, Christians and members of the medieval society and it was considered anti-Christian and a heresy. In the early Western world, witches were believed to engage in flying, killing and making pacts with the devil and it was due to all this that Inquisition began from 1200 which authorised the discoveries and killings of witches and heretics. The concept of witchcraft practice as harmful is normally treated as a cultural ideology and a means of explaining human misfortunes by blaming it either on a supernatural entity or a known person in the community. The harmful nature is believed to include the belief in the use of occult resources to achieve evil or harmful ends. One must hasten to explain that this concept has been transmuted from the Middle Ages down to the Renaissance and modern period with very slight modifications.

Dr Faustus in Christopher Marlowe's *Dr Faustus* readily comes to mind as the archetype of witchcraft in the subconscious of early Renaissance humanists. It is to be noted that a link with the devil was eventually deemed necessary for the concept and as such the possessor of supernatural power was believed to have a link with the devil, as he or she invariably wrought the craft of witches, more often than not in a harmful or negative way. The nefarious acts of the witches in Shakespeare's *Macbeth* further encapsulate the perception of Elizabethan society of the period that witches and their acts are evil. There is no doubt that the beliefs in witchcraft and the resultant witch persecution are found in many cultures of the world.

In the Western part of Nigeria, especially among the Yoruba, the origin of witchcraft is equally not a concrete phenomenon to trace. The reference to its origin could only be garnered from myths and from the story narrated in *Odu Ifa Osa Meji*. The *Odu* narrates that after the creation of the earth, *Olodumare* sent three *orisas*: *Obaisa (Obatala)* and *Ogun* as well as one woman (*Odu*) to administer it. Although *Olodumare* gave various powers to the other deities, he gave nothing to *Odu* and this prompted her to go back to *Olodumare* to request for power and *Olodumare* replied 'You will be their mother forever; you will sustain the physical world'. *Olodumare* gave her a covered calabash (which symbolises the physical structure of the world) and a special *Ase* (symbolised by a bird). According to Elebuibon,

when asked how she would use her power on earth, Odu replied that she “would use her power to fight those who insult and disrespect her. But she will not hesitate to use it to help those who adore her...and Olodumare consented to Odu’s desire” (46).

Etymologically, the witches are often referred to as ‘mothers’. Mothers, in Yoruba language mean ‘awon iya’. They are also seen in the context of grandmothers and this is usually translated as ‘*iya agba*’. Underlining this word is the age cognition. This is because the person so referred to as *iya agba* must be somebody old enough to be the mother of one’s mother. Thus, the word not only connotes age, but also the respect and reverence that one needs to give to one’s mother and indeed somebody who gave birth to one’s mother. Apart from this, a word of endearment for individual who is old enough to be one’s mother is ‘iyaami’ (my mother) and this is used, not in reference to one’s biological mother only. One notes that this is the name by which they are referred to in Wale Ogunyemi’s *Kiriji* and by Wande Abimbola (1975) while narrating the story of ‘Ifa and Aje in Conflict’. ‘Iyaa mi agba’ is thus an intimate reference to a grandmother. In all this, the addition of ‘mi’ (my) to indicate (mine) makes an ordinary indication of the individual more affable. In reference to the topic at hand, the grandmothers so referred to are so called due to their primordial existence as well as their symbolic reproductive essence in the evolution of man in conjunction with their spiritual significance. This is because, naturally, an individual comes into this world through a mother and as such, the mother deserves a lot of respect and the one who gave birth to this mother should, therefore, be a symbol of respect.

The mothers/grandmothers who, according to the Odu Ifa mentioned earlier on, were privy to the creation of individuals and as such their words naturally command respect, thus, they are in familiar terms called ‘iyaami’, ‘awon iyaa wa’, ‘iyaa mi agba’, ‘awon iyaa wa agba’ (my mother, our mothers, our grandmothers) and so on. This seems to be the reference point of the late fuji musician, Sikiru Ayinde Barrister who, in one of his albums sings: “*Eyin iyaa mi, e jaye mi o daa, eyin alale ’fe, aterere kari aye!* (my mothers, let my life be good, you who were privy to the creation of Ile-Ife, you are the ones that spread all over the world!) On the one hand, the term mother/ grandmother includes, in the word of Washington not merely biological mothers:

but co-mothers, grandmothers, aunts, older sisters and other community women. These women are the tradition-keepers and culture bearers. On the other hand, the mothers/grandmothers are the old, but ageless, wise and mysterious ones who are the physical and spiritual terrestrial mothers and they are “the gods of the society and the owners of everything in the world (p.20)

The honour heaped on grandmothers is therefore due to their spiritual, biological, social and political status, based on the fact that they not only went through the biological process of giving birth, but also for the fact that they possess 'Aje' (wrongly translated as witchcraft by the European). As Ulli Beier maintains (6), the word 'witch' does not accurately explain the mystic power, the deep knowledge or secret of life associated with Aje.

The witches in this *Yoruba* sense are thus women in possession of *Aje* and this does not connote the use of that primal power only in the negative sense as the Western explanation would make us believe. This special power, according to Washington is equally not restricted to women as any "person of ability, insight, leadership or other form of observable power can be considered Aje" (20).

In this sense, witches refer to women who are the custodians of culture and tradition due to their biological importance, influence in social and political endeavours underlining their roles in being the primary educators of children. The term also refers to an entity and a group (predominantly female) wielding a 'primal force',

The power of Aje which...is natural and neutral...in the sense that it can be used in myriads of ways depending on the Aje wielding the power, the circumstances and the motivations guiding the actions. Aje is also a cosmic spiritual force that is more active in the spiritual than the material realm. Finally, it is decidedly political and works to promote communal growth and stability (Washington, 22).

Again, it is to be noted that due to the incursion of foreign culture which discriminates on colour pigmentation, there are now three types of *Aje*: '*Aje funfun*' (white witches) which are alleged to be indicative of benevolent acts such as imparting wealth, prosperity and so on; '*Aje pupa*' and '*Aje Dudu*' (red and black witches) are the dreaded ones. The black ones are said to cause misfortune and bad luck as well as induce criminal offence while the red ones are alleged to specialise in bloodletting; car wrecks and so on. This colour-coding has been confirmed to be a recent phenomenon as there was no indication of colour code in traditional Odu Ifa.

Witches and Witchcraft and the Patriarchal Undertones

The question posed by Agnes Erigha in *Sunday Tribune* of June 2001 "Are Women Witches Victims?" becomes pertinent at this juncture. The writer was actually concerned with the victimisation of only women anytime the issue of witches and their craft come up in mild and volatile discourses. From what was understood in *ese Ifa*, *Osa meji*, (ifa divination), the

power of *Aje* was bestowed on woman *Orisa* and this seems to make it female-owned and female operated. However, apart from the fact that there is no age restriction on ownership of *Aje*, men can also be born with *Aje*. What this means is that a person could be born with the power and he or she would be ignorant of it until his or her positive or negative wishes begin to manifest. A person with such dormant power could also revitalise such power by initiation into the cult. Elebuibon again, avers that “women are *Aje* while men are *Oso*” (68). However, this does not take cognisance of the phallocentric bifurcation which portrays female *Aje* as irredeemably evil while male wizards are good. Visible under the male *Ajes* are *babalawo* and *onisegun* who are often considered respectable members of the society.

The clean-cut division and resultant castigation of female *Aje* as personification of evil has been traced to the advent of foreign religions and colonisation of Africa. Washington maintains that the fact that African women are accused of witchcraft mainly or exclusively shows a psychological and deep-rooted sexual antagonism’ which came about “as a result of the African man’s spiritual and economical oppression by the European man (and woman); this oppression the African man turned upon the African women” (.11). Nadel also confirms the existence of matriarchy which was a carefully balanced relationship among men and women before the advent of organised religions and colonisation in Africa (17). The anarchy instituted by slavery, slave trade and foreign religions and the resultant surreptitious ascendancy of patriarchy is what Elebuibon (99) probably narrated in *Ifa Obara Okanran* divination which tells the story of how men who hitherto were under ‘women’s domination’ threw off the yoke through sacrifice and came to lord it over the women. In all, the result of patriarchal ascendancy was the exclusion of men and his craft of wizardry from the evil list and the total stigmatisation of women who become the scape-goats of all evil or terrible things that befall the society. They become the witches (synonymous with wrongdoings) in the society and thereby “made to carry its faults and failures”.

Many sources have confirmed the positive activities of witches in the actual areas of governance in: militaristic, spiritual, political and agricultural spheres before and after the incursion of patriarchy into African socio-political and cultural settings. With the advent of patriarchy, there was a gradual exclusion of women from certain spiritual and social activities. In essence men have actually started the patriarchal trend before Europeans came capitalised further on a new alien patriarchal ideology to seize control of some spiritual cults, but *Aje* was among those they could not seize.

Before then, the traditional and historical matriarchy as a social orientation was tilted towards *Aje* and during this time any elderly woman who enjoyed longevity was seen as possessing

wisdom, secret knowledge and power and as such could be regarded as Aje. Bolaji Idowu (175) also observes that all who hold important titles in cults for the gods and ancestors in the fulfilment of their roles must possess such powers. For instance, the ascendancy of a new Ooni at Ife involves initiation into the Ogboni and a council of women controlling the mysteries of Odu and this Odu Council, according to Washington, predominantly controlled by elderly women, provides important functions to this paramount ruler in Yoruba land. The Iyalemo, is the head of the “Ifa mystagogues in the city, she is Aje and she oversees the prognostication of the Awoni and Emese” (196). There is Iya’le Oduduwa who was the high priest of Oduduwa and the Iya’le Agbo who was the King’s pharmacist.

At Oyo, a priestess, Iyamode, headed the Egungun cult. This elderly woman in charge of the royal mausoleum was in fact the only personality that took obeisance from the king. There were other Palace Women who were in the category of powerful women and these include; Bara Women, Iya Abiye, Obagunte, Erelu, Iya Naso, Iya Kekere, Yeye Olori and so on. Yeye Olori, who was the King’s elder counsellor, was even the one adjudicating matters and also acting as intermediary between the king, the Ogboni and the spiritual realm (Washington 199).

Ulli Beier also confirmed the role of Gelede and Iyalase, “the Mother of the shrine in the installation of a new king in Yorubaland” (7). The duty of this elderly woman is to remove the heart of the deceased Oba and give to the new one for him to eat and by so doing symbolically maintains the unification of the lineage. The patriarchal incursion has however led to a deliberate distortion, abrogation and hijacking of some socio-spiritual activities from women. Layiwola maintains that “during the matriarchal era, egungun cult was used politically by women to protect and boost their status” (29). During the patriarchal shift “men protested and seized back the power that devolved from them since the days of adventurous migration”. The patriarchal order instituted to assert male superiority over the previous order which was gender complementarities was what Elebuibon referred to in *ese Ifa* ‘Obara Okanran’ (99), mentioned earlier on.

There is no doubt that the incursion of patriarchy has also erased the roles grandmothers played in the foundation of towns and cities in Yorubaland. Adediran and Afolayan maintain that “Pupupu was the acknowledged founder of Ondo, while Adetirin, a daughter of duduwa was the acknowledged founder of Igbomina” (98). Other historical accounts revealed the existence of female queens such as Orompoto, Ajiboyede and so on as Alaafin of Oyo. Even in Ile-Ife, women ascended the throne of Ooni. Nevertheless, a patriarchal tendency has led to a deliberate removal of their names from the history of that town. History has also recorded

great women such as the Iyalode of Oyo and the Yeyeloja Ojumo of Ife who in history controlled economic affairs of the state. Recent history confirms the positive activities of great women such as Madame Tinubu, the Iyalode of Abeokuta whose economic and political dominance over even Oba Akintoye; her antagonism to British imperialism as well as her military contributions to Abeokuta against Dahomey made Mba to laud this great woman as “one of those who positively utilised their Aje politically” (9).

There is also the role played by Efunsetan Aniwura, the Iyalode, in the history of Ibadan. Contrary to Akinwumi Isola’s dramatisation of the hubris of this powerful woman which almost tended toward character assassination, her tragedy was premised on her wealth and power which overshadowed that of Latoosa, the Baale of Ibadan at that time. Ogunremi confirms that “Latoosa considered her his greatest rival and as Iyalode, she engaged in open political confrontation with a male dominated government. She acted as the arrow-head of a group of chiefs opposed to the governance of Latoosa” (341) and as Awe and Olutoye noted, “she became the spokesman of the anti-war group in Ibadan and she was among those opposed to the expansionist policy of Latoosa” (128). Even according to the patriarchal accounts given by Samuel Johnson, the charges levelled against Efunsetan by Latoosa (and which were used to gruesomely murder her) were “flimsy and they include: (1) that she did not accompany him to the war; (ii) that she never sent him supplies during the campaign; (iii) that she did not come in person to meet him on his safe return” (391).

The first offence quoted above also shows that historically, women were equal participants at the warfronts. Awe and Olutoye narrated the exploits of a woman, Molebi of Oye who was nicknamed ‘Elegberun Ibon’ (the owner of 1,000 guns) “who was reported to have fought single-handedly against Ibadan soldiers at night and rendered them vulnerable to Ekitiparapo attacks the following day” (126). As Opeola observes that “Many witches accompanied their soldier husbands to the war front to be of assistance to the latter in their war efforts.” (225). This point could be corroborated by the example of Orisaleke, named by Awe as the wife of Ogedengbe who provided mystical support for Ogedengbe.

She was regarded as Ogedengbe’s mascot; a very bold and daring woman; she was said to have mystical power and controlled unseen supernatural forces to ensure that Ogedengbe won all his battles; she was also described as a master in the preparation of potent charms to protect Ogedengbe and give him victory over his enemies. (125)

Aje as the Repository Powers in Witchcraft

In Yoruba belief, the mysterious power of the witches is resident in Aje. This power, as Washington (1), observes is esoterically controlled, but is redolent in its concept of “creativity, political acumen, power of the word, the capacity to both create and destroy”. Aje is an empowerment “through self-definition and proclivity toward gender-balance”. Elebuibon categorised the power of Aje into six. The first is what he terms ‘the Agogo Enu’ which he refers to as the power of the tongue. The second is that of gazing, ‘awopa Aje’ which refers to that penetrating gaze that can perceive many things including the future of individual. The third is the ‘Ofa Aje Nina’ which is the spiritual arrow that the Aje can shoot at someone from anywhere and the arrow will spiritually hit the person wherever he or she may be. The fourth is the ‘Igba Iwa’, sacred calabash which contains a bird, and this is the reason the powerful women are called the ‘eleyes’. The use of bird is an example of lycanthropy whereby the soul of an individual leaves the corporeal owner to assume the form of a bird or any other animal. In this state, the bird can attend the nocturnal meeting of the group, “slay and eat other human beings, but it can also be killed while in this form and that means the death of the corporeal owner of the soul” (25).

Instances of lycanthropy in recent times are quite many. For instance, the *Vanguard* of May 22, 2008 reported how a cat allegedly hit by a motorcycle turned into a middle-aged woman. Another story reported by *Post Express* of Sunday, May 30, 1999 narrated how a young girl knocked down by a speeding car turned to a cat. The fifth power of the Aje is the force resident in words. With Ase, whatever the mysterious being says, it must come to pass and the possession of this power, received from Eledumare, makes people to fear Aje. However, this power must be used with discretion. If it is misused, it can be withdrawn or revoked by Eledumare, the giver. ‘Omusu Aje’ is the last one and this is the power that resides in the cervix of a woman. In the word of Elebuibon, “Only those who know it can appeal to it and make use of it...Many men have fallen into problems due to their maltreatment of women who invoke the omusu to punish them” (56). Added to this category are men who failed to fulfil promises made to women while they were having sexual intercourse with them, when the woman feels disappointed, she can touch her omusu and command it to punish such men.

From the typologies of the power of the Aje, it becomes obvious that a woman in possession of Aje can use incantations, words, rituals and magic objects to inflict harm on the victim. She may also use the nails, hair, clothes or other possessions of the victim which she burns, pricks or wishes evil on. Washington corroborates Elebuibon description of the witches’ power as she refers to it as “womb-lodged, menstrual and menopausal charged biological,

melanin specific force.” (22). What is also implicated is the fact that the witches use their power as the children of ‘imole’, the earth, and as such use it to control agricultural fertility and plant life. The powers enumerated above are also used with utmost discretion and in accordance with pre-ordained rules from which no breach is allowed. Elebuibon confirms that at the initiation of a new member, the would-be-member is first given the dos and don’ts of the cult:

one of these is that she must always be humble and she must shun aggression...besides, she must observe certain taboos (eewo)...she is not to kill or harm people for the fun of it though she is conferred with powers over human lives. She must be able to provide concrete and just reasons for her anger or decision to harm someone.

Washington clarifies this further by stating that a person in possession of Aje must follow some code of conduct which include: (i) do not dabble in herbalism (that is, do not use herbs without a thorough knowledge of their nature and use); (ii) do not display wealth;(iii) share everything. (25). Perhaps the strict adherence to the ethos of Aje made Faleti, as cited by Washington to consider the iyami cult” as the most organised one in the world” (52). There is no doubt that the negative conception of the use of Aje’s powers is the most retained in the subconscious memory of Nigerians of the modern era. The first reason is traceable to the fact that the common avenue for the display of negative use of power has been the household, especially when one or two wives of the same husband possess Aje. The second reason, as indicated earlier, is traceable to the escalation of household conflict in which the power of Aje plays prominent roles in mass media imaging. Nigerian films and television drama are replete with diabolical use of power of Aje within the context of household in which children and other members of household are poisoned or harmed through the power of Aje.

The late doyen of Nigerian theatre, Hubert Ogunde, did a lot in the 1980’s to dramatically perpetrate the patriarchal and negative perspectives on the activities of the witches while the negative staple diet of overzealous Pentecostalism has also led to revulsion whenever witch and witchcraft are mentioned. There has never been the consideration that out of every twelve disciples, there could be one Judas and they have never bothered to know that any reckless invocation of powers by erring witch usually led to the withdrawal of the power and may lead to further consequences. There is no doubt that the powers are sometimes used to harm and also used as a means of effecting punishment, but there is no doubt also that the powers are used to render assistance to individuals and the society. The ambivalence inherent in the use

of the power of Aje resides in the fact that these powerful women could be as cool as Osun and Obatala in their benevolence and distribution of goodies of life, however, when they are on the path of pursuing justice, they combine the vengeance of Ogun, Sango and Esu together and even then, they still retain their composure.

Thus, when an individual disrespects, harasses or abuses their motherhood, they would still be ready to beg, but when they strike, it is without detection and there is no Western medical cause or cure. They could cause elephantiasis, impotence, infertility and other debilitating diseases such as cancer of the colon, liver, kidney that could kill the victim slowly. However, they often give room, usually 17 days for the victim to repent and this is usually done through the assistance of Orunmila. It should be stated clearly that the main goal of using the power is to ensure continuous and positive evolution of the community and the witches are given the power to employ various means to achieve this goal.

Drama and the Mimesis of the Power inherent in Witches and Witchcraft

As said earlier, the portrayal of witches and witchcraft in drama is ambivalent. The negative portrayal has demonstrated the use of the special power in diabolical way in many plays and films while many films, both foreign and local have equally been used to show what witches can do and how they can either make society peaceful or be in perpetual state of war. These films are numerous but a few include: *Macbeth*, *Exorcist*, *Game of Thrones*, *Vampire Diaries*, *Werewolves*, *Underworld*, *Sorcerer's Apprentice*, *Koto Aiye*, *Aje Niya Mi*, *Aje Meta*, *Ologbo Iya Ijebu* and so on. Many play texts have also been written to show the revered place and role of women especially in the capacity of grandmothers in the affairs of their different societies. Some of the plays are: *Morountodun*, *Kiriji*, *Women of Owu*, *Reign of Wazobia*, *Idia*, *Queen Amina of Zazzau*, *Mojagbe* and so on.

In *Kiriji*, the contributions of the Iyamis to Ekiti warrior are invaluable to the outcome of the kiriji war of the 19th century. In the play, there were scenes when the Iyamis had to take active parts in the war efforts. Ogunyemi shows how they were inextricably pulled into the war by the arrogance of Ajele and his servants appointed by Ibadan to govern Imesi. In the play, one of the Iranse (servant) of this Ajele (Resident) not only treated one Iyami with utmost disrespect but actually molested her. In a scene, the Iyami, carrying firewood is hounded into the queue of citizens being oppressed by the Iranse:

Iranse I: Fall in line! (*He pushes her toward the line. Iyami falls with her load. The market people scream in surprise. Iranse II picks her up and puts the load upon her*

head.) Before you die, this load must get to Ajele's palace. After that you may go to your grave...

After she is made to walk long distance and climb hills and her load forcibly taken for the use of the Ajele, the Iranse finally pronounces:

Iranse I: Old woman, you may now go and die, then I'll know you've done one thing in your life worth remembering: fetching firewood for the Ajele. (20)

The contributions of the Iyami are seen in the curse she immediately lays on the Iranse and his masters and the result is in the realm of 'abilu' (misbehaviour):

Iyami: The earth only goes barren and does not die, but the day you became an embryo is the day you began to wither. You treated me badly and wished me dead, but I will not die with you still alive. You 've exceeded your limit, Iranse, and abused your heaven, and the day the duiker's horn shows prominently over his head is the day the hunter kills him. (20-21)

The immediate result of the curse is the misbehaviour by the Ajele to rape the wife of Fabunmi which prompt Fabunmi to attack the Ajele with machete, killing first the Iranse, thus, the Iranse dies according to the Iyami's pronouncement. Apart from this immediate action of the Iyami, in line with the laid-down procedure of the cult, the molested Iyami further brings the report to the meeting of the Iyamis. Other Iyamis in unison and anger declare their support and even declare their war against Ibadan as one of liberation, thus, as the Iyamis fly to the warfront, they sing:

...We are going, Our destination: the battlefront...And our task?...To protect our warriors, From the tyrant Ibadan...(“ Oju ogun la nlo taara...Ki la n lo se?...Ami lo o eeh, Ami lo... Gbara wa sile l'owo Ibadan, buruku).

The impact of the Iyamis was greatly felt in the war as their assistance proved invaluable to the Ekiti warriors. In an instance, the Ibadan warriors conducted a surprise attack on the Ekiti camp while they were busy singing and dancing. This attack would have been a total annihilation of the Ekiti warriors, but the Iyamis supernaturally protected the Ekiti camp, thus, the Ibadan bullets could not harm them. According to the stage direction:

Just in time, before the Ibadan warriors open fire on the Ekiti, the three Iyamis fly onto the stage and spread their wings to screen the Ekiti from their enemies. Neither side is aware of the Iyami's presence. As the Ekiti continue to sing and dance, the Ibadan open fire on them. The bullets land on the Iyamis, but do them no harm. The Ekiti quickly scatter and lie prostrate in two rows with their guns at the ready.

Another round of firing comes across from the Ibadan camp and then there is silence for a while. The Iyamis fly upstage centre and remain there... (50)

Ekiti warriors' response eventually forced a disastrous retreat by the Ibadan.

Femi Oke in his analysis of *Mojagbe*, written by Ahmed Yerima, also examines the role of witches in the peaceful or violent nature of existence in their society. In the play, Mojagbe, who ascends the throne by trickery, seeks immortality. His sorcerer, Isepe, blocks the mouth of death by killing Mojagbe's mother. Mojagbe further whets the throat of death with the blood of his first wife and again appeases death with the foetuses in his young bride's womb. With his power, Mojagbe becomes tyrannical and his chiefs, citizens and even spirits of the village begin to plot his removal. Layewu, the community's masquerade of death is invoked by the four leaders of the village's witches against Mojagbe. The masquerade opens its face to the king, a taboo, but he remains unshaken with the assistance of Isepe. A white calabash which signifies that the villagers want him to commit royal suicide is placed on his throne but he breaks it in the presence of his chiefs whom he calls "old fools." Esan, the son of a former king also comes to assassinate Mojagbe, but he is caught in the process. Mojagbe orders Esan to be beheaded in the market square as a deterrent to other insurgents. Abese, the King's messenger, who has served three previous kings is given the task to carry out the punishment, but the old man pleads with the king to no effect. The women of the town refuse to allow Esan to be killed and they protest half naked to the palace.

The women flee the palace when the king threatens to unleash sex starved slaves from another community on them. The manner of flight of the women and old witches is one of the comical parts of the tragic play. The witches eventually put a curse on the king that manifests when some youths from Igbado murder a family member from Mojagbe's town. He is about to lead an assault on Igbado when Isepe warns him not to go. Among other warnings, Mojagbe must not go to any war; he must pick only one item from the war booty; and he must not receive any visitor no matter the status.

Mojagbe becomes very angry when he realises that he has no power over death after all and in frustration, he kills Isepe. He stays at home and picks a maiden, the daughter of an herbalist from the war booty. The king and the chiefs are partying when three messengers arrive from Oyo with a message from Alaafin Maku seeking to know why Mojagbe has refused to pay tributes. Against advice, Mojagbe chooses war and orders Abese to throw out the messengers who are indeed war generals from Oyo with their warriors already on siege on the town. The role of the witches in this play is pronounced and significant in the eventual

happenings and events in the community depicted. Their resolve to curse the king generated chaos, violence and disunity in the community and this leads to the eventual downfall of Mojagbe.

Apart from drama, in recent Nigerian history, the efforts of the iyamis in real life socio-political situation are seen in the activities of women such as those from Aba who took it upon themselves to fight against the colonial government in 1929. Olufunmilayo Ransome Kuti and her Abeokuta Women's Union (AWU) is another example of women playing active political role. Funmilayo Kuti, is named an Aje by his equally enigmatic son, Fela Anikulapo, and her constructive socio-political activities represent that of the archetypal grandmother.

Conclusion

This paper has so far tried to determine who the grandmothers are. It has indicated the reason for their existence and what they portend for human beings in general. It has shown that one-way human beings can avoid the wrath of the grandmothers is man's avoidance of all manners of behaviours that are offensive to Imole, the earth. And from mythohistory to recent history their activities have been proven to be essential to aetiology. The paper has also tried to define the scope of the power of the grandmothers, their operation as well as the level of their intervention in African nations, especially in Nigeria's social and political development.

The paper has also tried to address the concern of people like Ogunlesi, who blamed witches and wizards for Nigeria's lack of technological development, arson, mysterious deaths, corruption and so on; a concern that many Nigerians obviously nurtured in their subconscious. It is thus to be reiterated that from the myth connected to the grandmothers' existence as itemised in *ese ifa osa meji*, they were to be the fertile and creative mothers to the people of the earth and protect their children with myriad of powers in their possession and by so doing ensure communal and as the case may be national growth. One could however ask; how many researches have been done by Africans to tap into the positive realm of general African traditional powers as well as those possessed by Aje in order for them to become utilisable for national development? If one is totally ignorant on something, how can it be converted to one's advantage? Or in what ways can a preclusive attitude on a subject even as revolting as witchcraft contribute to knowledge on it? These questions become germane especially due to the fact that, the destructive or negative use of the power by the grandmothers has mainly been highlighted, emphasised and disseminated from the Eurocentric construct. This destructive and negative image has been equally disseminated by mass media imaging obviously exploited by neo-colonial, neo-patriarchal humanists,

inebriated religious zealots and all this was heightened by African man's confirmed psychosis of making others to carry his fault or failure.

Witches and their craft have been condemned alongside such term as sorcery, but it is notable that sorcery (Oso) as defined by Washington is the use of any means to "alter nature without regard to ethical principles". Western sorcery has however caused more harm to humanity than witchcraft as it has resulted in "nuclear weapons, the 'Star Wars', defence system and destruction of the Brazilian Forest". Washington also traced the results of Western sorcery to include:

transatlantic slave trade, the decimation of native American populations, the colonisation of Africa, India, China, the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagazaki, King Leopold II's decimation of Kongo and his cutting off and collection of the hands of the Kongolese, Cloning, the US and Clinton administration bombing of Sudan and Afghanistan and so on. (15)

One could add to this list the destruction of Iraq and Libya as well as the exploitation inherent in neo-colonialism and so on. Thus, in the definition of Aje, wizard, evil and so on, the explanation, more often than not is usually done with the yardstick of the person making the definition and this depends on his psychological orientation, idiosyncrasies and in the case of Africans, even in this contemporary era, it is done under the manacle of Eurocentric indoctrinations, hypocrisy, religious intoxication, supreme and self-induced ignorance.

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