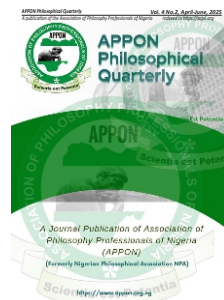


**TWO WORLDS FOR A
HARMONIOUS SOCIETY:
A CRITIQUE OF WITCHCRAFT
PHENOMENON IN OKULOSHO
COMMUNITY**



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ABSTRACT

This research aims to bridge two worlds that are far apart from each other due to the lacuna created through a misconception of both worlds. These are the perceived metaphysical world of witches, regarded as a threat to the other, the physical world of the Okulosho people of Akoko-Edo, Edo State, Nigeria. The objective of this research is to demystify the world of witchcraft for the purpose of harmonizing both worlds for peaceful coexistence, as has been achieved in Europe and America in the 19th Century. This paper observed that amalgamating the two worlds can lead to monumental development in all spheres of life. It is a common belief that development thrives faster and better in a peaceful and harmonious environment. The paper adopts a historico-phenomenological approach in order to critically examine the issues involved in an attempt to reconcile the physical and metaphysical worlds. It was also discovered that the witchcraft phenomenon in Okulosho has sown a seed of discord over the years that resulted in stigmatization, inherent hatred, suspicion, separation, disunity, and calumny among the indigenes. The paper concluded that the conflict between the two worlds is anchored in the attitudinal manner of the Okulosho people towards the perceived witches.

Keywords: Okulosho, Physical, Metaphysical, Peaceful Co-Existence, Witchcraft Phenomenon

Introduction

Okulosho as a community has experienced lots of setbacks over the years because of the witchcraft phenomenon. Some families have disintegrated because of witchcraft

accusations. Some others are traumatized, stigmatized, and treated like outcasts. A few have been banished for being involved in witchcraft practices.¹ Free association among the indigenes is interrupted by the

¹ V.A. Inagbor, "Witchcraft in Okulosho Culture." Unpublished PhD Thesis. Submitted to the Department of Religions. Faculty of Arts, University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria. (2022): 2

belief in witchcraft belief. In Medieval Europe the discrimination and persecution of perceived witches never allowed the then European society to develop, because of the acrimony that was generated from witchcraft belief.² People were afraid of displaying their scientific talents being accused of practising witchcraft.³ Hence, the paper looked at the possibility where and when the concepts and operations of witchcraft are demystified and its memberships as practitioners of a particular cult or religion are taken both as sane members of the society, and persons with special powers or abilities for the maximisation of their essences as persons. This way, there will be peace, harmony and cooperation towards the development of the same society.⁴

Brief Historical Background of the Okulosho People

Okulosho is a heterogeneous community. It comprises Dagbala, Ojah, Ojirami and Makeke in Akoko-Edo Local Government Area of Edo State, Nigeria. The four sister villages share the same cosmological and metaphysical worldview, owing to singular ancestral genealogical and dialectical tendencies. According to Mabolaji, it was during Ogiso-Owodo dynasty that the four villages migrated from the ancient Benin Kingdom to settle in their present location in Edo North to escape from the oppressive rule of the Ogiso dynasty.⁵ Mabolaji further states that the Okulosho people occupy an area of land of about 24km in the Northern

region of Edo State of Nigeria. They are bounded on the North by the Ososo, on the West by the Ibillo, on the South by the Etuno (Igarra), and on the East by the Okpella.⁶ According to Okulosho scholars, the word “Okulosho” designates “enclosure”. It was during the colonial era that Europeans were said to refer to these four communities as ‘enclosure’ because they are bounded by some contiguous hills (Kukuruku Hills), and owing to faulty pronunciation by the natives, ‘enclosure’ came to be pronounced ‘Okulosho.’⁷ The people are mostly farmers and hunters. They cultivate crops like yam, cocoyam, cassava, beans, cocoa, melon, groundnut, coffee among other crops. They also engage in petty trade to supplement their income from farming.⁸

Okulosho Concept of Witchcraft

The Okulosho word for ‘witch’ or ‘witchcraft’ is ‘ofia’; which simply means terrific, horror, wicked, diabolic and monstrous. According to Omolere, Okulosho derives her definition of ‘ofia’ from the general notion of ‘ofia’ among the Okulosho people when she says that ‘ofia’ is one believed to be capable or having the ability of making him/herself invisible to ordinary eyes and can metamorphose to lower animal for the purpose of carrying out nefarious acts.⁹ *Ofia* (witch) is a term or concept that is unisex among the Okulosho people. It is not gender-centred, and does not refer to only female practitioners of witchcraft, but also males who practice the

² R.E. Guiley, *The Encyclopaedia of Witches, Witchcraft and Wicca*. Third Edition (NY: Visionary Living Inc., 2008): xi-xii

³ B. O. Agidigbi, Witchcraft in Ika Traditional Thought and Contemporary Change. *EP HA: Ekpoma Journal of Religious Studies*, Vol. 5 Nos. 1&2, June, (2003): 82-87.

⁴ V.A. Inagbor, “Witchcraft in Okulosho Culture.”: 6.

⁵ H. O. Mabolaji, *Customs and Tradition of the Okulosho People* (Igarra: Amune, 1984): 39-43

⁶ H. O. Mabolaji, *Customs and Tradition of the Okulosho People*.

⁷ H. O. Mabolaji, *Slave Trade in the Heartland of Okulosho*. (Igarra: Amune, 1980): 15-20.

⁸ V.A. Inagbor, “Witchcraft in Okulosho Culture.”: 14.

⁹ F. Omolere, *Personal Interview*, Princess of Oduma Deity, Dagbala, 71 years, 2019

same.

In Okulosho, unlike most African societies, both males and females are involved in the practice of witchcraft in equal capacity. Also, they do not believe that female witches are stronger or more vulpine and dangerous than their male counterparts. Omolere's definition of a 'witch' is in tandem with Awolalu and Dopamu's view of a witch. For Awolalu and Dopamu, witches were those who possessed inherent psychic power to send out their spirits invisibly or through lower creatures to harm others. Witches were said to operate in guilds, but also operated singly or individually.¹⁰ John Mbiti also posits that witchcraft was a manifestation of the mystical forces which were inborn in a person, inherited or acquired in various ways. Therefore, a witch was one of the most hated and feared person in a community. People are scared to associate with them, eat at their homes, or even quarrel with them in case they might bewitch them.¹¹ For Latour, witchcraft is an act of supernatural interference in the natural order of life to favour an individual.

It was further pointed out that witchcraft was a supernatural endowment that was attached with a consequence.¹² Ofia and Ogbo go hand in hand. Ogbo in Okulosho is what makes one an 'ofia' (a witch). It is a common belief among the Okulosho people that Ogbo is a spiritual substance used for initiation and that once eaten, one instantly becomes an Ofia (a witch). It is this Ogbo or Ofia that empowers the Ofia spiritually to carry out nefarious activity and metamorphose into any kind of animal to participate in nocturnal meetings in the coven. Ofia is believed to have the power to kill or harm through the work of darkness (evil means) those who are not members of

the guild; whoever is considered to have such power is sometimes said to have Ogbo. This is expressive of the traditional Okulosho view of the witch. First of all, a witch is a person whom people believe can kill or harm others.¹³ Secondly, *Ogbo* is the spiritual power that possesses a witch, giving the person an extraordinary power to carry out his/her nefarious activities. In Okulosho's belief system, according to Okpolo, Ofia generically could refer not to a witch but someone who is sharp or extraordinarily clever, or one who guesses right. In a more serious use, it could mean a powerful one. When a drug is efficacious, the Okulosho say 'ikumu no gume' - the drug is powerful. The word 'Ofia' then may connote 'powerful' though in a special sense.¹⁴

The term 'Ofia' conjures one image in the mind of the Okulosho people-the image of a person who feeds psychically on his/her victims and destroys them in instalment. Somehow, an average Okulosho person knows from childhood who a witch is. Some children have read about it in story books, and if they come from polygamous homes they might have heard one woman referring to another as a witch. Witchcraft seems to be a very common phenomenon among the Okulosho, yet out of good social behaviour or fear of the witches, people hesitate to discuss witches and witchcraft in public. The first reason for this attitude is that witchcraft is generally regarded as evil and is not a matter to be discussed especially before children. With this consciousness, Washington shares the same view when he asserts that witches are personification of evil, as innately wicked people who worked harm against others. Witches were capable of their nefarious deeds through their

¹⁰ J. O. Awolalu, & P. A. Dopamu, *West African Traditional Religion*, (Ibadan: Onibonoje Press. 1979): 85-96

¹¹ J. S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, (Kampala: Heinemann, 1978): 112.

¹² C. H. P. Lator, "Witchcraft and the Avoidance of Physical Violence in Cameroon", *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, (1995): 599-609.

¹³ V. A. Inagbor, "Witchcraft in Okulosho Culture.": 20.

¹⁴ M. Okpolo, , *Personal Interview*, Hunter, Dagbala, 65 years, 2019.

possession of mysterious powers unknown and unavailable to ordinary people.¹⁵ Secondly, witches are generally resented because of the misery they are believed to be able to cause to individuals or groups. Everything is done to show that they are not wanted in society. Frightening stories are circulated about their activities, and children are warned not to accept food from strangers, suspected neighbours, and relatives.¹⁶

Seniority in the coven lies not in the year of practice, but in success and achievements in practice. Those who volunteered to engage in dangerous and challenging missions to protect the integrity of the coven from perceived enemies or external intruders from the opposition covens are more likely to head the coven. A young witch therefore can be regarded as the most senior or powerful in the coven pending on his/her achievements and spiritual power. Anikoro points out that, heartless witches who attack victims indiscriminately mostly occupy high positions in the coven, and they are regarded as senior elders. Some of them are more powerful than those who introduced them to the guild.¹⁷ He further says that, a witch especially the heartless one could attack his/her victim for the flimsiest reason or for none at all. A witch could attack his/her victim for being too kind to him/her (the witch). If it is his/her turn to bring a victim to the nocturnal meeting then he/she has to find one. The victim does not have to be one of his enemies; in fact, he/she could be someone close to the witch. Some, according to Anikoro, have confessed to donating their most beloved children for sacrifices at their nocturnal meetings. With such a pitiless attitude towards their own children or loved ones, we should not be

moved by surprise at their heartlessness to other people. For Mgbako, witches were mean-looking, mean-acting or otherwise socially disruptive people whose behaviour deviates significantly from cultural or community norms.¹⁸

Witchcraft Phenomenon in Okulosho

Shortly after the Nigerian civil war in January 1970 with its devastating effects on the Okulosho people whose forest was used as a battle field by the two warring parties (the Biafra and Federal troops), witchcraft became a topical issue in Okulosho. Like unexpected and uncontrollable explosive, perceived witches and wizards were said to confess out randomly especially when there was an outbreak of epidemic consequence upon the unburied corpses littered around their forest. The dirty environment and the trauma of the war might have been responsible or the direct cause of the epidemic. For Aberemu, it was the 'Dark Ages' in Okulosho history. However, witchcraft belief in Okulosho is as old as the very origin of the community, but the belief got to its zenith in the 70s. The same 70s, it was recorded in Okulosho history how witches fought over one penny in the coven and continued with the fight in broad day light at Ojirami Kpetesh market square. While at Dagbala there was high infant mortality rate caused by measles epidemic associated to Asekhokhai who admitted through open confession as being responsible for the outbreak of the epidemic.¹⁹

Saliu opines that before the advent of Christianity in Okulosho, parents never allowed their children to mix freely with

¹⁵ T. N. Washington, *Our Mothers, Our Power, Our Texts: Manifestation of Aje in Africana Literature*, (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2005): 156ff

¹⁶ V.A. Inagbor, "Witchcraft in Okulosho Culture.":25.

¹⁷ M. Anikoro, *Personal Interview*, Necromancer, Ojirami, 87 years, 2019.

¹⁸ C. Mgbako, Witchcraft Legal Aid in Africa. *International Herald Tribune*. (February, 2011): 15-17.

¹⁹ M. Aberemu, *Personal Interview*, Farmer, Ojirami, 85 years, 2018.

their peer groups for the fear that they might be initiated into witchcraft. He claims that witchcraft then was a secret affair, and perceived witches/wizards were afraid of being detected because of the instant jungle justice that would be given to them.²⁰ The few that were detected either through consultation of oracle or direct accusations were ostracized, and some of them died as a result of frustration from their own kinsmen and social segregation and stigmatization. Suspected witches/wizards could not attend social functions most especially with their age grades, believing that they might be harmful to their mates by poisoning the food and drinks with witchcraft substances and thereby initiating innocent people into their guild.²²

Okpafioko further illustrates this assertion by going into history and specificity. According to him, on the 5th of March, 1973 during Afa festival at Ojirami, a man used kola-nut to initiate some of his age mates who partook in the eating of the kola-nut. Based on historical evidence and experiences of some people in Okulosho on witchcraft activities, Omunagbe²³ says that witchcraft is a practical evil that some born evil men and women engaged in to haunt their fellow human beings. He claims that those who voluntarily submitted themselves for initiation into witchcraft already had evil tendencies prior to their initiation. He attributes socio-economic and political bankruptcy in Okulosho to the nefarious activities of witchcraft among the indigenes. He points out that the progress in Okulosho

is at slow space and below expectation because the said witches in Okulosho are of the black and red categories with destructive inclinations. This conviction of their activities may be as a result of jealousy of their well-to-do mates and neighbours. Ogbezuode²⁴ in the same trend of thought admits that in the colonial era Okulosho had brighter future, and there was light of hope in the area as they all seem to understand their values in operations and convictions. As at then, there was a Magistrate Court at Dagbala the centre of Okulosho community; and this court served as a symbol of unity among the Okulosho people.²⁵ The traditional rulers in Okulosho community occasionally had meetings there to deliberate on issues relating to the progress of the community. For Ogbezuode²⁶, some acts of witchcraft marked the lasting and pronounced retrogression in Okulosho till date, both socio-economically and politically. The public institutions in the community were destroyed spiritually and the pre-colonial era now became a case of reference in terms of progress to the contemporary Okulosho people.²⁷

The Okulosho people, either because of their experiences or encounter with perceived witches has never portrayed anything positive about witchcraft. Odarume²⁸ affirms that the day one is initiated into witchcraft that same day he/she becomes an enemy of the society. Offiong corroborates this assertion when he claims that witches in general demonstrate anti-social or asocial characteristics.²⁹ Odarume³⁰

²⁰ O. Saliu, , *Personal Interview*, Hunter, Dagbala, 90 years, 2019.

²¹ V.A. Inagbor, "Witchcraft in Okulosho Culture.]" : 30.

²² I. Okpafioko, *Personal Interview*, Witch-Doctor, Dagbala, 78 years, 2019.

²³ B. Omunagbe, *Personal Interview*, Necromancer/Herbalist, Dagbala, 82 years, 2019.

²⁴ T. Ogbezuode, , *Personal Interview*, Farmer, Dagbala, 80 years, 2019.

²⁵ V. A. Inagbor, "Witchcraft in Okulosho Culture.]" : 32.

²⁶ T. Ogbezuode, , *Personal Interview*

²⁷ V. A. Inagbor, "Witchcraft in Okulosho Culture.]" : 34.

²⁸ O. Odarume, *Personal Interview*, Clan Head, Dagbala, 88 years, 2018.

²⁹ D. A. Offiong, *Witchcraft, Sorcery, Magic and Social Order Among the Ibibio of Nigeria*, (Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishing Company, 1991), 86ff.

³⁰ O. Odarume, *Personal Interview*

says that one of the major reasons why perceived witches are stigmatized in Okulosho is because they are after the destruction of persons or things that would bring progress to the community. He stresses that through their evil power; witches can detect those with bright futures and hunt after them for destruction. He describes witches as blood-thirsty creatures that are not fit to live among civilized people or society. Parrinder³¹ sees witches in the same light with Odarume when he says witches have sucked the entire blood of their victims, while the actual human beings lie asleep on their beds.

Omokemi³² who claims to have been initiated into the guild right from conception opposed witchcraft activities vehemently. Her reason being that all forms or kinds of benefits either materially or spiritually one claims to have acquired through witchcraft are temporal. According to her, nothing given to a member (material or spiritual) that one would not pay a supreme sacrifice that is commensurate to the gift; it is all about give and take. Worst of all, she asserts that witches in Okulosho are visible demons who fight and destroy their family members and friends without conscience, and at times without a just cause.³³ Omokemi says that in the coven, apart from the members of the guild, there is no friend, or family member to have pity on when issues arise concerning the coven and the physical world. Every other person outside members of the guild is a perpetual enemy for destruction when an opportunity offers itself. They (witches) are always in constant war with non-members because they feel rejected and detested by the society. In her statement, no crime is unimaginable and impossible for witches to commit, because of their mystical and

diabolical powers given to them by evil spirits and demons. The Ika people of Delta State, according to Agidigbi, share the same view with Omokemi concerning crimes committed by witches. Among the Ika people of Delta State, Nigeria for instance, negative occurrences in the life of man such as premature death, barrenness, immoral behaviour and other forms of pains such as stealing, bad harvest, lunacy, accidents and so many others which tend to vitiate the happiness and achievements of man are believed to have their genesis from the activities of witches.³⁴

The comments of Balogun³⁵ on witchcraft in Africa have begun to make sense to researchers of witchcraft in Okulosho. Balogun distinguishes himself as one who has been involved in witchcraft practice for over forty years. He mentioned three categories of witches with clear descriptions of their activities. For him, there are black, red and white witches. Black and red witches are known for destruction, and they are mostly common and found in Africa. He opines that we are lagging behind scientifically and technologically because Nigerian red and black witches are known to be more destructive than their Western counterparts in their use of witchcraft. If Balogun's statement is taken to be true regarding this issue of witchcraft, it becomes very clear that Okulosho community has red and black witches; therefore, the complaints of the natives on witchcraft activities are not far from the truth. For Ugbebo³⁶, some people in Okulosho voluntarily eat the substance for initiation to become witches in order to avenge an injustice done to them by either family members or friends or neighbours. Probably, this is one of the reasons why witches in Okulosho engage in

³¹ F. G. Parrinder, *African Traditional Religion*, 3rd ed., (London: Sheldon Press. 1974) 124-130.

³² O. Omokemi, *Personal Interview*, Farmer, Dagbala, 66 years, 2019.

³³ V.A. Inagbor, "Witchcraft in Okulosho Culture.]"':40.

³⁴ Agidigbi, B. O., "Witchcraft in Ika Traditional Thought and Contemporary Change."

³⁵ M. Balogun, The Colour of Evil. *Tell Magazine* (22nd April 2000):14-15.

³⁶ M. Ugbebo, *Personal Interview*, Farmer, Dagbala, 73 years, 2019.

nefarious and destructive activities to retard other people's progress or make themselves agents of retrogression.

Nevertheless, Iselowo³⁷ queries the above assertion considering witchcraft as evil, and that the community and people's retrogression is traced to witchcraft activities. For him, witchcraft assists an individual for the understanding of the mysteries in our world, and also an instrument for self-defence. He opines that witches have contributed at various times to the development and protection of the community. He made an allusion to the history of Okulosho when it was under the Nupe siege for centuries. According to him, the Nupe slave merchants (known as the Izalomo by the natives), raided the Okulosho countless times and made away with their jewellerys (eka and ivie), and able-bodied men and women they sold to their European slave masters. He states that the charms in which the community used against them to destabilize and frustrate their efforts that led to their final exit from Okulosho were prepared in the covenant. The Nupe merchants who happened to cross the Okulosho forest which they used as their main route for the expenditure met their Waterloo because of the charms buried there. The witches, according to Iselowo, for some years, have not shown concern on the general progress of the Okulosho community, because of the direct and indirect attacks by the community members against them (witches) through the invocation of the community deities, ancestors, spiritual forces and prayers by different religious bodies for the total eradication of witchcraft practitioners. He asserts that it is dangerous to arm your enemy, because you might be his/her first victim.³⁸ By insinuation, Okulosho progress

is not in conformity with witches' *modus operandi* based on the historical antecedent. For him, the entire society cannot declare war against a particular set of people in the society and expect meaningful contribution from the same detested people for the betterment of such a society.³⁹

Aruogo⁴⁰ disassociates himself from Iselowo's view that witchcraft is not evil and points out some contradictory statements in his assertions. He questioned why the entire society developed hatred for witches. He opines that it is dangerous to appreciate the activities of witches either for good or bad in the community, because it would intensify and encourage evil practices in the community. He affirmed that the said charms that were buried in the forest which served as a passage for the Nupe slave merchants that finally ended Nupe's invasion of Okulosho were prepared with human blood in the covenant.⁴¹ According to him, neither the victims nor the parents were aware that their children were going to be used as sacrificial lambs to liberate the entire community; it was after the deed had been done before they were informed through the village head. The victims died mysteriously when their blood had been used in the covenant. He claims that once the evil spirit takes possession of them, they act irrationally and become insensitive to other people's feelings. Hence, even their own children fall victims of their irrational actions at times. He does not see any reason whatsoever why any given human society should accommodate witches based on their nefarious activities in the society. He describes witches as uncivilized beings that are not fit to be seen among other rational beings.

Children of suspected witches in Okulosho are stigmatized, because they are considered as potential or witches in

³⁷ O. Iselowo, *Personal Interview*, Farmer, Dagbala, 80 years, 2019.

³⁸ V.A. Inagbor, "Witchcraft in Okulosho Culture.":100.

³⁹ V.A. Inagbor, "Witchcraft in Okulosho Culture.":102.

⁴⁰ A. Aruogo, *Personal Interview*, Necromancer, Dagbala, 90 years, 20th June, 2019.

⁴¹ V.A. Inagbor, "Witchcraft in Okulosho Culture.":110.

making. Nevertheless, Oshomowe⁴² vehemently opposed the idea of considering children of perceived witches as potential witches because for him presumption is a crime against fundamental human rights; no one is condemned based on suspicious or presumption until there are facts to prove beyond the shadow of doubt that the accused is guilty of the crime, he/she is accused of. He therefore opined that there should be proven cases of those children involvement in witchcraft activities before they are treated like their parents who are supposedly witches.⁴³ It is a wrong inference and illogical to assume that once one's parents are witches the children must likely be witches; because Omokemi though an acclaimed witch as earlier stated in this work, is not enthused being a witch and therefore detested everything about witchcraft. She would not allow her children to be initiated into the guild as she pointed out, therefore, it would be out of place to treat her children as either potential witches or witches in the making. Oshomowe is therefore of the view that since Okulosho people have different methods and techniques of detecting witches, they should not hesitate in finding out the fate of the children of suspected witches to ascertain their membership of the guild so that they can be absolved into the community if found innocent or rejected if proven otherwise.⁴⁴

It becomes clearer from the foregoing discussion that witchcraft phenomenon in Okulosho is a microcosm of the Medieval era when witches were burned at the stake. The Medieval Church considered witches as those who have pacts with the Devil and demons.⁴⁵ For Brian, by the end of the

sixteenth century, most educated Europeans believed that witches, in addition to practicing harmful magic, engaged in a variety of diabolical activities. They believed that witches made an explicit, face-to-face pact with the devil. This pact not only gave the witch the power to perform maleficia (evil) but also initiated her into the Devil's service.⁴⁶ At the same period in Europe, they believed that 'the witches', having made a pact with the devil, gathered periodically with other witches- sometimes numbering in hundreds or even thousands - to perform a series of blasphemous obscene and heinous rites.⁴⁷

The burning of witches a stake and the torture given to them in order to either elicit confession from them or renounce their membership of the evil guild in those days in Europe has become a condemnable act and primitive on the part of the same Church and State who once upheld the method in fighting against witchcraft in the Middle Ages.⁴⁸ However, history has revealed that some of the accused and suspected witches were not truly witches, but mere rebels, radicals and heretics who probably parted ways with the Church dogmas and doctrines that were illogical and unverifiable by some of them (accused) that were scientifically inclined. It should be pointed out here that the era of the great witch-hunt was the great age of popular rebellion in the European history, centuries that witnessed countries peasants, lacquerers, religious civil wars, and ultimately the first national revolutions of the modern world. Enlightenment, civilization, awareness, education and of course religion (especially Christianity) have placed us in a position to vehemently

⁴² G. Oshomowe, *Personal Interview*, Farmer, Dagbala, 58 years, 2019.

⁴³ V. A. Inagbor, "Witchcraft in Okulosho Culture.]" :116.

⁴⁴ V. A. Inagbor, "Witchcraft in Okulosho Culture.]" :115.

⁴⁵ J. M. Ogenbo, *Contemporary Witch-Hunting in Gusii, South Western Kenya*. (UK: Lewinston, 2006): 111.

⁴⁶ P. I. Brian, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe*. 2nd ed. (London: Longman, 1995):17ff.

⁴⁷ V. A. Inagbor, "Witchcraft in Okulosho Culture.]" :120.

⁴⁸ J. O. Adeleye, A Philosophical Reflection on Aje (Witches) in Yoruba Traditional Society and Education. *Igwebuike: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities*, 6(6), (2020): 52-55.

oppose, condemn and criticize Medieval era actions against witchcraft.⁴⁹ Hence, some scholars are still of the opinion that witchcraft activities are based on speculations and over-exaggeration. Being a metaphysical issue in the real sense of it, the scholars with such opinion are not completely out of track. However, if these assumptions about witchcraft are confirmed to be nothing but the truth, can we say that the punishment meted out to them in the medieval era was justifiable? How are we sure that it was not the action of the Church against witches that made them to change their orientations, and therefore channelled their spiritual powers towards technological development?

The Causes of Conflicts between the Two Worlds in Okulosho

There are lots of reasons behind the constant conflict between the witchcraft world (metaphysical) and the ordinary world (physical) down through the ages in Okulosho. These conflicts had contributed to the seemly underdevelopment, rancour, disharmony, discrimination, suspicious, calumny, outright condemnation of some families, distrust, disunity, and cold war between perceived witches and the community. The perceived witches feel slighted because of the disdainful manner they are being treated even at death.⁵⁰

One of the major causes of the said conflicts is anchored on the open discrimination and stigmatization of witches which also affected their innocent children and at times their entire families. People keep a distance from suspected witches in Okulosho because of the belief that they are capable of wreaking havoc on their close relatives and friends. The Okulosho people

try as much as possible to disassociate themselves from suspected witches especially in social gatherings to avoid involuntary initiation. According to Ogbezuode, social gatherings are avenue for the evil ones (witches) to recruit members into their guilds because of some people careless eating and drinking habits outside their homes. Also, some of the perceived witches who are in business line suffered from low patronage from community members, because of the fear that they would spiritually siphon their customers' wealth to enrich or boost their business. Their business can only flourish outside the Okulosho community where they can easily interact and associate with fellow business people and customers.⁵¹

Another serious issue, according to Iselowo⁵² that is causing the lacuna between the two factions is burial. He points out that in spite of the discrimination against perceived witches, even at death they are buried like lower animals not even like the hunters' dogs that owners of such dogs honour them at death. There is a secluded place in the forest where their corpses are carelessly deposited without any manner of sympathy for the living relatives of the deceased or for the deceased or even any form of ceremony to bid the deceased farewell. Family members, friends and well-wishers are warned not to mourn them, based on the belief that mourning them invites calamity on the family members. Nevertheless, the family of the deceased is expected to entertain people who celebrate with the family for the exit of an evil member of the family.⁵³ Visitors are not there to pay condolence visit or sympathize with the family, but to congratulate them for losing an evil genius capable of destroying family members and friends. He further says

⁴⁹ V.A. Inagbor, "Witchcraft in Okulosho Culture.":121.

⁵⁰ V.A. Inagbor, "Witchcraft in Okulosho Culture.":125.

⁵¹ T. Ogbezuode, *Personal Interview*, Farmer, Dagbala, 80 years, 2019.

⁵² O. Iselowo, *Personal Interview*, Ibid.

⁵³ V.A. Inagbor, "Witchcraft in Okulosho Culture.": 140.

that no matter how bad and wicked one is, at death the living members of the family and community at large should at least sympathize with the deceased and the family he/she is leaving behind, because it is an everlasting parting away. He claims that when the perceived witches observe how their members are been treated at death, they are tempted to take vengeance on behalf of their deceased members by bringing calamity upon the community that has shown an outright hatred towards them whenever the opportunity to cause such havoc offer itself.

Okpafioko⁵⁴ says that not all the allegations against witches are true, that witches are very rational like all other human beings. According to him, their fight against the community is genuine because as human they (witches) have to defend themselves. He claims that their members at times are physically abused for crimes they are not aware of, harassed unjustly, public molestation and humiliations from their mates at social gatherings. For him, no one would pass through such situations without reacting in one way or the other. People become witches for various reasons and some were forced into it, therefore, they should be allowed to practice what they belief in without interference from non-members; it is a matter of choice. He claims that not all witches are involved in destructive activities, and at times members fight against some of their members who deliberately cause damages to people's properties without genuine reasons or just for mere jealousy. They are guided, according to him, by law of Karma; so, witches do not use their spiritual/mystical powers carelessly as presumed by non-members.

It is observed, according to Oshomowe,⁵⁵ that non-members and the

entire community invoke powerful and superior spiritual forces for the eradication of witches in the land. Witches are seen as common enemies to the entire community and some individuals who are not members. In Okulosho, Oshomowo states that all the traditional shrines, Churches, Mosques, all spiritual homes and assemblies aimed to fight against witches who are tagged as evil incarnate. Their common prayer point is the destruction of their enemies (witches) who are mostly responsible for their misfortunes. Ironically, some of the witches also worship in those traditional shrines, Churches, and Mosques, and while some of them are heading some spiritual home where voodoo and consultation of oracle take place. He says witches because of their innocence of the crimes they are accused of also participate in such prayers and worship believing that they are not enemies to non-members of their covens. This type of open attacks could create acrimony and disaffection between members and non-members of witchcraft practitioners.⁵⁶ There is an impression created here that both parties are at war with each other based on suspicious and presumptions. It is natural that the accused cannot be happy with the accuser that is exactly the situation here. Those innocent people that were accused as witches would never have a cordial relationship with their accusers; this can create bad blood among the people.

The cold war and psychological warfare that exist between these two worlds never create an atmosphere of peace and harmony that will bring any form of human development.⁵⁷ The only thing that has not happened so far between the two worlds is to transfer the spiritual warfare to a physical conventional warfare whereby both parties would send their warriors to the battle field to confront each other.⁵⁸ Development in

⁵⁴ I. Okpafioko, *Personal Interview*, Witch-Doctor, Dagbala, 78 years, 2019.

⁵⁵ G. Oshomowe, *Personal Interview*, Farmer, Dagbala, 58 years, 2019.

⁵⁶ V. A. Inagbor, "Witchcraft in Okulosho Culture.": 154.

⁵⁷ E. B. Adekoye, *Personal Interview*, Farmer, Dagbala, 76 years, 2019.

⁵⁸ V. A. Inagbor, "Witchcraft in Okulosho Culture.": 156.

Okulosho is like a far distance horizon that is almost becoming an imaginable venture. The seed of discord and disunity emanated from the belief in witchcraft in Okulosho over the years has caused a lot of irreparable damages that made some people till now still groaning and wallowing in a state of melancholy and distress. Some families have been stigmatized socially and otherwise, because members of the community do not transact business with them or even marry from such families no matter their influences and wealth. They are tagged as forbidden fruits. Modernization has not changed their frame of minds towards perceived⁵⁹

Possible Reconciliations of the Two Worlds

A healthy society, according to Macaulay,⁶⁰ is a developing society because of its potentialities for development. He sees a healthy society as that society where there is no war, but peace and harmony in spite of ideological, religious and socio-ethnic differences. For him, development in any warring zone is not far from utopia, because it is not conceivable. As earlier pointed out in this work, development does not come through miracles and primitive beliefs system, but through hard work, corporation, positive thinking, science, technology, literacy, true religion with human-face, and love. When these elements and ingredients of development are lacking in any given human society, development becomes an unthinkable *Eldorado*. The bridging of the two worlds (witches and non-witches) will bring about a healthy society that will surely open up more opportunities for development in Okulosho. The antagonistic attitude of the Okulosho people towards perceived witches will only end up with hatred and self-destruction, while development will remain

in a bottomless doldrums and Shakespearean *Erebus*.

More also, freedom of worship and association in Okulosho is another area we have to address in an attempt to reconcile the two worlds. In some quarters, or some civilized societies, witchcraft is seen as an old nature religion traced to Palaeolithic period that believes in the worshipping of nature. Reason being that it involves supernatural powers or spiritual forces and powers. For the witches to equip and fortify themselves they have to bow down or worship some superior spiritual forces, which brings out the religious nature of witchcraft. If other societies especially in Africa and Okulosho in particular see witchcraft from this religious perspective, it will help to demystify some of the attributes of witches. According to Martello, in his book, *Witchcraft: The Old Religion*, witches do not worship devil as alleged by Christians, but worship nature Gods and Goddesses. Therefore, the way other religions are allowed to exist and practice their faith without inhibition from non-members, witchcraft should be allowed to exist and practice the dictates of the said old nature religion. There is no religion without mystical powers and beliefs.⁶¹

If no other reason, the perceived witches should be seen as human beings and be treated as such by respecting their freedom of association. They are members of the community, and they have roles to play as members of the community for the development and growth. All hands must be on deck in moving any society forward, because nobody is completely useless to the society. There is possibility that when the said witches are accepted to the society they will contribute their quota to the development of the society by bringing into reality their hidden talents and making break-through in science and technology.

⁵⁹ V. A. Inagbor, "Witchcraft in Okulosho Culture.":160.

⁶⁰ A. S. Macaulay, *Personal Interview*, Witch-Doctor, Dagbala, 78 years, 2016.

⁶¹ I. L. Martello, *Witchcraft: The Old Religion, Secaucus*. (NY: New Jersey University Books Inc, 1975): 45.

The segregation and stigmatization of witches will only make the community uncomfortable and ungovernable, because no one expects an enemy to contribute meaningfully to the development of the society that hates him/her.⁶²

It is characteristic of almost all religions and occults to seek for members just for the continuation and propagation of their faith. In Medieval Europe, for instance, some scientists who rejected Christianity based on their personal conviction, were declared heretics and were burnt at the stake. Nevertheless, in our contemporary world, this is no longer tenable, because people's fundamental human rights must be respected; people are not forced to practice any form of religion that does not appeal to their conscience. That is why in most countries, state religion is not encouraged so that people can freely choose whatever religion they want to practice. In the same vein, Okulosho perceived witches should be civilized and follow the modern trend of thought when it comes to propagation of faith of initiation into witchcraft. Initiation into witchcraft should be voluntary the way it is presently in Europe and America. Even those who willingly submit themselves to the perceived witches for initiation into witchcraft should be interrogated to find out why they are interested and their intensions. If their intensions are genuine and positive i.e., they need spiritual power for scientific and technological break-through, the members can accept such candidates. This is the only way witchcraft can gain respect in Okulosho. If they can channel the said spiritual power towards development and people are no longer initiated without their consents the opinion of the Okulosho people about witches and witchcraft will drastically change. They (witches) will not be seen as agents of destruction since they have something positive to contribute towards human development and to their community

especially.

In Okulosho, there are inherited titles (family title) while some are honorary. Some suspected witches who are qualified by birth to inherit such family titles are deprived of having such titles because they are suspects. The argument is that in Okulosho, title holders are not expected to be buried in the bush, therefore, witches (who are usually buried in the evil forest) should not be given any traditional titles either by inheritance or otherwise. Some of the seasoned administrators in Okulosho that would have contributed meaningfully to the political development of the community were denied of the opportunity of occupying traditional leadership positions through titles because they were suspects. Instead of considering their administrative acumens the Okulosho people rather focus on their secret and personal spiritual activities whether they are witches or not. It is interesting to note that some of the suspects are retired civil servants who have served the country meritoriously, yet they are not qualified to serve their own local community by Okulosho standard. Instead of taping from the wealth of their administrative experience for the progress of the community, they prefer to use mediocre that are adjudged to be saintly.

There should be a peaceful coexistence and a spirit of brotherhood whereby everyone in the community will be accommodated. This is the only way the community can develop faster and compete favourably with other neighbouring communities like the Itunos, Osu, Ewans and others who are far ahead of Okulosho in terms of physical development. The hatred emanating from witchcraft belief has done more harm than good in term of socio-economic and political relationship among the people. The Okulosho people are unnecessarily apprehensive in transaction of business with perceived witches. The

⁶² V. A. Inagbor, "Witchcraft in Okulosho Culture.": 170.

perceived witches too are also suspicious of non-members in transaction of business for the fear of the facts that whatever goes wrong along the line they would be held responsible. This type of visible fear, hatred and suspicious does not give room to modern development.⁶³

The bridging of the two worlds may help in the eradication of poverty. One of the reasons why majority of the Okulosho people are wallowing in abject poverty can be traced to superstitious beliefs. Instead of focusing attention on modern science and technology, everything or event is given an exoteric and superstitious interpretations.⁶⁴ Till now antiquated farming methods are still evoked in Okulosho, and when there is poor harvest consequence upon the old methods of farming, they would be pointing accusing fingers to perceived witches as being responsible for the poor harvest. Virtually all forms of misfortunes such as destruction of houses in the community as a result of Tornado or rain storm, which ought to be natural disaster as also experienced in advanced world, it is attributed to witches in Okulosho.⁶⁵ No standard health centres to treat ordinary malaria, yet when those whose immune system cannot withstand the attack of ordinary malaria and they eventually die, all eyes are directed to the witches. Some cannot afford to buy malaria drugs if by chance they are available in the local chemists around. Auxiliary nurses and quack chemists occupy and play the roles of doctors.

Conclusion

From the foregoing, the paper has been concerned on the possible reconciliation of witchcraft and religion as two worlds that should be allowed to coexist and operate, towards the realization of peace, harmony and cooperation in our society, using the

witchcraft practices in Okulosho community as a paradigm. It posited that there are a lot of benefits that can accrue from the reconciliation of the two worlds, apart from the peaceful coexistence between the two contenders; we stand to benefit both physically and spiritually to aid the entire community in their bid for developmental stride to compete favourably in area of development with neighbouring communities as earlier stated.⁶⁶ There are people who are of the opinion that no man is completely evil as long as he has a functional conscience and he is truly human. It has been established that witches are our next-door neighbours, brothers, sisters, mothers, fathers, uncles and aunties, that until there are declared suspects, we mixed with them freely; therefore, without iota of doubt they are humans. Apart from possessing mystical powers, we believe that ordinarily, where peace exists their conscience will prick them not to haunt an innocent person.

Having establishing the above premises, therefore, this work x-rayed the bridging of two worlds (the physical world and the metaphysical world) in Okulosho. The metaphysical world centres on witchcraft world that is not within the reach of the ordinary people in the society. It is referred to as a metaphysical world because of its spiritual nature and mystical powers. This work points out some of the genuine reasons why the two worlds need reconciliation. Some of these reasons are predicated on peaceful co-existence, development, respect for humanity, and the conversion of mystical and magical powers associated with witchcraft to tangible technological development and scientific breakthrough in the community. Both the witches and the non-witches in the community stand a chance to benefit from such reconciliation, as it creates room for self-actualization,

⁶³ E. Odere, *Personal Interview*, Dagbala, 72 years, 2019.

⁶⁴ J. B. Oluremi, *Personal Interview*, Ojah, 70 years, 2019.

⁶⁵ B. Omunagbe, *Personal Interview*, Necromancer/Herbalist, Dagbala, 82 years, 2019.

⁶⁶ V. A. Inagbor, "Witchcraft in Okulosho Culture.": 170.

respect for human rights, respect for human dignity, and harmonious blending among members of the community.

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