

## A PHILOSOPHICAL REFLECTION ON AJE (WITCHES) IN YORUBA TRADITIONAL SOCIETY AND EDUCATION

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### Abstract

*This paper focuses on Aje (witches) as a controversial entity in Yoruba traditional society and Education. Although some may argue against the existence of Aje (witches) due to their philosophical or educational background that may somehow be rooted in Western tradition. One is not interested in going to this argument but dwells on the existential impacts of Aje (witches) which can either have positive or negative influence on the life of human beings. White witches (Aje funfun) are believed to bring fortunes while black and red witches are dangerous in all ramifications. One who has the experience of Aje (witches) will never deny their existence in Yoruba traditional society. The paper exposes the belief of Yoruba people of the south west of Nigeria that Aje (witches) can pretend to physically love a person and at the same time harm such a person in their spiritual realm. The paper finally examines the measures to combat the negative effects of Aje (witches). Being a quantitative research, some native people and elders were interviewed.*

**Keywords:** Aje (witches), Philosophy, Education, Tradition, Benevolence and Malevolence.

### Introduction

Aje (witch) is a Yoruba word that signifies the biological and spiritual power of African (Yoruba) woman that has myriad potential including but not limited to, powers of healing, destruction, spiritual and physical development and fortification and political empowerment. (Washington, 2014) Aje has always flourished in Africa and in the lands of the diaspora to which the Yoruba travelled either by their own volition or as victims of slavery. Aje (witches) are known to preside over the market as *iyalode*. *Iyalode* serves as the head of commerce and business in most Yoruba towns and cities. *Iyami Aje* (spiritually powerful being) also continues to occupy essential positions of power in Yoruba sacred societies and political institutions.

Aje (witch) performs function as creator and destroyer of life. It has even been said that Aje has the spiritual power of wake up a dead person for an interrogation in order to ascertain the source/cause of that person's death. This could be done by calling the deceased name three times after performing some rituals (Fatunmise 2013). This practice still exist Ipao Ekiti of southwest of nigeria till the present day. Aje( witches) are so powerful that they can travelled from Ado Ekiti to any part of the world in the night and come back before the dawn. Though, this may be argued but the fact remain that it is a reality that majority of the Yorubas will never deny. There was a story of a women who showed the picture of her grand children to his son that was fond of hiding the identity of these children for the fear of being killed by these spiritual people (Aje) . The man would tell all sorts of lies to hide these children from his mother. The mother who is more powerful first showed the son a mirror and allowed him to see how the children were playing in Lagos and that he, the son should stop hiding about the grand children from her. She said, she monitored all of them through the mirror whenever she wanted. Aje, being so power, travelled by taking a forms of birds like owls vultures, and parrots. Aje is nothing more than a supernatural phenomenon inherent in a nature which, when trapped into by humans or manifest itself in humans, can be used to achieve either good or bad and depending on the motive and character of the possessor. The power can mostly manifest itself in women though there is what yorubas called OSO (wizard) which manifests itself in men but this appears to be very few in numbers than that of women. Based on its scope and power Aje (witch) is feared and revered by many.

### **Classifications of Aje (Witches) in Yoruba Traditional Society**

According to the Yoruba's belief, there are three types of Aje (witches). These include; Aje dudu (black witches); Aje Pupa (red witches) and Aje Funfun (white witches). Aje dudu (black witches) these are the malevolent spiritual being who always not interested in the success of their follow being. They are happy in destroying the happiness of others. These Iyami osorong (powerful spiritual mother) will be the cause of one's sorrow and as well be the one to take care of the same person. By pretending to love their victim, this gives them the opportunity to harm the victim the more. In the physical realm, they supply all the needs of their victim and harm him in the spiritual realm. A story was told of a woman in my village who rode on her son's back to all spiritual meetings. She (Aje) pretended to love him by giving him a beautiful, dime to earth lady as a

wife but unknown to the man, the lady was also a powerful spiritual being (Aje) who had vowed to ruin the man's life by not allowing him to have any child in this physical world instead producing Iyami (witches) for the man as children in the spiritual world.

Aje dudu (black witches) do not kill their victims but only disallow him to succeed in whatever they lay their hands on. The victims will find life difficult in all spheres, they are usually a not progressive one, they have mysterious power, they only punish or make human being to suffer. Aje pupa (Red witches) happen to be another categories of Aje. These are more dangerous because they kill at their convenience. They claim to be responsible for most of the untimely death in many communities in Yoruba land. You may want to be inquisitive about how can this be. Experience speaks volume to this as many living witnesses attest to their metaphysical power to kill. They drink blood and eat flesh, they punish their victims and give no room for forgiveness even to their own biological children. Aje pupa (Red witches) according to Awominure (2020) kill people directly.

It is difficult to say precisely where Aje (witches) meet to discuss and stage attack or carry out their operations. They do not have any physical shrine. Derived from oral traditional that was passed from the elders, the places of meeting of Aje can be under the Iroko tree, banana tree, Orita meta (T-junction), market places. To the extreme, as a result of modernization, churches, mosques, offices, Hotels, could also be meeting points for these spiritual being. As regards the time of Aje (witches) hold meeting, it is usually between 1'0clock to 3'0clock mid night as expatiated by (Aremu, 2018).

No Aje (witch) dares stay beyond this scheduled time without a bad consequence. A story was told of some groups of Aje (witches) that put up a rebellious attitude by staying more than necessary by Yeye Olokun (mother of the river) in Ayede Ekiti and that they were rejected by the confraternity as a result of the rebellious attitude. This rejection compelled them to publicly confess all their past deals disdainfully. The confession may either attract positive or negative treatment from the people of the community. Aje pupa (Red witches) because of their malevolent nature would sometime be stoned to death or exposed to hardship for the rest of their life. Aje (witches) as noted earlier have been categorised as malevolent, neutral and can also be benevolent. Aje (witches) in Yoruba tradition have been described as participants in the creation and providential continuance of the cosmos. Aje funfun (white witches) are believed

to be guardian of communities and towns. The view that Aje are guardian angels watching over children has been a significant practical exercise as this has physical life experiences and justifications among the people in Ayede Ekiti of the south west of Nigeria. They are said to perform benevolent acts, such as impacting wealth, property, good health and protection as supported by Washington (2005). Our mother are called Aje Olomon tabi Aje Abiyamon (witches who protect her children). Those who possess aje funfun (white witches) don't kill, they don't drink blood or eat flesh, they use their energy to bring protection, blessings and prosperity to whoever they love like their children, husband or family friends. However, if someone incurs their wrath or offends them they have power to punish the person but they quickly forgive anybody who offends them immediately they are appeased. Based on the interview had with "Yeye Olokun" (Mother of River) in Ayede Ekiti, she said initiation to Aje funfun could be cumbersome, since the energy must be passed to another person. Aja funfun (white witch) would not want to die with the energy. Hence, it is passed to their children or grand children. Many women who possess this energy do present themselves to the society as very nice and gentle in order to hide their identity. This makes them very difficult to be identified except through metaphysical power.

### **Measure to Combat the Negative Effect of Aje (witches).**

Ayeni (2003) postulated that if a man has sound knowledge to master and control the realm of the supernatural, the world would be a much happier place. Yoruba life is based on community living. The community itself supposed to be made of all types of characters, good, kind, mischievous among others. The Yoruba man is educated that all human beings are not equally endowed and believed that some human beings have advanced in celestial journey that they can influence positively or negatively the Ori (inner head) or Ogbon (wisdom) of another persons. Attempt is therefore made either to persuade Aje (witches) to be more favourably inclined.

At times, the Yoruba people appease Aje through prayers, sacrifices, protective charm and in these present days by joining spiritual or orthodox churches to be endowed with impregnable power. Hence, the Yoruba would say *eleje funfun ni* or *atanda eledumare ni* (He is a holy man, a special man of God) at times they say "A ki n fi omo ore bo ore or Aje aye ko le gbona titi ki o pa omo aje orun je" (nobody dares slaughter a child of the cult for sacrifice. No matter how powerful an earthly witch, she cannot conquer the children of the heavenly witch).

As I earlier said, there is no disaster or tragedy in Yoruba community that is not traceable one way or the other to Aje (witches): poverty, misfortune, accidents, still birth, infertility among others. Hence, Yoruba will say Aje ma se mi, Omo elomiran ni ki o se or ki aye mase elenini mi ebe ni mo be (Do not hurt me you spiritually power beings, go and hurt another person or may the spiritually powerful being of the world not be my enemy, so I beg).

Some of the measures to combat the effects of Aje (witches) according to Yoruba are;

**Purity of life:** Luke 10:19 states that behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpent and scorpion, and over all the power of the enemy and nothing shall by any means hurt you. Once one is has not made any covenant with Aje (witches), it may be difficult for Aje to harm such an individual. One major source of problem in people's existence is evil covenant. This force is so strong and binding that, if it is in operation in individual's life, it wreaks havoc. It is therefore imperative in Yoruba tradition and education that purity of life combats the effects of Aje on individual. Eni ti ko ba je gbi ko le ku gbi (He who does not eat with them will not die with them). Yoruba education teaches individual to be moderate in his/her action in order to combat negative effects of Aje (witches) in one's existence.

**Kindness** This is another way of preventing the wrath of Aje in Yoruba society. It is believed that act of kindness can definitely suppress the wicked act of Aje dudu/Aje pupa in Yoruba culture. A story was told of a man who due to his generosity to a woman who also possessed the spirit of Aje (witch) averted an evil plan against him in the spiritual world when his name was mentioned as the next victim. One could liken this to the biblical injunction that one should keep on doing good and this is also a cardinal characteristic of Yoruba traditional education. "Eni to ko fe ki a jeun yo aafi tire more se" ( who might wish one not to be well fed, one must add his own while cooking)

**Guiding one's tongue and actions:** This also serves as a means of combating evil effects of Aje (witches). Guiding of one's tongue and actions are the principles that are learnt, shared and transmitted from one generation to the others in Yoruba society. Hence, the Yoruba would say "O ma fi enu ko or eno re lo ko ba e or enu orofo lo npa orofo. (You will commit yourself by your speeches, it is the utterance of the dove that put it in trouble, "it has only two children but boastfully proclaimed of having many thereafter its house was ravaged by the

evil ones). Yoruba elders through their education caution their children to be watchful of what they say in public, since one cannot say who and who is in that gathering. The Yoruba child is expected to be observant and interact with elders who their experience can influence his utterances and actions. (sodipo 1973).

### **Conclusion**

Existence of Aje (witches) in Yoruba traditional society is real and practical. This is based on the experiences narrated by the elders interviewed. Denying their existence because one is groomed in western philosophy is like playing with fire since Aje (witches) will not present themselves physically to non-member of their spiritual association. Aje do not display themselves but their impacts are felt by all and sundry in the Yoruba traditional society. One's child or wife that eats, plays, makes love and does all sorts of physical activities may be a spiritually powerful one who hides this energy from her loved ones provided such persons do not hurt her in any way. In case of Aje dudu (Black witches) and Aje pupa (Red witches) all what one can do to prevent being harmed is to live a pure life and as well guide one's tongue as much as possible because sometimes, these spiritually powerful being may prove difficult to be appeased once they are offended.

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