

**CHARMS AND MAGIC IN OUR CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY IN RELATION
TO ITS ORIGINAL UNDERSTANDING IN AFRICAN TRADITIONAL
RELIGION: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS**

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Abstracts

Charms and magic are one of the things African traditional religion adherents use in worship and performing rituals in their religion. These things are powerful instrument which work for them without any problem. Consequently, a lot of people like modernism, Christianity etc. have criticized and this criticism is nothing and should be discarded. These charms magic and amulets are functionally the same with the Catholic medals, cross etc. this works aim is to establish that charms magic and amulets are very important to African Traditional Religion and valued by them. Also, what they are to African traditional religion is what sacramental like medals are to Christianity. The work employ socio-historical approach in his findings. It was finally discovery that charms, magic and amulets are one of the instruments used by the adherents of African Traditional Religions also that it serves the same functions Sacramentals like medals do for Catholics. Finally, charms, amulets are not harmful to the adherents as modernism, and Christianity are insinuating.

Keywords: Charms, magic, contemporary, society, A.T.R.

Introduction

There is a mystical order in the universe. Africans believed in the existence of a mystical, invisible, hidden, spiritual power in the universe. This power originated from the Supreme Being ... God (Chukwu Okike-Abiama), but is possessed hierarchical by divinities, spirits, and the living dead, and it is available to some people, in various degree. This is a universal belief among Africans. Those to whom this power is accessible can use it for good, such as healing, rain-making, or divination, while others can use it for harm, though magic are not accessible to everyone, and in most cases it is inborn, but the person have to learn how to use it.

Magic, charms and amulets are ever present reminders that in African Traditional Religion belief, that the spirit world affect every other aspect of the life of the Africans. This is because, in this religion, the natural world is filled with spiritual forces. This gives us the ideas of Charm and magic that have been in existence from the Ancient times in African till the contemporary times. But the question is, “could there be any comparison between the understanding of charm and magic in our contemporary society and in relation to the original understanding in African Traditional Religion? It is difficult to give an explicit answer and this becomes the focal point of this research. However, different people especially, the missionaries who evangelized the Africans understood this differently simply because they were in a haste, this idea, they passed to some Africans and they started parading it. Today most Africans do not understand what charms, magic and amulet stand for and the confusion has cause a lot to African Traditional Religion. The confusion caused is what this work intend to clarify.

Definition of Terms

Charm and magic are two different things, but they are just two birds of the same fader. A well founded African child is likely to be familiar with these terms.

African Traditional Religion: This is the African belief system that has been handed down from one generation to another. It is indigenous to the people. African have an organized belief system, which they practice. It is a religion full of lives and activities through ceremonies, festivals etc. It places emphasis on virtues, values and morals. They have leaders or officials whose roles are highly indispensable are far as the beliefs and practices of this religion are concerned (Ugwu, 1999:24). The African Traditional Religion is highly buried in the cultural practices of the African indigenous people.

Charm: According to Merriam-Webster, “charm is a practice or expression believed to have magic power. It is also something worn about the person to ward off evil or ensure good fortune (amulets).” Following from the above definitions, it seems that there are always erroneous reactions to practices and use of charm and amulet making. Serving utilitarian purposes, a charm is not evil as general assumption in modern-day Nigeria that has become a religious enclave for Christians and Muslims (Soetan, 2017). To make these points clear, Soetan argues that “certain verses of the bible and the Quaran embody spiritual supplications that are amenable only to transcendental powers which operate beyond human cogitation and rational knowledge, such as Psalm 119 and Surat Al –Kursi, respectively”. According to Andrew (2013), the word is from the Old French “charm” and the Latin “carmen,” meaning “ritual utterance,” “incantation,” or “song. The implication is that despite any object presented as a charm, what makes the real essence of the charm

is words or ritual utterances spoken upon the object. In certain cultural circles including Igbo Land, amulets are regarded as magical symbols worn by people, especially newly born babies to protect themselves from malevolent forces. But one should not skill doubt that evil persons make and symbolize some incantations to attack other persons, hence there are harmless (helpful) and harmful charms such “*eyiule*”, etc. it is also commonly regarded as consisting of the way people deal with ultimate concerns about their lives and their fate after death. We can now see the reason why charm and magic are parts and parcels of Africa Traditional Religion. Charm, known in Tiv Traditional Religion as “*Kuraior*” is believed to be effective against evil forces, including *mbatsav*, *adzor* and other malevolent spirits. “*Kuraior* was believed impart to the owner certain magical powers which enhanced the wearer’s ability to fight, make love, gain material possessions etc. (www.cambride.org). The “*Kuraior*” is known as charm in Tiv Traditional Religion.

Magic: In early every documented society, people believed that some misfortunes are caused by malicious group mates using magic or supernatural powers (www.journals.uchicago.edu). Magic simply means the demonstration of supernatural powers in the African Traditional Religion. A very good example is the “*Kwagh-hir*” among the Tiv people in Benue State of Nigeria, where a command will be given to a wooden-car, made locally and it will be moving. According to Amaegwu (2019), “magic is the attempt to control nature by performing rituals. Another aspect of magic is the fetish (to bring good fortune to the one who possesses it (p.33)”. Magic is “a power that allows people (such as witches and wizards) to do impossible things by saying special words or performing special actions or the use of means (such as charms or spells) believed to have supernatural power over natural forces. That is, an extraordinary power or influence seemly from a supernatural source” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Following the definition above, we can conclude that magic is just a “semi-supernatural capacity” to utilize the elements of charms (instantly). Andrew (2013) refers to magic as “a concept used to describe a mode of rationality or way of thinking that looks invisible forces to influence events, effect change in material conditions or present illusion of change. Within the Western tradition, this way of thinking is distinct from religious or scientific modes; however, such distinctions and even the definition of magic are subject to wide debate.” This definition of course is Western inclined. The only meeting point with what should be African is that it is product of the best mind, but magic should be more than that.

Contemporary Society: A contemporary society is defined as a setting characterized by technological innovation and increasing human inter-connection and globalization. It brings about changes as increased life expectancy, literacy, and gender equality, bringing a natural equilibrium (www.scribbed.com). When we talk of the contemporary society, we refer to the happenings in our present-day environments. The contemporary society has

set a standard of living but in reality, we neglect some of the issues projected as a licit way of living in our modern society.

The Concept of Magic Using Principle

From the clarification of terms and the definitions given above on magic, it is imperative to state according to James, H. L. (1912) the different types of magic and how they work.

Principle of Repetition

Something that has happened once is likely to happen again. A successful arrow will meet with further success, and one that has failed with further failure. No idea of a telepathic power is involved here.

Uses of Magic

In the ancient world, magic could be used by the living, the dead, even the gods. Making magic work often involved a combination of ritual actions, symbolic imagery, performative recitation, written texts and appropriate material ingredients. When combined these elements created a powerful sense of agency in the practitioner, who sought to manipulate reality. Ritual actions and magic imagery were likely combined with intoned words enhance the efficacy of the practice

Protective Use of Magic

Kate, M. & Cynthia, S. (2016) maintained that ancient practitioners employed both helpful, defensive magic and harmful, offensive magic, which might be referred to white and black magic in the modern time. The former includes *apotropaic*, or protective, magic. Apotropaic magic was predicated upon a belief that certain

Depiction, texts, or practices shielded the user from harm. For example, thousands of phallic-shaped amulets, which warded off evil and misfortune for the wearer, survive from antiquity. Additionally, the powers of demons, monsters, and gods, who were harmful by nature, could be harnessed through their depictions on amulets, and buildings. These images would then provide protection against natural and supernatural threats.

The Penn Museum houses a substantial collection of another form of ancient protective magic, the incantation bowl or demon, these bowl. Decorated with a spiraling incantation and, typically, an illustration of a chained demon, these bowls were buried upside down around the boundaries of a property or the thresholds of a room. Used well into late

antiquity and found throughout the ancient Middle East, such bowls trapped evil spirits and denied them access into one's home, constituting an ancient magical security system.

Use of Magic for Healing

Another form of defensive magic in the ancient Mediterranean pertains to healing. In the realm of ancient medicine, magic was difficult to distinguish from religion and science. Because diseases, particularly those that were long-lasting or difficult to cure, were frequently attributed to divine origin or causation, medical practitioners often employed magical rituals to appease angry gods, expel demons, and produce a cure (Kate, M. & Cynthia, S., 2016) by allusion. Again considering the Yoruba culture, they believed that when certain objects are paired together, especially herbs and animal parts, they combine their natural energies to cure or prevent diseases and ailments. Most therapeutic Yoruba medicines are in this category; they require no incantation. Examples include a cure for headaches and stomach aches and even an elixir for prolong child labor, in which case the patients are only given powder made from combination of animal and plant materials. Great herbalists, hunters, and initiates are said to possess such highly effective, which they deploy in time of great adversary and difficult (Soetan, 2017).

Uses of Charms

Naturally, in Igbo traditionally culture, charms work with amulets and were essential for survival. They served different purposes: for protection, for fortune seeking, for winning wars, and for conquering empires. Against the general assumptions that surround fabrication of charms and amulets in the contemporary period, possessing and using charms and amulets then had no correlation with piety, holiness, evil, or fetish, as claimed today. Because of their ease of use and ability to surmount the elements, charms become a necessary tool in the society and culture. What modern society cannot achieve in terms of modern technology was achieved through the use of charms and amulets. There are charms that can speed up travel, which was important in an age where people walked long distances to their destination. There is charm that has the ability to make a man disappear in case of disaster and chaos.

As with all knowledge, there will always be the positive and the negative sides of every innovation; while some will deploy charms to tackle societal upheaval and mitigate situations, others may use them for other nefarious and inhumane activities. On the whole, charms could be deployed for both private and public uses; private connotes individual uses of charm while the public utilization represents the collective uses of charms and amulets by societies, communities, families, and clan. Other uses of charms and amulets

include but not limited to: curing certain ailments, gaining success in different enterprises, and warding off attacks of enemies.

Ingredient for Making Charms

To prepare charms, one needs different types of ingredients. For Soetan, (2017) these ingredients depend on the type of charm produced. Whether incantatory composite or non-incantatory composite, charms differ in their material compositions. There are super charms and minor charms.

For super charms, elaborate preparation and ingredients are needed. The ingredients are, in most cases, many, expensive and scarce. Minor charms are composed of few items and materials that can easily be used source locally. The fact that one charm is minor and the other super does not in any way suggest lesser efficacy but indicates the severity of the purpose for which the charm is made. What is important, however, is that “we combine objects that are energetically” suitable to match the intention of our charms.

To make charms in either category, one needs to combine animal and plant materials. Usually, animal products such as hide, bones, eyes, nails, claws, and feathers are the most commonly used ingredients for the super charms. These components are often crushed together in a mortar and mixed with African black soap or heated until they make a powder. In other instances, super charms may require blood, especially for money-charms; the blood is either mixed with other animal and/or human body parts. A minor charm requires minimal effort and ingredients. One can grind animal parts together and mix the paste or soak certain medicinal plants in aqueous solutions. Also, gums and resins, are potential ingredients for charms. Other ingredients are, but not limited to, fecal dropping, snail slime, old clothes, footwear, earth, rainwater, spring water, semen, human genitals, menstrual blood, yokeless eggs, animal horns, fallen meteor, seaweed, chameleons, snakes, tortoises, placenta, and fetus.

Charm and Magic: Learning or Inherited

The only genetic part of part of being charming is being born with dimples. Other than that, it is learned. The important part is to make the other feel good... which does not mean lying, but really paying attention. It is actually quite difficult to focus on anything other than what is in own brains, and not many people try to do it (www.quora.com). The whole idea is that, the biggest part of charm is acquired through learning processes, which equally showed that, a little part of it is acquired through the inherited genes. In humans, magic or the lack thereof is an inborn attribute. It is usually inherited, carried on “dominant resilient gene”. Magic is the norm for children of the magical couples and less

common is those of muggles. Exceptions exist: those unable to do magic who are born to magical parents are as “Squibs”, whereas a witch or wizard born to muggle parents is known as a muggle-born, or by derogatory term “mud blood”. While muggle-borne are quite common, Squibs are extremely rare (www.en.wikipedia.org). The whole idea here is that; magic is basically inherited from the genetic transmission from parents to the offspring's.

The Connection between Charm and Magic with Sacramentals

Charm, a practices or expression believed to have a magic power, similar to an incantation or a spell (www.britannica.com). Critics of Catholicism sometimes brings up the objection that sacraments, sacramentalism, and particularly belief in relics, amount to the notion of magic, charm or talismans... Relics or sacramental in the Catholic understanding are not mere magical, charms talismans; but they have explicit biblical basis (www.pateos.com). De Bruyn has proposed the Eucharist as the primary association of the magical texts. In particularly, in the early liturgy the moment of distributing the Eucharistic bread and wine to the faithful is marked with the announcements “the body of Christ” and “the blood of Christ”, which was presumably heard by all the congregation. This hypothesis of liturgical comments of high importance adopted by magic is corroborated by the recent publication of a sixth or seventh century CE Phylakerion from Egypt with a quotation anaphora. The overall structure of this amulet is common for magical texts (www.brill.com). The connection between charm and magic with the sacramental in Christianity is on the ritualistic approaches.

The Positive and Negative Effects of Charm and Magic

1. Good magic is accepted and esteemed, used mainly by specialists such as medicine men, diviners, and rainmakers. These practioners use their knowledge or tap into this power for the benefit of their community (Bernard and Dickson). It is an important effect of magic.
2. Evil magic involves belief and practice of tapping and using this power to harm human beings and their property. In such cases, sorcery is at work. Belief here is largely based on fear, suspicion, jealousy, ignorance, or false accusation. Hair, nails, cloths and other article can be used by enemies to produce evil magic (Bernard and Dickson). This is an important negative effect of magic.
3. The study carried out a primary validation of charm II tests for the detection of antimicrobial residues in aquaculture fish. The validation was performed according to European Commission Decision 2002/65/EC, and parameters

determined include: detection, capability, repeatability, reproducibility, specificity, and robustness for the detection of antimicrobial residues in fish (www.em.biomedcentral.com). This is an economic important of charm.

The Concept of Magic and Charm in the Contemporary African

African peoples have never been the same since the advent of Christianity, Islam, Colonialism, Secularism, and indeed any form of contact with the Western world. Western ideologies on religion, culture and worldview have seriously downplayed the African concept of religion, community and worldview (Nweke, 2017:3). On the surface, the general notion is that the use of charms and magic are profoundly deployed to solve modern problems, even among literate and highly educated Nigerians. Making and using charms and magic in contemporary time is shrouded in hypocrisy and Pentecostal egoism. The period after colonialism is notorious for its ruination of African culture and religion. As a carryover effect, colonial subjects in the independent nations maligned their cultural heritage, desecrated ancestral religions and worship, and followed the colonizer's religions. Christianity and Islam substitute for traditional worship, and those practicing traditional religion were hunted and severely punished. Magic, charm and follow laws and cosmic theories. They are also scientific in their operation.

The remains that African indigenous knowledge was never theorized but practiced. It is this lack of theory that denies their place in the canon alongside larger epistemic arrangements. The argument around African indigenous knowledge creation has never been about its existence or nonexistence but about its provability. It is incumbent on modern scholars and practitioners to establish some theoretical assumptions for this body of knowledge so that it agency is not subsumed within the global scientific practices. The elements that combine in charms are not always the physical elements produced in laboratories; rather, they are mostly transcendent elements.

Evaluation/Conclusion

All across ancient world people used practices that we today label as “magical” in order to alleviate their anxieties and establish control over more chaotic forces in the world. Although such practices varied greatly across time and space, there are also many similarities inasmuch as these are human cultural products. People all over the world continue to believe that wearing powerful symbols is useful and helpful. These beliefs are truly multicultural. The instance of this cross-cultural inspiration is found in the use of amulet for health and healing. A search of the internet will reveal that many people continue to such amulets to this very day. The reality of magic and charm in African

Traditional Religion is undoubtedly in place. In African Culture, magic and charm are very crucial in medicine, protection, and healing of different ailments. From the cross research carried out so far, it shows that across different cultures and religions of the world, magic and charms are often used for spiritual, psychological and even physical purposes. In fact, they are multi-cultural and cultural-religious concept, though used and applied in different ways but with similar methodology. Noticeably, science and technology apply the ideas of this magic and charms in its work and development with little modifications suit the scientific process. It is worthy to note that many religions like Christianity, fashioned things serve as charms and amulets in African Traditional Religion in their own religion. Things like, medal, and other sacramental perform the same function as charms and amulets they perform protective functions for the Christians likewise charms and amulets perform protective functions to African Traditional Religion. Summarily speaking, African Traditional Religion adherently should value the charms, amulets and should preach it and tell people importance and its efficacy.

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