

# Pin-Casting (*Igba Ntutu*) and Piosoning an Art of Witchcraft Mechanism for Negatives in Traditional Religion: A Case Study of Agulu People of South-Eastern Nigeria

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**Abstract:** - This study investigates the meaning Agulu people of South-Eastern Nigeria attribute to the notion of Pin-Casting (*Igba Ntutu*). This approach has frequently been misunderstood. Critics have objected the idea that it tends to distort the undeniable distinction between traditional and scientific thinking; that indeed it presents traditional thinking as a species of science. In the perception of the Agulu people, pin-casting is an aspect of African indigenous religious practice which they engage with through the mediation of its symbolic acts of negativities in other to make life very miserable for the people. Nonetheless, the fears and aspirations of the devotees are equally identified in the course of the potency ascribed to this indigenous ideology. Witchcraft is a novel ground breaking study in the area of religious scholarship and it has been shown to be intrinsically important in aiding of religious communication of any kind as it pertains to Igbo tradition and culture through the mediating use of pin-casting in Agulu belief system. Pin casting is an essential negative medium in attacking individuals in the cult of witchcraft religion. Belief in pin-casting as an act of witchcraft in Agulu cosmology is one of the focal point of negativity why mother African is under development in African Traditional Religion. The objective of this work is to investigate the symbolic acts of negativities through ethnographic method as my analytical lens and how it concerns those aspects of its use in Agulu community to bring out its religious, cultural, political, ethical and economic significance. The referent point of pin-casting as an instrument of indigenous negativity is loaded with the ritual symbolism it evokes, which imbues it with mystical power that is played out of Agulu rituals. Born out of fieldwork and interviews, the author found that in traditional Igbo religion and especially among the Agulu people, the practice of pin-casting is significant and related to one function that brings religion and science as a discourse. This paper focuses on the negativities of the witches through the mediating power of pin-casting from the members of the cult an indigenous religious movement – a collective ritual of group of devotees who worship the tutelary spirits and uses their powers negatively to inflict hardships on individuals. It explores how this negative ritual emerges as a manifestation of the group's intrinsic power of accomplishment, adaptation, and invention. Moving through ritual spaces and will, these mediums or devotees utilize their independent and ritual performative power in order to actively develop their religious practices through the mediation of pin-casting.

**Keywords:** Devotees, Pin-Casting, Potency, Power, Witch.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Not minding the contestations and historical paradigm of the philosophy or the concept of pin-casting (*Igba Ntutu*) in Igbo cosmology, it has been widely noted in African art literature for its magical and mystifying role through the mediation of its methods or ensembles. However, no literature I have found has discussed the concept of pin-casting (*Igba Ntutu*) as a traditional and magical art or elements of an ensemble. Elaborate methods and complex compositional ritual functions of the witchcraft as an art are much encountered in the ritual negativities and culture of the Agulu people of Igbo origin of South-eastern Nigeria.

Nonetheless, African countries are blessed with a lot of natural resources like agricultural resources, which are of great importance to them. These blessings are attributed to the supernatural being to which they render worship. According to Nabofa "it has quite been observed that magic is an attempt on the part of man to tap and control the super-natural resources of the universe for his own benefits. While the motto of Religion is "Let thy will be done", that is God's will, that of magic is, "My will be done" (1992:64). This is done through a priest in the African Traditional Religion. Africans have powers to manipulate nature using some diabolical things like mysterious pins and poison. Pin-casting and poisoning are defined as a harmful substances causing death if injected / infected magically or spiritually into the body or absorbed. It is in various forms which they carry out these wicked acts through pin-casting. Poison is prepared by a native doctor (*dibia*) in African Traditional Religion. Some can also be prepared by an ordinary person who is an initiate of the witchcraft cult. Therefore, in the course of this paper Agulu town would be used as case study. Pin-casting and poison are undoubtedly believed to be real and practical. A number of evidences and research have proved this philosophy through personal interviews. Pin-casting and poisoning "has been used in many ways as the devil's weapon or arsenals (Nabofa, 1992:67). This paper explores a unique type of wicked act known as pin-casting with mystifying ritual methods and its applications in injecting pins Agulu town of

Igbo origin—its compositional features and specialized indigenous style of mystical injection. Oral tradition has it that the pin casting in as part of traditional belief system style in which it figures originated in Agulu. However, we shall not ignore the hardworking and adventurous nature of Agulu people like most other Igbo people. In all, very many factors constitute very serious setback to meaningful progress in the practice of agriculture in Agulu example the presence of acidic soil and gully erosion. This erosion constitutes the greatest threat to agriculture in Agulu. Agulu indigenes are also reputed as the foremost bakers and confectioners in Nigeria. The bread and cakes made by Agulu people are best in quality. In every major town in Nigeria, the Agulu indigenes are bakers and confectioners out number all others and on account of the wide patronage of their product that is why some musicians in their songs believed that Nigerians would die of hunger or “eat sand” if bakers and confections from Agulu stop their production.

## II. BRIEF HISTORY OF AGULU

Agulu town is situated south of Awka the capital of Anambra state. The town shares boundaries with eight other towns namely; Nise in the North, Mbaukwu in the North-east, Awgbu in the East and Nanka in the South while Agukwu[Nri] in the North-west, Adazi to the west and Obeledu and Aguluizuigbo to the south-west. Agulu town covers an area of about 85 sq.km (51 sq. miles) which is more than half the total landmass of Aniocha local government area.

It is made of twenty (20) villages namely; Nwanchi, Nneoha, Okpu-Agulu-Amaezike, Odidama, Amorji, Isiamaigbo, Ukunu, Uhueme, Obe, Nkitaku, Obeagu, Okpufite, Umubiala, Amatutu, Umuowelle, Umunnonu, Ifiteani, Umuifite and Nneogidi. Agulu has over 50,000 inhabitants that makes it the most populous among the 10 towns that constitute Anaocha L.G.A as this number represents more than half of the L.G.A's total population. These villages are the names of the sons of a man called Aguluefo, who was the founder of Agulu town. Agulu town has about 66 quarters and 259 kindred's.

## III. TRADITIONAL SYSTEM OF AGULU PEOPLE

In terms of traditional religion, the notion of God had never been strange to Agulu people. Unlike in the Christian belief that regards God as a big father who anyone can talk to and deal with directly. But before the advent of Christianity, Agulu people believed that God is so powerful, so sublime, so sacred and so far removed and unseen that it would be quite impudent and insulting for any human being to talk to or approach him (God) directly. Accordingly, they as the saying goes that the best way to reach the top of oil palm tree is by using the climbing rope which is always handy. Thus, they formulated the idea of deities in concrete figures, moldings, carving and other artifacts and made them their go-between and means of reaching the biggest, most powerful and all-knowing God (*chi-ukwu*). Some of the deities (gods) were

private and personal e.g: *chi, Ikenga, Agwu, Ogwugwu, Ngene, Udo, Idimeto* while some others were owned, catered for, celebrated and worshiped by the entire villages or town like *Ghaaba, Odudonka, Ana* and so on. Masquerade added dignity and glamour to the worship of the deities and their feast were held annually.

## IV. WITCHCRAFT AND EMERGENCE OF PIN-CASTING IN AGULU BELIEF SYSTEM

The main issue of creolization of African water divinities can be found in the ritual production of *Mami Water* through the ritual and spiritual endeavours of the *Igbe* cult, an indigenous religious movement in Aguleri cosmology. According to Kathleen O' Brien Wicker “*Mami Water* is the name applied by Africans to a class of female and male water divinities or spirits that have accreted elements from several European, New World, and Indian cultural traditions” (2000:199). In Igbo traditional religion, *Mami Water* is understood and interpreted in various ways as an “African-centered manifestation of traditional water deities despite her apparently foreign iconographic characteristics (Wicker, 2000:203). According to Achebe (1986:15) “with the arrival of Europeans to this part of the world, *Nne Mmiri* became known as “*Mami Wota*” – a translation which enabled the local inhabitants to communicate the existence and exploits of this female deity to foreigners”. In thinking of the devotees of the *Igbe* cult religion, Jell-Bahlsen (1995a; 1995c) comments that “*Mami Water*'s luxurious long hair is *dada-rasta* hair and represents unrestrained fertility, creativity, and spirituality. The white complexion and facial features in *Mami Water* representations are regarded not as maskers of ethnicity but rather as a symbol of the sacred”. One school of thought believes that “a legend from Surinam tells of the Great Mother of the Inland Waters who delivered Africans from slavery as they made their way up to the Mamadam River in two boats with six paddlers each. One interpretation of this legend suggests that its original inspiration was in stories about a woman who aided African slaves' in escaping from bondage (Paxson, 1980:54-80). This is the reason why inscription of small boats with six paddlers are found in a number of African *Mami Water* shrines, perhaps recalling these traditions (Drewal, 1988b:41).

However, not minding the historical paradigm and the contestations of the origin of pin-casting in Igbo religion in Nigeria, originated from Agulu. According to David Chidester (1996) the supposed discovery of such indigenous religious movement was based on the practice of morphological comparison that established analogies between the strange and the familiar. He argues that morphology did not depend upon reconstructing historical links between ancient and contemporary religions; rather, morphological comparison relied exclusively on the observation of formal or functional resemblance (Chidester, 1996:18). Apparently, one obvious social function of belief in witchcraft is social control and the preservation of order...while the belief in witchcraft can also support certain types of authority in society (Bourdillon,

2000:187). It is on this position that Akama (1985:25) asserts that “belief in witchcraft and practices of other allied antisocial evils appears to be the root cause of the emergence of the *Igba Ntutu*” in community like the Agulu and its environs.

In Igbo belief system, witchcraft is found in all Igbo communities, but its potency and practices seems to be very strong among the riverside Igbo, *ndi olu* like the *Omanbala* people but this negative practice of pin casting (*Igba ntutu*) in Igbo tonal language is very high in Agulu town in Anaocha Local Government Area of Anambra of Anambra State. This is to counter the claims that “the gospel in Igbo land achieved an amazing success where the walls of pagandom collapse Jericho-wise” (Ayandele, 1973:126). This is the reason why Bourdillon (2000:181) echoes that “whatever outsiders may think of the reality of a witch’s powers, in the perspective of insiders, witchcraft is a social reality that cannot easily be laid aside”. Interestingly, it has been observed that the cult of witchcraft carry out their religious rituals in the mid nights especially on top of *Iroko* trees. At the *Iroko* trees, the devotees meet every day to have secret meetings, offerings and decide on whom to attack spiritually. No wonder Umar Danfulani (1999:167) affirms that “African communities used various methods for controlling witchcraft before the introduction of colonial rule”.

Similarly, Kathleen Wicker (2000:198) asserts that “these characteristics differentiate African spiritual traditions from Western religions, where faith usually involves acceptance of an articulated set of beliefs posited as absolute truths”. But not withstanding the controversies on the origin, one thing that is clear is the fact that the ritual activities of the cult of the witches is filled with ritual meeting and mystical offerings and sacrifices that subdues the physical bodies of the devotees, while the spirit possession comes to the fore, in which a state of altered consciousness is attained and worship will be better effected through the mediation of the ritual worship. It is no wonder then that “possession by a water spirit may induce a socially accepted form of dancing out of control” (Jell-Bahlsen, 2000:42). Michael Nabofa (2005:358) asserts that these methods of magical pin-casting and poisoning “have been claimed to have been revealed to any of the members in dreams and in visions. They are not codified but learnt by memory because most members are illiterates”. He argues that the ability to be able to master these form of methodology of pin-casting and poisoning “indicates how mature the person is, spiritually and also how involved the person is in the religion. Although, these... are not written they are well punctuated and they blend with the... instrument” (Nabofa, 2005:358).

From the analysis of the above assertion, it has come to show that the historical paradigm of how the dance came into being which has been part and parcel of the Agulu oral tradition that is somehow neglected. No wonder Jacob Olupona (1991) has observed that the failure to engage in a history of African religions has created the impression that the religion is static

and unchanging and that in the history of religions, diachronic analysis can no longer be neglected. Such analysis normally leads to issues of continuity and change in African traditional religion (Olupona, 1991:3). Chidester draws our attention to the idea that “such oral tradition as a myth is not a story with canonical closure, but rather than being subject to timeless repetition, such a myth is opened and reopened by interpretation, and as a result, such myth is a type of ongoing cultural work” (1996:261). Anthony Aveni asserts that by this way “history is regarded as a chain of events, a process whereby every happening contributed to the causation of future events” (1998:315).

#### V. CONTEMPORARY ISSUES IN AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION

African Traditional Religion from time immemorial have been concerned with issues of ancestor worship, spirit invocation and ritual practices that has to do with the use of sacred drums or sound. Nonetheless, it was the scholarly writings of John Ferguson (1869-1870) cited in Chidester (1996:207) that described African traditional religious as the worship of animals and plants, that actually sparked the in-depth exploration of African religious life. Scholars like Idowu, in his book *African Traditional Religion: A Definition* [1973] and Mbiti, in his book *Concepts of God In Africa* [1970], took it upon themselves to examine the true nature of African Traditional Religion. According to Chidester (1996) the supposed discovery of indigenous religions was the practice of morphological comparison that established analogies between the strange and the familiar. He argues that morphology did not depend upon reconstructing historical links between ancient and contemporary religions; rather, morphological comparison relied exclusively on the observation of formal or functional resemblance (Chidester, 1996:18). In his *Global Citizenship, Cultural Citizenship and World Religions in Religion Education*, Chidester goes on to argue that “the study of religion and religions is not a strategy for dealing with foreign subjects but a therapy for dealing with fears that arise in ongoing and regular relations with fellow citizens who live and work in the same operational environment” (2002: 4). It has been argued by scholars such as Mbiti (1970) and Idowu (1971) that Africans have their own way of worshipping God and divinities which is equivalent to that of the colonialists who actually described the religions of the Africans as primitive. Benjamin Ray (1976:15) argues that Idowu is rightly indignant at much of what has passed for the study of African religions but his own purpose is avowedly theological, not merely anthropological. Idowu thus goes beyond the descriptive level to that of metaphysics which “makes religion, religion”.

Harold Turner (1981) and more recently David Westerlund (2006) lamented the tendency to reject all scholarship of African indigenous religions by non-Africans as western constructs and methods. This practice of exclusion and expulsion in the field of African religion, while intent on guarding against a history of distortion and misrepresentation,

has also facilitated the marginalization of African religion in the broader field of religious studies. This movement is primarily concerned with setting the record straight regarding the designation of African religion by such names like paganism, heathenism, juju, fetishism, idolatry, and animism through the use of ritual sound. Against this backdrop, it should be noted as Moghalu commented that “African science is not the popular perception about the manipulation of supernatural phenomena that pervades African societies, but in fact was underpinned by natural, empirical scientific knowledge more advanced than what obtained in what is today the Western world, thousands of years ago, and certainly rivalled it as the gap narrowed in the last few hundred years and Africa went into a period of reversal as a result of colonialism. Who knows what trajectory Africa’s innovation path might have taken had colonialism not intervened? This is not an excuse for Africa’s underdevelopment, but only a counterfactual....With the confidence that this knowledge of recorded history should imbibe, Africans have a basis to develop a worldview that approaches technology and innovation from the standpoint, not of an alien wonder, but of reclaiming a lost heritage” (2013: 215-216).

Commenting further on this, Turner (1981:3) argues that in spite of the undoubted mistakes of the past, this attitude must be firmly rejected when applied to the international resources available today for the study of religions. Reflecting on the insular nature of scholarship on African religion and culture, Meyer Fortes (1974:6) maintains that “those among them who are engaged in the same academic enterprises and enquiries as their Western counterparts have been concerned with in the past thirty years, come out, broadly, with the same observation and conclusions... And this holds out not only for anthropology...”. On the ethical dimensions of African indigenous systems, Jacob Ayantayo (2001:45), explores the ethical meanings, messages, information and interpretations, arising from African indigenous systems and argues that using non-traditional musical instruments in carrying out religious practices is alien to African people. On the other hand, Westerlund (2006) posits that several scholars have stressed the extraordinary paucity of communal rituals, which contrasts vividly with many over generalized presentations of African religions as being particularly rich in terms of such rituals.

Conceiving of religion more generally, Bruce Lincoln (1998:65), advocates the need to have a conception of religion which is not based on beliefs and moral injunctions but rather to “multiple components that can relate to one another in a variety of ways including disjuncture and contradictions”. He further argues that whenever one of these components plays a role of “some seriousness” within any given conflict, it should be acknowledged that the conflict has a religious underpinning/dimension (Lincoln, 1998:65). This actually tallies with the ritual performance which can contribute significantly to the enhancement of the universe, according to Lincoln (1989:53). Michael Bourdillon (1990:14) describes

such rituals as performative primarily because it is concerned with human action and social relation in particular. Rosati (2009) argues that ritual and the sacred are vital concepts for understanding modernity, and that religion should be a resource for making whole our common world.

Innocent Uwah (2010) asserts that Africans communicate to God, god, deities and ancestors through festivals and rituals both in private and in public situations. The recognition of the abiding power and efficacy of African traditional religion is very vividly expressed in the work of Nabofa (1994), where he explores African Traditional Religion from the twin perspective of religious communication theory and the practice of arts and the culture. He argues that the study of religion has made us to realize that religious practices takes place at two main levels: inner and outer planes. The inner level concerns the divine disclosure, and this occurs between people, and can include telepathy and divination. The outer plane concerns expressions of the relationship between people and the supernatural (Nabofa, 1994:iv). Metuh (1987) asserts that African Traditional Religion is a living religion and he argues that African Traditional Religion is virtually written in the routine of the everyday life of the community. He claims that it is enshrined in the customs, traditions, culture, festivals, myths, legends, proverbs and sayings of the people (Metuh, 1987:20). I may thus, conclude that African Traditional Religion cannot be studied in isolation from other aspects of a community’s social life. It is with this notion and the conception of African Religion as articulated and mediated through cultic symbols that I propose to explore the sacred symbols in African religion that permeates every aspect of Igbo social and religious world through its ritual functions.

#### VI. THE PHILOSOPHICAL APPRAISAL OF WITCHCRAFT IN AFRICAN ONTOLOGY

A Witch is a wise person supposed to possess supernatural powers in consequences of forming a league with devil or evil spirits. According to Metuh “a witch is a person who possesses a special psychic quality which permits her spirit, *Obi*, to leave her body, *aru*, while she is asleep to afflict injuries on other or even to eat their souls. A witch uses no medicines, utters no spells and performs no rites. Her powers are inherent in her personality; she did not have to learn it like learning a trade. In this, it differs from *igwo ogwu*, making of medicine, or *Ikpa Nsi*” (1999:129). A witch projects her evil thoughts directly from her mind, invisibly and without causing and invoking. In the Yoruba context, a witch is normally called *Ajo* and also in Igbo tonal language, context and cosmology, it is called *Amusu* or *Amosu* depending on the difference of dialectics. Then the critical question that comes to mind quickly is: Is witchcraft real? Here, I can tersely say in affirmation yes because information gathered from people who have confessed their bad behaviour for example “a young girl whom I know had a sore on her foot which refused to heal after several years of treatment. People in the village still say that this was because a witch spat into her sore” (Metuh,

1999: 130). It is on this position that Metuh again comments that:

The Igbo say that *Amusu adaghi ebu n'iro*, 'a witch never attacks an outsider'. The victim must be close relation, a friend or a neighbour. The belief is that a witch carries away a person's soul, she enters into spiritual communication with it, so it is only those whom she knows well enough to communicate with *ndi oma obi ha*. The second reason is based on the belief that the witch is sometimes forced to contribute her own children, her relatives, or even part of herself, to the ghoulish feast of the witch club, when she cannot find other victims" (1999:130).

Once a witch confessed and promises to leave the craft, she is spared and leave a good life normally. Accusation of witchcraft are made against real persons not imaginary personalities, victims of witchcraft are real. Those who confess to be head of anti-social secret members are real also. The main information concerning witchcraft is gathered from confessions made by the witch themselves. These confessions constitutes largely to the people's belief about their existence of witches. People ask: If X is not a witch, how could she claim to have done all these things that she claimed that she had done? The witches carry out their evil activities in circullit of shadow form. She must have been sleeping on her bed in her physical body but she is not there spiritually. Witches engage in what one can describe as 'abstract travel' as is done or practices in some cultic or secret societies. We have anti-wickedness divinities in Yoruba land called *Ayelala*, who can do or single out wicked witches for punishment. According to Metuh "a charm prepared by a *dibia* can catch a witch red-handed in her transformed form. Some *Arusi* are known to be terrors to witches those dedicated to their service are never attacked by witches" (1999:131). Witchcraft is a kind of African science through the mediation of pin-casting (*Igba-Ntutu*). Invariably, one can see where religion and science are inter-play. In fact, scholars that are familiar with theoretical thinking in their culture have deliberately failed to give special attention and recognition to its African equivalent, simply because they have been blindfolded by a difference of semantics.

Considering Robin Horton's argument, he posits that "not surprisingly, perhaps, this approach has frequently been misunderstood. Several critics have objected that it tends to blur the undeniable distinction between traditional and scientific thinking; that indeed it presents traditional thinking as a species of science" (1993:197).

Nonetheless, it is generally believed that this divinity do not pick innocent people. Those singled out to be witches are indeed witches. When they make full confessions and promise not to engage in further evil deeds, they are usually spared. The institution of witchcraft is more or less like that of secret society, because unless one is a witch you cannot understand

what they do or how they carry out their activities. It is only during their symbolic confession time that their activities are usually thrown out to the public thereby making some of their members and their secrets known at the same time. Although, there are ways to prevent attacks from witches and the commonest precaution is the use of cocoyam. It is believed in Igbo cosmology that witches do abhor food items prepared with anything associated with cocoyam therapy. According Ikenga Metuh "remedies for witchcraft are many and easily available. The commonest is a simple cocoyam tuber which is believed to be a taboo to witches. A cocoyam put under the pillow drives away a witch" (1999:131).

#### VII. THE CONCEPT OF OATH TAKING IN SECRET SOCIETY AS PART OF WITCHCRAFT IN TRADITIONAL RELIGION

The Oxford Advanced dictionary Learner's (Hornby, 1995) defined oath as a solemn or formal appeal to God or big deal to God or to a deity or something held in reverence, in witness of the truth of a statement or the binding character of a promise or undertaking and act of swearing a statement or promise collaborated by such an appeal or the form of words in which such a statement is made. From the above definition, we can see that oath taking have a significant role to play in a secret society like the witchcraft. As it does in association and in the corporate society example in a court of law, it is conventional that a witness must take an oath what he or she is about to say is the truth, also in any high governmental establishment; members take an oath not to divulge the government or administration. Oath taking in secret society ifs therefore mostly done during the initiation ceremonies of new members at each time, they promise total allegiance to the society to protect the image and tenaciously adhere and also keep the secret of the society and failure to normally cause trouble to them. No wonder then Ikenga Metuh described witchcraft as "club of soul-eaters" through the mediation of the *Igbe* cult dance as a religious communicative system (1999:129).

#### VIII. UNDERSTANDING OF WITCHCRAFT AS CULT IN IGBO COSMOLOGY

Witchcraft itself is made up of two spiritual powers – the power of metempsychosis and that of destruction. The power of metempsychosis is known Igbo tonal language as *eriri*. This means a method of leaving one's physical body and transforming to other spiritual forms, while the destructive mystical power of attacking / inflicting spiritual injuries to others by eating their souls known as *Obi* in Igbo language. A witch is a wise person supposed to possess supernatural powers in consequence of forming a league with devil or evil spirits. Buttressing this, Horton (1993:199) posits that "it is true that, in a very superficial sense, African cosmologies tend towards proliferation. From the point of view of sheer numbers, the spirits of some cosmologies are virtually countless. But in this superficial sense we can point to the same tendency in Western cosmology". Affirming to this,

Metuh (1999:129) asserts that “a witch is a person who possesses a psychic quality which permits her spirit, *Obi*, to leave her body, *aru*, while she is asleep to afflict injuries on others or even to eat their souls”. Commenting further, He writes that:

A witch uses no medicines, utters no spells and performs no rites. Her powers are inherent in her personality; she did not have to learn it like learning a trade. In this, it differs from *Igwo Ogwu*, making medicine, or *Ikpa Nsi*, sorcery, which are arts and trades sometimes learnt through a long period of apprenticeship. Both witchcraft and sorcery have the same purpose, namely, the evil and devilish intention of injuring their fellow men by occult means. Some people are born witches, though witchcraft can also be acquired by swallowing a chemical substance inducing a psychic state which makes it possible for witches to leave their bodies and attack others spiritually (Metuh, 1999:129).

A witch projects her evil thoughts directly from her mind, invisibly and without causing and invoking. In the Yoruba context, a witch is normally called (*Ajo*) and also in Igbo context it is called *Amusu*. Then the question that arises is: Is witchcraft real? Yes, witchcraft is real because information gathered from people who have confessed their bad behavior for example, a woman who confessed that she causes her husband’s business failure, she killed the child of her brother and other people around. Once a witch confessed and promises to leave the craft, she is spared and leaves a good life normally. Accusation of witchcraft are made against real persons not imaginary personalities, victims of witchcraft are real. Those who confess to be head of anti-social secret members are also real. The main information concerning witchcraft is gathered from confession made by the witch themselves. These confessions constitutes largely to the people’s belief about their existence of witches. People ask: if x is not a witch, how could she claim to have done all these things that she claimed that she had done? The witches carry out their activities in circullit or shadow form. She must have been sleeping on her bed in her physical body but she is not there spiritual. No wonder then that Isichei (2004:309) opined that the witch is sometimes a shape-shifter or closely linked with an animal familiar. Whereas people eat animals and seek companionship from their own kind, witches eat people and prefer the companionship of a familiar”. According to Metuh:

Igbo beliefs about witchcraft generally follow the African patterns already known in social anthropology. The woman is the witch, *Amusu*. Men who practice witchcraft are hard to find, but they do exist and are called *Ajalagba*, wizards. *Ajalagba* are by far more powerful and more dangerous than

witches, hence the saying: *Amusu ada ebu ajalagba*, ‘A witch cannot carry a wizard’. This has overtones of male chauvinism and is often used by men to remind women who appear to be very forward of their subordinate place in society (1999:128-129).

The referent point of pin-casting as an element of magic and medicine through the mediation of witchcraft is loaded with ritual symbolism it evokes, which imbues it with mystical power and a sacredness that is played out in the gendered nature of Agulu ritual. Through this form, pin-casting and poisoning represents a symbol of patriarchal privilege for the custodians of sacred canopy in Agulu community although matriarchal so to say. This depicts male dominance. By this I mean that cult is a convention and convocation of men in a secret cult. No wonder when a witch is referred to as being an ‘*Ugboma*’ in Onitsha cosmology, it means that the devotee or the initiate cannot reverse his or her membership in the cult. To digress a bit, it is interesting to note here that in some parts of Igbo land, some communities are basically known for or associated with witchcraft practices. Communities like Anam, Igbariam, Awkuzu, Ogbunike and its environs are associated with these kinds of magic and medicine and equally inflicting these kinds of wicked practices to innocent victims with certain sicknesses.

It has been observed that these kinds of spiritual diseases cannot be cured with western medications. Such diseases and sicknesses are Elephantiasis, *Ule Ukwu*, heart attacks, liver and kidney related problems. Ironically, the wicked individuals that inflict these kinds of diseases and sicknesses are the same group of people that cure their victims. What a wicked world?

In fact, in Anam community it is believed that once a child is born, the power of witchcraft is imbued in him or her through spiritual form and *mami iwota* spirit possession. Even in traditional Yoruba belief system, there is anti-wickedness divinities in Yoruba land called *Ayelala*, who can do or single out wicked witches for punishment. It is generally believed that this divinity do not pick innocent people. Those singled out to be witches are indeed witches. When they make full confessions and promise not to engage in further evil deeds, they are usually spared. The institution of witchcraft is more or less like that of secret society, because unless one is a witch you cannot understand what they do or carry out their activities. It is only during the confession time that their secrets are usually thrown out to the public thereby making some of their members and their secrets known at the same time.

#### IX. ANTIDOTES TO WARD OFF WITCHES AWAY

There are some items that have been revealed that serves as ritual antidotes against the attacks of evil forces of witches. This is because they abhor such items. It has been observed

that such items carry in them some spiritual forces that scare witches away. Such items are as follows:

- a. Cocoyam: It has been observed that person that involves themselves in the act witchcraft practices does not eat foods that are associated with cocoyam. This is because It is believed in Igbo cosmology that cocoyam has a malevolent spirits to exudes from it which is desirous of cocoyam, may cause death. According to Metuh (1999:130) “a cocoyam put under the pillow drives away a witch.
- b. Broom: This is a ritual item that significant in neutralizing the potency of evil deeds of witches. It has the power of exorcism and purification in Igbo belief system. It is believed to have mystical power which can neutralize any negative effect in either a person or a place. Whoever, therefore, that touches or uses it would be cleansed of its impurities. The belief is that the spiritual magnet it is capable of extracting impurities from a diseased and unwholesome condition” (Nabofa, 1994:66). Writing in the context of *Igbe* religion, an indigenous religious movement, He went further to explain that it acts as a weapon:

Which attract and repel both visible and invisible missiles meant for all forms of psychic attacks. ... The broom, apart from its being used for purification and psychic attack expeller, it also symbolizes unity. With the way the components: the broom sticks are joined together with some other symbolic items {especially the cowries} it invokes a sense of unity among those who worship in such a shrine. When placed in a conspicuous place in the shrine, though for purification and exorcism purposes, it still reminds the devotees of their unity and bond of fellowship not only when they come together for worship but also wherever they may be and meet after worship” (Nabofa, 1994:66).

- c. Special Charms prepared by a native doctor is believed in Igbo system to catch “a witch red-handed to her transformed form” (Metuh, 1999:131).
- d. There is a belief that there some powerful deities in Igbo cosmology that are known to be horrific and terrorizing to witches. Nonetheless, those dedicated to their service are never attacked by witches according to Metuh (1999:131).

#### X. ANTIDOTES TO WARD OFF PIN-CASTING

There is a wide believe in Igbo cosmology especially among the Agulu people that for one to avert the wraths of these wicked ones that carry out this wicked act on their innocent victims, one has to insulate himself or herself by having some pins affixed on his or her dress. This means that the safety pin

that is affixed on ones dress must be touching the physical body of the person and this would act as an insulator against being attacked.

#### **Confessional statement from some of the Native that inflicts Pin-Casting to their Victims and Boasting their Illicit Businesses among the Agulu People**

From my research conducted, pin-casting have been existing even in olden days till date and it is believe to be in existing and embedded in Agulu cosmology. In the past, even today, pin-casting is also still used by ‘*Alusi*’ as a punishment to law breakers. Human beings also use it to punish their fellow men for one reason or the other. Pin is called ‘*Ntuntu*’ in Igbo tonal language. Pin-casting seems to be so rampant today in our society especially in some areas or towns like Agulu, Nise, Ichida, Nnobi and its environs. According to Ogoadigbomma- a native doctor from Nise town:

‘*Ntuntu*’ is a spiritual substance which can operate like remote device that is used to control television. He throws a question to me by asking whether we can tell how the remote controls a television. The question was unanswered. Therefore, as a remote is used in controlling a television, so does ‘*Ntuntu*’ works spiritually. Any person who cast out pin from other people has a charm in his body that aids them to dictate the area or direction affected. Again, there is a level a person will attain in charm making through witchcraft, if he passes, that charm in his body will be sending ‘*Ntuntu*’ into the body of other innocent victims around. Some innocent victims can dictate when they have ‘*Ntuntu*’ in their body and some do not know and once they are injected through Western medicine it can lead to death (Personal Communication, November, 2019).

Interpretatively, this means that the person in question must have been initiated into the cult of witches or wizards.

Ezeekwuuka- a native doctor from Agulu in Ntitaku village asserts that “it is the pin which we see with our physical eyes when removed from someone’s body is projected into people’s body by wicked fellows” (Personal Communication, November, 2019).

Asserting to the above statement, Chief Obiekezie a native doctor from Nneogidi village in Agulu comments that:

The pins that are projected by ‘*Alusi*’ looks like the line of a feather when removed from the victim’s body also. People who whom may like to or want to carry out pin-casting activities to someone in distance through abstract method / travel like can do it through the magical powers of the ‘*Alusi*’

tree like 'Ngwu'. Practically, this is done by presenting nails to the 'Alusi' after some rituals and incantations to appease the deity and ancestors, and then he pronounces the name of that person to be harmed (Personal Communication, December, 2019).

Pointing to this assertion, Ezeekwuuka- a native doctor from Agulu concludes that:

It is not everybody that can do the work of removing pin 'Ntutu' when it is casted on somebody. Those who do the work have it as a call and it flows from lineage. A son can inherit it from his father. Pin-casting is real through its magical arts. There is an 'Alusi' in charge of this job whose name is 'Aruburunagu'. If a servant that is, those who remove the pins violates the sacred order of the 'Alusi', he becomes mad instantly. So, the job is a delicate one. Some traditional doctors who are in the field have some charms imbued in their body as dictators or indicators. They remove the pins 'Ntutu' either by beating or biting the infected person and the pins fall out of the person's body. Pin can penetrate everybody except if one insulated or favoured by the Gods and ancestors. This means that if one is covered by divine protection of the spiritual forces (Personal Communication, November, 2019).

It very interesting to note from the above statement that in trado-medicalism, the work of native doctors are basically hereditary that means it passes from father to son. No wonder Mume opined that:

Tradomedicalism is the methodology and mechanics of treatment of human diseases as applied by our forefathers, and which has been practiced by the succeeding generations over the years. Tradomedicalism can be briefly be described as a system of treating diseases by the employment of the agencies and forces of nature. It is a distinct system of healing based upon its own philosophy of health and disease. Its modern practice is based upon empirical knowledge and a broad foundation applied by the ancient healers (1976:14).

#### *Other Poison*

Some poisons are prepared from most of the foods we eat. One of them is 'Ona'. Ona is a kind of native potato or yam. Ona should not be allowed to stay up to two years otherwise it becomes poisonous. The roots of bitter leaf (*Onugbu*) and

Pumpkin (*Ugbogulu*) are also poisonous when eaten. According to Chief Patrick Ugwu:

The quickest destroyer of life is human skull. The use of human skull for preparing poisonous charms is mostly found in Nsukka town. It is believed that when the native doctor get a human skull and burn it to ashes to powdered form that becomes poison automatically. Once this substance is added into a person's food and its eaten it does not last for more than 24 hours and the person is dead. This is most dangerous poison of all times. The substance can also be poured around the entrance of a house or pathway, when this is done, only the person it is kept for will be affected. This type of poison is peculiar to Enugu and Ebonyi people respectively (Personal Communication, December, 2019).

#### XI. WAYS OF PROJECTING POISONS SPIRITUALLY IN AGULU COSMOLOGY

In some cases Chief Patrick Ugwu again opined that:

Mirror is used. The petronizer or the votary tells the native doctor (*Dibia*) his mission. The native Doctor (*Dibia*) invokes the targeted victim and he will appear on the mirror. Then the petronizer or the votary speaks to the image on the mirror telling it what he wants to become of the person, whatever sickness he should be inflicted with after these the targeted person will wake up to see himself or herself suffering from that very sickness (Personal Communication, December, 2019).

Nonetheless, from my research it has been observed and gathered that lizard is used, but it is mostly used on women. This act is done by getting a lizard, and then the person's name will be called seven times consecutively. For example, if he wants to poison Theresa, he will call the name seven times telling the lizard what it will form on the person's body either to form python, lizard, cockroach, and ant and so on. Then he will open the mouth of that lizard and pour all the poison then release the lizard. When the targeted person wakes up, he or she is spiritually inflicted with spiritual diseases as mentioned above. Some wicked native doctors or ordinary people carry out this kind of wicked and spiritual activities if they want to damage any part of human being, lizard is used also to carry out such wicked act. Somehow, if the wicked person wants to break one of the legs he will simply get a lizard and call the victims name seven times and break any part he wants. When his victim wakes up he or she will notice that some bones has broken or it can make the person to fall down in that wise the person's leg, hand or any part of his or her body can get condemned for life. Some will



add the poison substance to their finger nails and when applied into someone's drink, the person will be affected. Some also put the substance in their nose and when they drink from a bottle, they will breathe out air into the bottle. When another person takes the drink he or she will contact it. This is most dangerous because no one will ever suspect that because they drank from the same bottle. All these are manifested physically in real life. Sometimes, when such incantation is going on in the spiritual realm, the person sees himself or herself eating in a dream and this can be very dangerous.

## XII. CONCLUSION

Pin-casting and poison are real as part and parcel of witchcraft in Agulu cosmology and practically, most of the people interviewed in the neighbouring towns that do engage in this kind of wicked practices are native doctors who practice witchcraft and poisoning. Through this form, it enables the indigenous people of Agulu to be underdeveloped and equally brings miseries to innocent victims and it bridge the gap between the seen and unseen worlds and thus, brings them into contact with all those forces that are believed to control the destinies of man. The impressions created by the magical art of pin-casting and poisoning seem to linger and indelibly remain as a point of reference in the minds of most victims because according to the views expressed by some of my participants it's a wicked act. This is one of the reasons why the presence of a devotee, in whose interest a particular ritual is being performed, is needed. Such is required in order to enable the message of the ritual, which is basically transmitted through the symbolic pin-casting and poisoning to sink deeply into the inner recesses of the devotee where spiritual forces control the movement between individuals while the spiritual potency of the pin and poison is ritually and spiritually contained. Nonetheless, the act of pin-casting provides a channel through which the indigenous Agulu community activates and sustains unique religious communication with their deities and ancestors. From the research, it has shown that native doctors of the indigenous people of Agulu and its environs are experts in the field. They have also testified and asserted that the only condition where someone's body can reject being infected with pin-casting and other forms of related poisoning is when one insulates himself or herself with affixed safety pin and protected by ancestors, spirit through the mediation of divine protection. Witchcraft through the art of magic and medicine of pin-casting has rendered African continent and African Traditional Religion useless and dangerous through this kind of devil acts. All these devilish acts has made mother Africa underdeveloped.

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