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Toward an Empirical Inquiry of Religious Language in The Interface of Libation Rituals in Africa: Experience From Ibibio, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT
Experience to date has highlighted the importance of language in the relationship between God and man as exemplified in the matrix of all human endeavour. This is because prior to its being a tool that is used by humans; language had been the foundation which supports human beings for the purpose of communicating his intentions. This paper examines religious language of libation in Ibibio indigenous knowledge system with special focus on its problems of traditional equivocation and analogy in an attempt to provide a meaningful vehicle by which God can be expressed. This paper discovers that in most recent findings on libation, it is more creative, spiritual, dogmatic, linguistic and imaginative medium for religious assertions through incantation and invocations which manifest beyond an empirical base. The paper concludes that libation rituals are meaningful medium of communing with the spirit.

Key words: Religious language, Libation, Worship, Ibibio Rituals, Communication

INTRODUCTION

Reminiscent of the beliefs and practices in African Traditional Religion is libation rituals which have significantly become involved in the process of Africa's self reflection and identity construction by means of its cultural representations. Scholars like Epey, 2012, Olupona: 2000, Nyame: 2009, Mbiti: 1990, Anti: 1987, to mention but a few, by their findings attest to the fact that libation as a cultural institution is vital regarding religious identity of the Africans and symbolizes something of a revelatory process towards understanding not only the religious culture of the people but indigenous knowledge and communalism in their ritual performance. The libation observance is a ritual that is performed throughout the African continent. However, inconsequential differences occur in language and format of the celebration depending on the customs and the traditions of each ethnic or tribal group. Even though it is possible to approach religion from various perspectives, it is pertinent to consider it from the perspective of the nature of language used in its liturgical process. Liturgy is a religious parlance used in describing the prescribed forms of rituals for public worship. It can further be defined as a means of communication and/or communicating with the deity within the context of worship (Abanuka 1991).

Throughout Africa, libation is taken to be an essential aspect of worship where the Supreme deity, divinities, ancestors and the transcendental spirits are addressed or called upon to participate in the worship and intervene in the affairs of the people. The question then is how is this extra-mundane form of communication achieved? That is where language as a medium of communication features prominently. That is to say, it is in the sphere of religion that the question "What is language?" becomes a fundamental issue. Ordinarily speaking, we often

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suppose that language is treated carefully in areas such as literature or literary studies and poetry. But it would be interesting to note that the language arts give expression to all things through words, thus, giving them preference over colors or/and sounds. Yet, in the language arts, words do not reach the point of being able to lay bare the deepest foundations of language (Lystad, 1999). This is because literature presupposes the existence of language. Expectedly, in religion, by contrast, the source of language can be experienced for the first time when words become manifest in human life. In other words, religion is none other than that place where language is realized as the route of communication between human beings and that which transcends them, such as gods, divinities, ancestors and other spirit elements. However, it has become very difficult for people living in the contemporary world to experience directly the unfathomable and inconceivable mystery of language. This is why John Locke (1632–1707), an English 17th Century philosopher stated that humans are social animals and that language is a tool which humans use to make their respective intentions known (Appiah-Kubi, 1982).

With the advancement of science and technology, this view of language came to be seen as self-evident and widespread acceptance came to be given to the view that language is nothing more than a means for the transfer of information by human beings. This way of thinking lies at the base of the consciousness of people in the contemporary world. Similarly, Heidegger corroborates the fact that language is truly an inconceivable mystery because although we may think that human beings speak language, in fact it is the language that is speaking. He reasons that the German phrase ("Die Sprach Spricht.") "Language speaks" indicates that prior to its being a tool that is used by humans; language had been the foundation which supports human beings. Thus, if language does not speak, human beings will not be able to speak. This therefore lends credence to the fact that the supernumerary rite of libation in Ibibio in particular and Africa in general have the capacity to create a communication link, bond, and revitalization in the human relationships with deities, ancestors, and God in order to provide for human needs. This study is therefore an attempt to evaluate the hidden dimension of language in the libation rituals of Ibibio traditional religion and knowledge system.

CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

Libation is one of the oldest and perhaps least understood religious rituals. It is the sacrificial pouring out of liquid. Its primary importance seems to lie in the act of pouring, since the liquids that are poured out (wine, liquor, milk, honey, water, oil and in some cases, blood) and the places where this is done (on the ground, into chasms, upon the altar, over the sacrificial victim, into a sacrificial bowl) vary and change. As a religious ritual, libation can be traced as far back as the Bronze Age by means of libation pitchers and bowls discovered in excavations or depicted in stone reliefs and vase paintings or on gems, seals and rings (Adediji, 2000). Etymologically, the word libation is derived from a Latin word "libatio" meaning "sacrificial offering of drink" and in most ancient sources it was a separate gift offering. It is also connected with the Greek noun "loibe" which directly translates to what is known as "libation" and the verb "leibo", which connotes the act of pouring the libation (Betz 1987).

In Babylonian and Assyrian religions, it was primarily the duty of the king's office to offer libation to the gods. It was part of the meals presented to the gods on altar tables, around which the divinities gathered eagerly. It was also common in the Greco-Egyptian period and in Israelite religion, libation was central to the cult of most ancient powerful nations. Jewish religion was however compelled to abandon its sacrificial rituals and with it libations, because of the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 CE. (4)

The practice of libation pouring, however is not unknown in the New Testament (see John 7:37-39). But during the Festival of Shelters or Tabernacles, Jesus stood up in the Temple and with a loud voice he said: ". . . whoever believes in me, streams of life-giving water will pour out from his heart . . .". (5) (The Living Bible) This saying was uttered during the last and most important day of the Feast. On this day, a priest fetched water with a golden pitcher from the Pool of Siloam. This was brought into the Temple and while the Hillel psalms Psalms 113-118) were being sung and flutes being played by the Levitic choir, the water was poured out on the altar as an offering to God. It was within this cultic background that Jesus spoke these words. St. Paul similarly applies the concept of libation with its deep theological meaning in Philippians 2:17, "And even if I am offered like a drink offering, giving myself for the cause and work of your faith, I am glad and have joy with you all".

In the same vein, libation in the Old Testament received a much serious attention as reference to it is made in very many passages in the Pentateuch. Beginning from Genesis, the first reference to the pouring of libation is made. It is mentioned in connection with God's renewal of the covenant with Jacob. "And Jacob set up a Pillar in the place where he had spoken with him, a Pillar of Stone; and he poured out a drink offering on it, and poured oil on it" (Genesis 35:14). In response to a call to settle in Bethel, Jacob instructed his household to purify themselves by destroying the foreign gods they had brought with them, and washing and putting on fresh garments. They are to do away with all cultic practices which are incompatible with the Divine call. Upon their arrival in Bethel, God renewed his covenant with Abraham. Jacob and his children will be fruitful and possess the land of Canaan. After this theophany, Jacob set up a stone pillar in the place where God had spoken to him and poured wine over it as a drink offering to God and anointed the pillar with olive oil (living Bible), by pouring oil on it (Baran, 1998). This undoubtedly, was an act of worship with offering involving Libation rituals and not a mere consecration. It was an acknowledgement of God as the source of both material and spiritual blessings, for oil in Israel symbolised wealth, abundance, prosperity (Deuteronomy 34:24), divine honour and favour (Deuteronomy 32:13, Job 29:6, Psalms 23:5, cf. Joel 2:24), joy and gladness (Psalms 45:7, Isaiah 6:13).(2).

Thus what Jacob did was a ritual pouring of wine and oil in acknowledgement of God as the source of his life and the life of his household who had purified themselves to walk with him.

It is important also to note that among the essential elements in the regular daily sacrifice is a drink offering. Libation was therefore a regular offering in the Old Testament days especially in Israel (Exodus 29:40-41). References to libation utensils confirm the great importance attached to this ritual act. They are to be made of pure gold (Exodus 25:29; 30:9; 37:16, Numbers 4:7, I Chronicles 29:21, II Chronicles 29:35). These bowls are chalices for pouring out the wine and are placed on the table of shewbread. Thus not only was libation a common act of worship, the utensils used were to befit the glory of God - bowls made of pure gold. This was to reflect his nobility and royal dignity. Furthermore, the vessels for the altar were made by one chosen by God and filled with his spirit: ". . . He has filled him with the spirit of God and endowed him with the skills and perception and knowledge for every kind of craft . . ." (Exodus 35:31 f.). The vessels are thus made under the inspiration of God. God chose Bezalel and filled him with his spirit and granted him ability, intelligence, knowledge and craftmanship to design and produce the cultic equipment for service in the sanctuary. And among these are jars and libation bowls (Exodus 37:16). One can safely conclude that libation was of great importance to the cultic life of Israel, for the vessels used were made by people specially chosen and filled with the spirit of God.

The significance of libation is again stressed in the code of Holiness (Leviticus Chapter 17 - 26) where it is to be one of the elements to be presented to Yahweh on the day of First Fruits

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(Leviticus 23:10-13, cf. Numbers 15:5). As in Exodus 29:40-41, the quantity of wine to be poured is specified. This cultic act of 'Sheaf-waving' took place at a time near to the Feast of Unleaven Bread marking the beginning of harvest. And in addition to the meal offering, there was a supplementary drink offering of wine, which was probably to be poured out before the altar. (5) According to Leviticus 23:14, before this cultic duty had been carried out nothing might be eaten from the new harvest either in the form of a roast ear of corn or more probably raw grains of corn rubbed in the hand.(6) Similarly, libation is poured during the important feast of Weeks (Leviticus 23:18). In Leviticus 23:37 Israel is reminded that in all the great ritual feasts where the people are called together in a holy convocation, libation must be poured to Yahweh. It is a holy act to be performed by the holy people in reverent service to and acknowledgement of Yahweh. And in Numbers 4:7 the pouring of libation seems to be so well known that it needs no further comments except a mere reference to "Bowls and libation jars".

Not only was libation a regular cultic practice. It also formed part of the Nazarite purification rites, which will enable him to enjoy normal life on completion of his period of separation or consecration. Among the offerings he is to make is the pouring of libation regarded as ritually necessary for his release (Numbers 16:15 & 17). The Nazarite because of his dedication to Yahweh was a shining example of holiness and piety. It is specifically stressed (Numbers 15) that libation is a divine command which the people must observe in the land of Canaan. Together with other sacrifices they are means of upholding the covenant. Thus not only are the moral commandments necessary; the faithful performance of the cultic practices were equally important. According to Numbers 5:1-16, every sacrifice is to be accompanied by an offering of meal, oil and wine as prescribed. Hence on the calendar of public cultic rituals which are to be offered for the nation as a whole in a year by the priest, libation has its rightful place (Numbers 28). The public cultic rituals, as opposed to the private offerings of individuals include the daily offerings (Numbers 3-8), the sabbath (Numbers 9-10), the new moon sacrifices on the First day of each month (Numbers 11-15), the feast of Unleavened bread (Numbers 16-25), and the feast of Weeks (Numbers 26-31). The main interest here is the recognition that offerings are to be made at a set time and on each of these occasions libation is to be poured.

In the daily sacrifices libations are to be offered in the holy place with a strong drink. "The accompanying libation is to be at the rate of one quarter of a hin for each lamb; the libation of strong drink for Yahweh must be poured out in the sanctuary" (Numbers 28:7). It is apparent that intoxicating drink can and is offered to Yahweh in the holy place. We may also add that feast period like the Day of Atonement and the Feast of Booths (the Autumn Festival) are marked by the pouring of libation. The Feast of Booths is celebrated for seven days and on each day libation is poured as part of the day's sacrificial offering. Expectedly, the fundamental position of libation in the Old Testament needs no further substantiation as the act is found in all the major sections of the Old Testament except in the Wisdom Literature. Libation is at the core of ancient Israelite religion. It is practiced as a cultic act of communion and communication between the people of Israel and their ancient God, Yahweh. The main elements used in the pouring of libation were water, oil, wine and the blood of sacrificed animals. Libation was in earnest an act of worship. It was an acknowledgement of God as the source of both material and spiritual blessings (Soola, 1999).

Background Information on Ibibio

Ibibio is the ancestral name for the people regarded as most ancient of all the ethnic groups in Nigeria today. The name is a family name for the different nationalities of Ibibio extraction

dispersed throughout the present day Akwa Ibom State. Historically, the Ibibio people belong to the Kwa speaking people of the Benue-Congo group of Niger-Congo language (Udo, 1983). They are related to the Anaang and the Efik peoples. During colonial period in Nigeria, the Ibibio Union an umbrella body for the Ibibio people asked the British for recognition as a sovereign nation (Noah, 1988). In Akwa Ibom State, the Annang, Efik, Ekid, Oron and Ibeno share personal names, culture, and traditions with the Ibibio. They also speak closely related varieties of Ibibio-Efik. Prior to present-day Nigeria they were regarded as Ibibio tribes speaking dialects of Ibibio. According to Monday Noah, a foremost historian, in his work "Ibibio Pioneers in Modern Nigerian History" writes:

> *"The Ibibio occupy mostly the mainland parts of the Cross River State and constitute the fourth largest ethnic group in Nigeria. The major Ibibio sub-groups include the Oron, Eket, Ibuno, and Annang and there are also some Ibibio communities in most of the fishing settlements along the estuary of the Cross River. The Efik people of Calabar are descendants of Ibibio people" (Esen, 1982).*

However, Annang, Efik and other related people see themselves as different people. The name Ibibio is a derivative of the Ibibio word "Ibio-ibio" literally meaning short or brief but does not in any way have anything to do with the height of the Ibibios. The name nevertheless was given to the people due the brief way of doing things attributed to them (Nssien, 1991). The name Ibibio identifies the largest subdivision of people living in southeastern fringe of Nigeria, in Akwa Ibom State, and it is generally accepted and used for both ethnic and linguistic descriptions. It is the candid observation of Talbort Amaury that the Ibibio people are probably the indigenous natives from whom most small tribes of Qua Ibom and Calabar are descended. He further stated that the early settlement of the Ibibio in the southeastern coastal area of Nigeria led to the development of a number of sub-clans, notably the Anang, the Efik, and the Oron. Talbot further suggested that by 7000 BC permanent settlement of some of the ethnic groups in Ibibio land had already begun and notes that the Ibibio language is probably the most ancient of all the semi Bantu languages (Talbort, 1969).

Geographical and Historical setting of Ibibio

The Ibibio people occupy the palm belt region in the southeastern part of Nigeria. The area is located in Southeastern Nigeria also known as Coastal Southeastern Nigeria or what is today known as the South South region (Abasiattai, 1987). The Ibibio people share boundaries with their Igbo neighbours in the Northwest hinterland and with the Efik Southeast ward. They also share the south-west coastal boundary with the Okpobo/Ijaw in Rivers State. They are bounded in the northeast by the cluster of Ejagham nation such as the Qua, Efut and Ekoi up to Southern Cameroon (Udo 1983). Prior to the existence of Nigeria as a Nation, the Ibibio people were self-governed group. They became a part of the Eastern Nigeria of Nigeria under British colonial rule. During the Nigerian Civil War, the Eastern region was split into three states. Southeastern State of Nigeria was where the Ibibios were located, one of the original twelve states of Nigeria) after Nigerian independence (Obio-Offiong, 1958). The Efik, Anaang, Oron, Eket and their kith and kin of the Ogoja District, are also members of the Southeastern State. The state (Southeastern State) was later renamed Cross Rivers State and in 1987, the military through decree No.24, carved out Akwa Ibom State from the then Cross Rivers State as a separate State (Abasiattai, 1987).

Socio-Political Setting of Ibibio

The Ibibio traditional society operates a "stateless society" which, according to Ekong (1988), is organized on the segmentary unilineal principles. Traditionally Ibibio society consists of communities that are made up of Large Families with blood affinity each ruled by their Constitutional and Religious Head known as the Obong Ikpaisong. The Obong Ikpaisong ruled

with the Mbong Ekpuk (Head of the Families) which together with the Heads of the Cults and Societies constitute the 'Afe or Asan or Esop Ikpaisong' (Traditional Council or Traditional Shrine or Traditional Court') (Ekong, 1983). In the traditional setting the Traditional Ruler's Councils lay down laws and regulations for the governance of all units. For the enforcement of these laws each Ibibio village has its own Ekpo or Ekpe Society. The decisions or orders of the Traditional Council or the Obong Ikpaisong were enforced by members of the Ekpo, Ekpe and/or Obon society who act as messengers of the spirits and the military and police of the Community (Oku, 1989). Ekpo members are always masked when performing their policing duties, and although their identities are almost always known, fear of retribution from the ancestors prevents most people from accusing those members who overstep their social boundaries, effectively committing police brutality. Membership is open to all Ibibio males, but one must have access to wealth to move into the politically influential grades (Nssien, 1991). The Obon society with its strong enticing traditional musical prowess, with popular acceptability, openly executes its mandates with musical procession and popular participation by members which comprises children, youth, adults and very brave elderly women. However, the principal women's society is the Ebre society, while the principal men's society is the Ekpo society. Ibibio society consists of villages, (a village consist of a number of families comprising the husband, his wife/wives, children and grandparents) each of which belongs to a larger unit known as the "Clan." The clan was often named after the founder of the first village in the area. The duties of a head include the settlement of disputes among members of the families, the villages or the clan (Nssien, 1991). He is not only a true mediator but also performs sacrifices at the ancestors' shrine for the well being of the families in the village. The society is mostly polygamous and each Ibibio village is independent and equal in status.

Religious Setting of Ibibio

Ibibio believe that there is a Supreme Being called Abasi who created all things including the gods (ndem) to who He gives charge of the different aspect of human affairs. However, Ibibio religion has of two dimensions, which centered on the pouring of libation, worship, consultation, communication and invocation of the God of Heaven (Abasi Enyong) and God of the Earth (Abasi Isong) by the Constitutional and Religious King/Head of a particular Ibibio Community who was known from the ancient times as the Obong-Ikpaisong (the word 'Obong Ikpaisong' directly interpreted means King of the Principalities of the Earth' or 'King of the Earth and the Principalities' or Traditional Ruler) (Faithman, 1999). The second dimension of Ibibio Religion centered on the worship, consultation, invocation, sacrifice, appeasement, etc. of the God of the Heaven (Abasi Enyong) and the God of the Earth (Abasi Isong)through various invisible or spiritual entities (Ndem) of the various Ibibio Division such as Etefia Ikono, Awa Itam, etc. The Priests of these spiritual entities (Ndem) were the Temple Chief Priests of the various Ibibio Divisions (Ekong, 1983). A particular Ibibio Division could consist of many inter-related autonomous communities or Kingdoms ruled by an autonomous Priest-King called Obong-Ikpaisong, assisted by Heads of the various Large Families (Mbong Ekpuk) which make up the Community. These have been the ancient political and religious system of Ibibio people from time immemorial. Tradition, interpreted in Ibibio Language, is 'Ikpaisong'. Tradition (Ikpaisong) in Ibibio Custom embodies the Religious and Political System (Faithman, 1999). The word 'Obong' in Ibibio language means 'Ruler, King, Lord, Chief, Head' and is applied depending on the Office concern. In reference to the Obong-Ikpaisong, the word 'Obong' means 'King' In reference to the Village Head, the word means 'Chief'. In reference to the Head of the Families (Obong Ekpuk), the word means 'Head' In reference to God, the word means 'Lord'. In reference to the Head of the various societies - e.g. 'Obong Obon', the word means 'Head or Leader' (Ekong, 1983).

Demographic Setting of Ibibio

The Ibibio tribe is the 4th largest ethnic group in Nigeria, and barely outnumbered by the Igbo neighbors (Noah, 1980). The Ibibio numbered over two million in the 1963 census and 3.76 million based on census demographic data of 1991(Adamu, 1978). Ibibio can be divided into the following six major divisions: Riverain (Efik), Northern (Enyong), Southern, (Eket), Delta (Andoni-Ibeno), Western (Anang), and Eastern (Ibibio proper). These main groups are further divided into groups that are identifiable by geographical location. The Efik reside mostly in the Calabar Province, and are divided into Enyong (Aro), Calabar, Itu, and Eket groups. The Riverain area also includes the Cameroons, inhabited by the Kumba and Victoria groups (Udo, 1983). The Eyong are divided into the Enyong (Aro) and Ikot Ekpene of Calabar Province and the Bende division of Owerri Province. The Eket division resides in Calabar Province. The Adoni-Ibeno are divided into the Eket and Opopo of Calabar Province. The Anang are divided into the Abak and Ikot Ekpene of Calabar Province, and the Aba of Owerri Province (Northrop, 1973). The Ibibio proper are divided into the Uyo, Itu, Eket, Ikot Ekpene, Enyong (Aro), Abak, Opopo, and Calabar groupings (Uya, 1984).

Libation in Ibibio Liturgy and Worldview

The act of pouring of libation is central to Ibibio religio-cultural life and features prominently in all political, social, economic and religious activities. The performance of libation involves a ritual that many Ibibio perform on a variety of occasions—some daily, others seasonal; some low, others high; some serious, others playful; some highly formal others informal. One main feature of the African Religion is the pouring of Libation during worship. When libation is poured, the spirit of God, divinities and that of the ancestors are invoked and this is the African way of praying to God. In that regard, the people are employing and portraying their own culture and tradition to serve God. Libation in Ibibio worldview is a magico-religious ritual that entails pouring liquid on the ground, or sprinkling it on ritual participants or sacred objects, as a means of communication between human and spiritual beings (Atakpo, 1988). The liquids used and the conditions of the ritual vary by geographical, ethnic, and temporal contexts.

In traditional Ibibio cultures, libations accompany sacrifices, rites of passage, and prayers. In litany proceedings, the participants recall the meditative links between spiritual beings and people. Libations are generally intended to earn the favor of supernatural beings or spirits (Udoh, 1987). In traditional Ibibio religion, (as in ancient religions, such as those of the Babylonians and the Assyrians), libations could be poured as separate offerings to spirits, gods, and God, through the ancestors. In traditional belief, ancestors dwell in the ground as masters of the land. Participants in the libation believe that the ancestral spirits can effectively receive water, milk, honey, oil, beer, spirit (hot drink), liquor or palm wine or other beverages as the occasion demands through the ground. Therefore, libations are poured onto the earth through natural or artificial cracks, openings, or holes. The preferred sites for religious libations are gravesides, alters, homestead shrines, and sacred groves. The main objective of libations in indigenous Ibibio religious and social contexts is to appease ancestral and other spirits, thus encouraging their continued favor and good will. In Ibibio tradition, the foremost rationale for libation ritual is to give honor and thanks to God Almighty the Supreme Being for His benevolence, then to pay homage and respect to the ancestors who are held in deep reference and even worshipped, our grandparents and great grandparents. During the libation, we ask their permission, guidance and blessings for the event we are about to take part in. Libation rituals are also performed in recognition of the living leaders (those people whose activities make positive impacts on the community) for their contributions and good leadership in the community. In a general sense, libation rituals are carried out in order to honour the leaders of yesterday with hope for the leaders of tomorrow.

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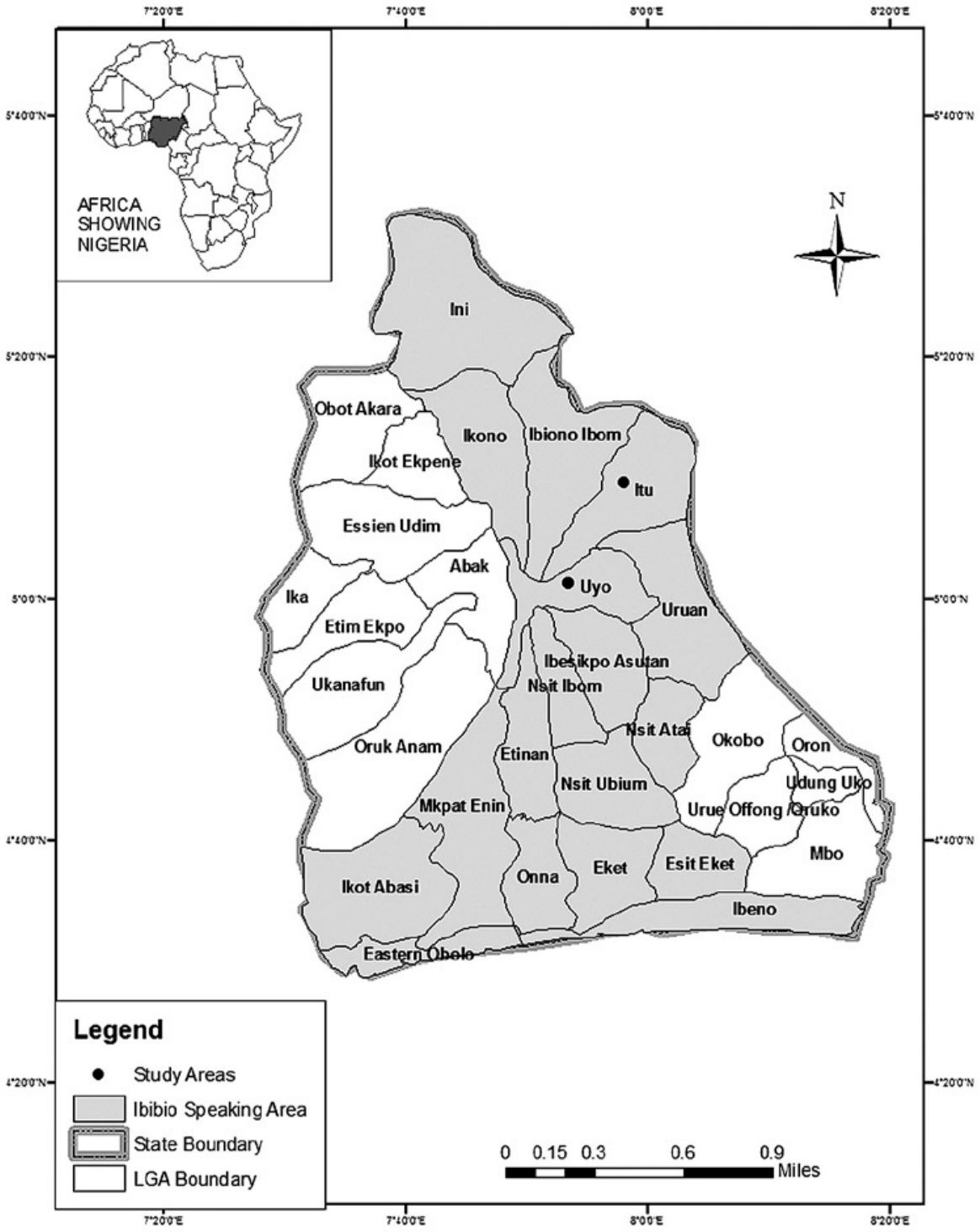


Figure 1: Map of the study area

Such rituals are also meant to propitiate spirits that cause disease and other calamities (Udoh, 1987). The libations in Ibibio viewpoint are therefore intended to prevent illness or misfortune, protect human beings, and facilitate curing. In Ibibio culture, the ritual of pouring libation is an essential ceremonial tradition and a way of giving service to the ancestors. Ancestors in this culture is not only respected, but also invited to participate in all public functions and events (as are also the gods). In this circumstance, prayers are offered in the form of libations, calling the

ancestors to attend and take action. The ritual is generally performed by an elder, the head of the family, a cultic functionary, a title chief, and/or a nominee with traditional know-how. Typically, some traditional wine like local gin popularly known as "ufofop", and palm wine are often used for the libation, and the libation ritual is usually accompanied by an invitation (and invocation) to the ancestors and gods (Udoh, 1987).

Execution of Libation in Ibibio

Religious leader in African traditional religion perform diverse roles in the course of carrying out their religious duties. One of such religious functions is that of talking to the spirits (deities, divinities, ancestors) through the process of pouring of libation. The dispensing of libation is a special role carried out by a priest known as "oku idem". An "oku idem" in Ibibio must not be a young person. He must be aged 45 years and above. In addition, he must have initiated into secret societies in the land including "Ekpe", "Ekpo", "Obon", "Ekong" and others. Hierarchically, there is also the chief priest (akwa oku idem or oku inam) who officiates in state functions. He must be an elderly priest who has attained the age of 65 years and above and who have also initiated into "inam" cult in the land. The function of administering libation in any public function is carried by these specialists. However, the performance of libation and the officiant of the ritual in Ibibio land depend on the occasion that warrants the rite.

Libation and Invocation

The traditional liturgy of libation requires some element of worship or ritual practice of inviting the spirits. This simply put, is the act of pouring some liquid to the spirits which is accompanied with prayers. Citation for deities is evident during libation rites in all the following occasions: Traditional marriage rites, burial rites, communal and family settlement of disputes, initiation rites, sharing of properties (either family or communal), foundation laying ceremonies, coronation ceremonies, and installation of new governments to mention just but a few. During these rituals, libation is poured on the ground before the shrine or on the emblems of the divinity. The offerer must be in a sound state of mind in order not to make any mistake in the presentation. The observance is usually referred to as "adue ukot akpa itong" meaning any mistake committed is always costly, sometime resulting in dead. This is because the Ibibio people believe that "ekpo akpa anyen ikpaha utong" which means that the spirit is alert to everything happening on earth. They do not see but hears everything. Also, the spirit will not take it nonchalantly if she is slighted during the presentation. Performing libation rite is equivalent to embarking on a journey. It is tricky, risky, and procedurally intricate. That is why the people are always happy and welcome the offerer back to his seat whenever he successfully accomplishes a particular task of this offering sacrifice to the spirit.

The significance of libation lies on the belief that since the liquid softens the ground, it symbolically opens the way to the presence of the divine power or powers so that they may favourably treat the offerer. As a dominant element, incantation and invocation is a common practice. Invocation is the act of addressing or calling upon the supreme deity or divinities as well as the spirits to respond and participate in the affairs of the people. It usually takes place during the pouring of libation (Adedeji, 1971). As the people pours the libation on the ground, the officiant pours the wine and addresses the divinities, ancestors and spirits by name, attributes and praise appellations and thereafter invites them to attend and accepts the worship. In some places, a gong is sounded to create an atmosphere of silence or solemnity. The confidence and hope of the people, their belief in and sense of dependence on the divine beings are all made manifest. The capability of the divine beings to supply the needs of man and the fact of the general relationship between God and men are made evident. Sometimes, the officiant uses a song which leads to ecstasy, where the devotee is believed to be possessed by the spirit of the divinity. In this state, the officiant may become the mouthpiece of the divinity, taking messages from him to the people.

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Libation Presentation in a case of settlement of dispute in Ediene Clan Council:

Everybody is seated, before the commencement of business, the clan head invites the "oku idem" libation priest to perform the rite. He gets up pick a tumbler and turns in a good quantity of the local gin known as "ufofop", he then walks away from the table to where he can see the sky, then he starts with the citation of the names of the deities: "Abasi Onyong, Abasi Isong. Etime ototod Abasi ndien anye atuak isong. Ese idim ndom, udi Ediene, abam adep, Etefia Ikono, etok idim Ibiaku, udooh Oku, anantia Ibiono, edoho ekid, anyan Nsit, atakpa ndem Uruan (above are names of some major divinities in Ibibio). While mentioning each divinity, some quantity of wine is poured in acknowledgement. **Recital:** Aahg! Mme ette mi mbok eda ye ami, endat eka, endat enyong. Ette unen adia itin, eka unen adia itin, nyin ukim atipe ukim, ukpa atipe ukpa. Mmamana ndikut inuho ebot, idoho mmamana ebot aman. Mfin ibohoke mi, ikedi adidiodiong, ikedihe adibiabiat. Edue mkpo obuma ase onyong. Oduok ntong ken tong ekene. Owo idoho abasi. Afaha ikide Afaha ikpa ekong. Aniekan Abasi, Mbok, imidi utumo mbufo. Ekudaka ekpong owo. Ediwana ye nyin. Se anie ufok ibok ano ibok ke ibok adia. Edinwong mmin mi o!!!, edidia mkpo. Mbok edida ye nyin (Essien, Participant Observation, 2012).

English Translation of the recital:

Please our fathers please, take me go and take back. Father chicken eats from refuse dump, mother chicken eat from refuse dump, iroko begets iroko, cedar begets cedar. I was born to see the goat bends and walk, not when I was born before goat was born. Today, we gather to repair, not to destroy. He who offends the thunder watches the sky. Whatever is your action, the reaction comes back to you. Man is not God, brother and "imaan" defends a brother in danger, who surpasses God? We have come upon thy feet. Leave us not. No one can defeat God. Please, we have come to consult you, do not forsake us, come and share with us. Today we are present here. Come and share with us. Whenever I mention your name, I must give you wine to drink. Come and drink and eat. Whatever the herbalist gets is what he gives to his juju. Come and drink, come and eat. Please come and eat with us. At this point, the recital is concluded and the remaining part of the drink offering will be poured by the officiant with two hands to show respect. And then walks back to his seat while the audience or those that gathered would say, Amen! Well done for talking, welcome. The chairman of the occasion then takes over the case settlement and proceedings (Essien. Participant Observation, 2012).

Libation and Citation of Ibibio Deities

In addition to historical allusion in libation, a libation in Ibibio tradition recognizes the origin of the deities and their functions. Several deities in the traditional pantheon are usually mentioned together with some Ibibio clan names. However, the recital of libation text in Ibibio is done hierarchically beginning from the resident or landlord divinity to the community, societal and the national or general divinity. This is to enable homage or recognition to be duly accorded and protocol to be appropriately observed. A typical libation liturgy in Ediene, Ikono local government area of Akwa Ibom state involves the invocation of the following dieties during the libation sacrament: (a) Ese Idim Ndom, (b) Udi Ediene, (c) Abam adep, (d) Etok Idim Ibiaku, (e) Etefia Ikono, these are the major divinities from Ediene in Ikono. Upon the invocation of these divinities, the deities of the neighboring communities will also be invited. They include: "Anantia Ibiono", "Udo Oku", "Edoho Eket", "Anyan Nsit", "Esihi Etebi", "Atakpa Ndem Uruan" and others before "Ibom" which is the general deity for the Ibibio people (Ekpo-Ndueso, 2012). The communal element in the ritual is manifest in the basic fact that pouring libation is almost always a group event, not an individual affair (Oreh, 1978).

Relatedly, the performance of libation ritual is conceived as a poly-vocal utterance, not a solo presentation. The leaders engaged in the recital are always in a literal sense speaking for ”us” and “we, instead of “I” or himself. His is the embodiment of a group voice, of collective aspirations of the people. The strongest support for this conception comes from the attitudes to commit error or omission that are displayed in the course of performance (Abrahamson, 1951). If, for example, the elder forgets to mention a certain ancestor while recalling a particular genealogy, any resulting retributions will fall on all of us, not just on him. The consequences of the failure or success for that matter is understood as socially dispersed. In Ibibio tradition, it is often said, “We pour libation together”. Even though certain individuals are recognized for their eloquence and therefore may be or are always asked to perform more often than others, and even though some understand better the reasons for the specific gathering, the elder’s role is conceived with the community as a whole in mind (Kilson, and Kpele, 1971).

Performance of a libation ritual in Ibibio culture often features interjections, some quiet, some not so quiet, some restricted to a monosyllabic exclamation of approval, agreement or dissent, others involving the shouting of whole phrases to amplify certain sentiments. Ululating is not uncommon on elevated occasions; on others, on-lookers —who are not merely on-lookers— will affirm the truth of what is being said, or reinforce the wish that evil forces not visit us on this occasion. Participants in effect re-perform the elder’s spontaneously generated text, and they do so selectively. The effect, then, is of a dual, triple or multiple performances. The priest’s text is notionally complete, while the others are necessarily incomplete as material expression. The mode is participatory, the conception thoroughly communal.

Extra-ordinary approach to libation communication

This is commonly known as the extra-mundane modes of communication. It is classified as belonging to the traditional communication system taking place between the living and the dead, or between the living and the extra-terrestrial world (Wilson 1990: 282). Professor Desmund Wilson, one of the most renowned Nigerian scholars today in the field of trado-modern communication holds that extramundane mode of communication on the surface usually seems uni-directional but participants at religious crusades, prayer sessions, rituals and other religious and pseudo-spiritual activities know there is often a form of feedback which may come through intrapersonal processes, physical revelations or magical and other-worldly verbalizations. This however explains why in traditional libation rituals in Ibibio, acceptance of the meal or offered item by the spirit is required after invocation and presentation. The signal usually in Ibibio culture is the appearance of the vulture bird and perching in a close proximity.

Wilson further maintains that the extra-mundane mode of communication make use of specialists such as spiritualists, witchdoctors, priests, and oracles who investigate on happenings both in the society in which they operate and beyond. They are believed to have some extraordinary powers and their revelations are believed to be reliable. In this respect, every instruction or information they pass on to the members of that society or community are treated as valid. Cases that may call for investigations through the extra-mundane include the following: Disappearance of a child in mysterious circumstances, abnormal deaths within a family, causes of constant accidents believed to be uncommon within a given family or community tradition, poor harvest (sacrifices are made after consultations with the chief priest of the community shrine), finding out a visitor's intention (whether with a good intention or not). In this case, colanut is used, broken and the ancestral spirit called upon to assist in finding solution to the existing problem, Incessant illnesses and abnormal behaviours of some children (constantly attributed to "Abiku or "Ogbanje" in Yoruba and Ibolands respectively) (Achebe, 1958). Communication in the extra-mundane prominently features the

incantatory and invocatory modes of communication. Incantatory communication deals specifically with rituals especially involving libation, sacrifice, vision and many of the forms of meta-physical communication which have a lot to do with the spirit beings.

CONCLUSION

This paper has demonstrated that libation rituals in Ibibio culture provide a framework which the people use religious language to express their dependence on their creator by means of rituals. As an important component of spirituality and worship, libation, along with sacrifice, acts as a medium of trade between human beings and ancestors. This ritual is used to demonstrate the people's seriousness in seeking spiritual assistance (Mbiti, 1990). Ritual communication involving libation among the Ibibio expresses their understanding of what it means to live and to die. The analysis also showed that Ibibio people believe that libation rituals influences the deities, divinities, ancestors and other spiritual beings, to secure desirable results, namely salvation or wellbeing for their communities. These offerings of drink and food are perceived by the people as ways in which the ancestors can be convinced to listen to their prayers and traffic them to the supernatural. Libation rituals for instance cause the divinities to be benevolent towards human beings. The content of traditional libations rituals therefore, clearly demonstrates that libation is a traditional religious ritual which communicates in its liturgical elements massages of support to the living from the extra mundane. The modern use of traditional libation rituals indicates that human beings are enabled to live through the truth of language embedded in their culture. The trend portends a prospect of a new cultural transformation in contemporary Ibibio indigenous knowledge.

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