

Philosophical Significance of Myths and Symbols: Zangbeto Cult

Maduabuchi Dukor

Abstract: *Zan-gbeto cult reflects the cosmology of Ogu people of Badagry Local Government of Nigeria. Although, the language and the set-up of this rich traditional heritage has some unique features as distinct from so many others like Egungun (Yoruba), the Eyo (Yoruba), Muo (masquerade cult in Igbo land) and Cargo cult, Azande, and so on, there are some fundamental affinities in their thought process. Consequently, although this study concentrates on Zan-gbeto tradition, I am also convinced that my assumptions and conclusions are also valid, at least, to a large extent with regard to African Culture generally.*

Keywords: *Zan-gbeto, Cult, Africa, Philosophy, Theism, Festival and Tradition*

Zan-gbeto tradition is an epitome or expression of religious humanism and philosophy. The festival and cult, named after the sea god of peace, is embraced by members of all religious denominations among the people of the Badagry Local Government area of Nigeria. The leaders and chiefs of this tradition are traditionalists as well as the Christians and Moslems. This partly accounts for religious harmony and understanding among the Badagry people of Nigeria. During *the* festival, the supreme deity is called upon through the sea god or spirit, *Zan-gbeto* to protect and hear the people. For this reason, among others therefore, my concepts of polymonotheism,¹*Theistic Panpsychism* and Humanistic Theism² for African metaphysical world-view are also valid for *Zan-gbeto* culture. The tradition, as a religion, tradition and philosophy of a people is explainable and rational in its context. The philosophical significance of this tradition is its religiosity which underlines the African philosophy. It is also important to note that this tradition, in theory, belief and practice, is the same with similar traditions among the peoples in the west-coast of Africa namely the *Ijaws*, the *Itsekiris* and *Ilajes* of Nigerian, the Ewes of Togo and Ghana and virtually all the people inhabiting the edge of Atlantic Ocean in Africa.

Religiosity of African Culture

Zan-Gbeto cult is fundamentally religious. This is precisely because African people have high religious consciousness: they were extra-ordinary religious. Old African administrators acknowledged this and so referred to them as “incurably religious people”³. An average African man is highly idealistic and this is what accounts for his religiosity. Suffice it to say that religion permeates all aspects of African culture. The people think in religious terms and this is noticeable in their music, dance, art, architecture and so on. According to Walter Rodney, “African dance and art were almost invariably linked with a religious world-outlook in one way or another.”⁴ And to John S. Mbiti, “the individual is immersed in religious participation which starts from birth and continues after his death. For him, therefore, and for the larger community of which he is part, to live is to be caught up in a religious drama... Both that world and practically all his activities in it, are seen and experienced through a religious understanding and meaning”⁵ Religion is the matrix with which aspects and elements of African culture can be explained. There is hardly a distinction between the secular and the sacred. *Zan-gbeto* cult and its festival is therefore immersed in a religious drama.

Equally religious are the ontologies and metaphysics of the Africans. Everything is defined from its relations with the supernatural forces. In African ontology, we have God, gods, spirits, man, animals and plants, phenomena and objects, space and time. God is the highest force which creates, controls, and informs others and man is the center of this ontology. “The animals, plants and material phenomenon and objects constitute the environment in which man lives, provides a means of existence, and, if need be, man establishes a mystical relationship with them.”⁶

Traditions, cults and festivals in Africa establish or affirm the people's mystical relations with phenomenon or gods. Cults and festivals, therefore, are characterized by a celebration of life, humanism, universalism, symbolism and transcendentalism.

Ogu People and Zan-Gbeto

Ogu people occupy a wide and aesthetically beautiful expanse of land adjacent to the sea border between Nigeria and the Republic of Benin. "Badagry is on the edge of land, the edge of the Atlantic ocean and shares its boundary with the then kingdom of Port-Novo (Now Republic of Benin)"⁷. *Ogu* people include not only the people that live in Badagry town but also people from neighbouring villages that made up the Badagry local government area, who also were the inheritors of *Zan-gbeto* tradition. These people are peace-loving. Thus their disposition could be partly accountable by the *sea god of peace* for whom and in whose honour a festival is celebrated annually. Although, there are Yorubas, *Ogus*, and Ghanaians as settlers in Badagry and environs, the *Ogu* were the people that carried the *Zan-gbeto* tradition from Republic of Benin to Badagry Local Government area of Nigeria. According to Chief K. A. Amosu an *Ogu* man from *Ajido*, an initiated member of *Zan-gbeto* cult, a retired major in the Nigerian Army and once the Chief Security Officer of Lagos State University said that the first place the *Ogu* people settled in Nigeria with the cult was at *Ajido*, his native community. According to him, immediately the people arrived in *Ajido*, there arose a disagreement between two brothers of the ruling family over who was the rightful person to be the *Oba* or traditional ruler of the *Ogus*. As one of them inadvertently went back to their original home in Republic of Benin to get permission for his *obaship*, the other one swiftly got the support of the people with him in Nigeria and installed himself as the *Oba*. The result was that when the one who left for Republic of Benin came back, he heard of his brother's installation as the *Oba*, and since two kings cannot control a domain, he decided to settle in Badagry town and introduced *Zan-gbeto* cult. The history of *Zan-gbeto* can therefore be traced to the original home of the *Ogu* people which is Republic of Benin. However, today, the *Ogu* people have sparsely settled in Badagry, *Ajara*, *Ajido*, *Shoki*, *Ere* and *Vawhe* of Nigeria where they celebrate and maintain the tradition. These areas constitute "an eastward extension of *Gu*-speaking, *Ogu* people who are to be found in fairly large concentrations in the Republic of Benin"⁸. An interesting phenomenon in African is that people of fundamentally different cultures could settle in a land and interact. A case in point here is the interaction between the *Awori*-speaking Yoruba people and the *Gu*-speaking *Ogu* people. The *Zan-gbeto* tradition, though *Ogu* in origin has been able to survive in the mist of other cultures of Yoruba origins like the *Egungun* and the *Ayo*. The interaction has been going on against potentially formidable odds like language barriers. It is important to note that language of any people is a *sine-qua-non* to understanding the logic of their thought. Funso Akere says,

*"Although the Gu. Language is distinct from any of the dialects of Yoruba language; there have been extensive interaction between Ogu and Yoruba people in Badagry. The interaction between the Awori-speaking Yoruba people of Lagos and the Gu-speaking Ogu people of Badagry Local Government area and parts of Dahomy (Republic of Benin) has a fairly long history... It was one which involved both linguistic and socio-cultural contacts"*⁹

The pertinent question then is; why all this linguistic and socio-cultural contacts without any of the culture dying off for the survival of the other in accordance with Darwin's theory of natural selection?¹⁰ What might partly be accountable for this is the similarity in the fundamental thought processes of African cultural groupings. E. G. Parvinder acknowledges this fact;

*The filling up of ethnographic detail produces an impression of chaos where there is in fact only variation on a few themes. African societies can be broadly classified into a limited number of economic and political types and the difference between the most varied African tribes is slight when compared with the difference between the most highly specialized African Societies and developed industrial societies. By comparison, African tribal societies are relatively infferentiated and homogenous"*¹¹

Another phenomena which might account for the interaction between different cultures in Africa are acculturation and syncretism. Acculturation is “a process of intercultural borrowing marked by the continuous transmission of traits and elements between diverse people resulting to a new and blended pattern”¹². *Zan-gbeto* tradition might have acquired some degree of acculturation since its arrival to Badagry because some traits of Yoruba culture might have permeated into it and vice-versa. It is undeniable that language is a formidable factor in the dissemination and sustaining of culture and it is not arguable that the universality of English language is the greatest force in the process of universalization of European culture. Therefore, the extent to which *Ogu* people absorbed or learned Yoruba language will determine the extent they have absorbed Yoruba culture into their corpus of tradition. According to Professor Funso Akere,

*Linguistically, the Gii-language is still spoken extensively in Badagry and the surrounding villages, although a sizable proportion of Ogu people are bilingual in Gu and Yoruba. Socio-linguistically the contact between Ogu and Yoruba cannot but have some effect on the Gu language which has a minority status in comparison with Yoruba.*¹³

If “Linguistic behaviour has always been taken as an index of the socio-cultural characteristics of a people”¹⁴ and some *Ogu* people are bilingual in *Gu* and Yoruba languages, then their culture (including *Zan-gbeto*) may likely have some Yoruba cultural influence. It is not entirely strange to discover that a new and different culture might emerge out of the mixing of two cultures. This is called syncretism. Another factor which might have affected African cultures is the process of Transculturation. Transculturation is “the modification of a primitive culture resulting from prolonged contact with a more advanced culture”¹⁵. There is little doubt that *Zan-Gbeto* corpus of tradition might have been affected somehow by Christianity and Islam. Those members of *Zan-gbeto* cult include Christians and Moslems and, that Badagry was the gate-way to Christianity to Nigeria buttress this fact. But whatever the extent of Acculturation and Transculturation might have taken place in relation to *Zan-gbeto* tradition, the basic elements of the tradition are still preserved intact against the phenomenon of enculturation. Enculturation is always negative to a native culture. “It is the process by which individual learns the traditional content of a culture and assimilates its practices and values”¹⁶. Enculturation so far in Africa is the process by which western culture completely annihilated the indigenous cultures of the Africans with little or no room for their survival. However, the *Zan-gbeto* corpus of tradition consistently and tenaciously has remained immuned to encultural attack.

***Zan-Gbeto* Cult**

According to legends and oral tradition, *Zan-Gbeto* is a spirit which came out of the sea *Ohu* and settled on *Ogu* land, adjacent the sea border in the Republic of Benin. According to the myth, when the spirit evolved from the sea, it brought for the people good things and omens like good health, coconut, technology for fishing and building houses and other essentials of life. An evidence of this spirit having come from the sea is shown by clusters of coconut trees which aesthetically beautified the sea beach-lines in *Ogu* land of Republic of Benin and Badagry area of Nigeria. It seems, therefore, that the good things in Badagry and *Ogu* land like coconut, and peace are, for the people, a sign of the ever-presence of this spirit. *Zan-gbeto* spirit, now elevated to the status of a god, is sacred and esoteric, and it has mystical relations with the people. It is believed that it appears on different occasions and times as circumstances and need arise. *Zan-gbeto* cult, should therefore be a kind of charismatic movement inspired by the spirit of the sea.

Man, from the earliest times, conceived and believed in the idea of spirit. The whole idea of belief in spirit is called *spiritism*. Spiritism is rooted in idealism and religion. Its frame of reference is unempirical and immaterial. Nevertheless, the Africans were so religious because they needed to be idealistic to justify their existence in the world. Spiritism has informed and engendered many movement, societies and religions in the history of mankind. It has given rise to *Zan-gbeto* cult just as it has occasioned Christian Pentecostal movements, and oriental cults which from the first century before Christianity spread rapidly across the Greek and Roman world. Spirit of *Zan-gbeto* is believed to be as holy as the Holy Spirit that descended on the disciples of Jesus on the Pentecostal day. For according to Acts of the Apostles, “when the day of Pentecost had come, they were all gathered in one place... And they were all filled with the holy spirit and began to

... speak in other tongues as the spirit gave them utterance”¹⁷ The *Zan-gbeto*'s spirit possession is common among the people in their agricultural, cultural and craft practices.

The church or the movement which began in Jerusalem and spread to Samaria and Judea as a result of the out-pouring of the Holy-spirit is similar to the movement or cult which is now associated with *Zan-gbeto*, the holy spirit of the sea. “The Christian church in the course of her long history has witnessed out-bursts of movement whose members claimed to be specially imbued with the holy-spirit”¹⁸. Examples include the montanist movement in the third century; Afro-Christian churches like the Aladura churches, Celestial church, Brotherhood of cross and star and so on. Africans hold a special belief in spiritism. According to Bolaji Idowu, “spirits, according to African belief are ubiquitous; there is no area of the earth, any object or creature which has not a spirit of its own or which cannot be unhabited by a spirit...”¹⁹. “All waters are places of power; wells and springs; rivers and streams”²⁰. The idea of associating some powers with rivers or seas is common to many cultures. Christians use water for baptism. The spirit of river *Tano* of Ghana is one of the chief spirits of that country and the people of *Songhay*, on sundays, have popular drummings and dances where people are possessed by river-spirit called *Zin* or *Jinn*.²¹ The great rivers of East and South Africa are also associated with spiritual beings.²⁰ The *Ogu* people believe in the plurality of spirits as well as in the Supreme Being. Like many African people, they believe also in the Supreme being who control other lesser spirits, and for that reason I described African culture as polymonotheistic. Again since Africans believe that there is life in everything as well as that the supreme deity exists, I again described African culture as *Theistic Pansychism*. Therefore my explanation of African culture in terms of *polymonotheism* and *theistic panpsychism* are subscribable to *Zan-gbeto* corpus of tradition.

Zan-gbeto is a cultural as well as a religious institution with the initiated community of elders at the helms of affairs. “Non-initiated cannot know anything about the esoteric activities of *Zan-gbeto* and cannot accompany or address *Zan-gbeto* anyhow”²². *Zan-gbeto* usually appears to the people as masquerades. And there can be as many *Zan-gbeto* masquerades as possible, each and every one of them representing the spirit, *Zan-gbeto*. *Zan-gbeto* (in the masquerade form) is built of raffia leaves called *zanho* in order to conceal the spirit of *Zan-gbeto*. It should be noted that members of *Zan-gbeto* cult or a congregation of its followers are also known as *Zan-gbetos*. The cult is made-up of elderly people who inherited this tradition from their forbears. There are various names and ranks for the elders, according to their order of importance. The overall head and leader of *Zan-gbeto* in *Ogu* land is called *Azogan*, who is the highest *Zan-gbeto* chief in his village. The next in rank and authority is *Zangan* who is the leader of the various *Zan-gbeto*. There is also the *Zannukonfo* who is the leader of the night groups of *Zan-gbetos*. The *Azogan* presides over *Zan-gbeto* meetings at night. Like the *Misthrasif* and *Isis* of the ancient Greek and Roman world, *Zan-gbeto* cult requires new members to undergo a series of initiation. All male members of the communities can be initiated. Initiated members cannot and should not divulge anything about the initiating ceremony to non-members. Failure to adhere to this rule always carries or attract severe fines or punishment called *ozan*. This *Ozan* is the process of afflicting punishment on anybody who goes contrary to the rules and regulations of the cult. The fine is normally a goat or pig as the case may be, a basketful of *paps*, an alcoholic drink (*Ogogoro*) and so on, depending on the weight of the offence. Failure of the defaulter to produce all these things could result to his death. One who wishes to be initiated as a member will first of all consult an initiated elderly person who will present his case before the *Azogan*. The person to be initiated is normally asked to provide certain initiation materials. This varies from village to village. In Ajara community or village, near Badagry town one will be asked to provide the following; a bottle of gin *Ahan*, ₦60.00, a bundle of raffia leaves, firewood (to be burnt at night), a keg of palm-wine and so on. On being initiated, there are certain secret and esoteric rites and rituals that are performed in the midnight. On being initiated, one will be given *Zanyin*, another name with which he will be called at nights to prevent non-initiated person from identifying the person in the midnight. In the night the person being initiated will be taken to a shrine where certain rites, rituals and ceremonies will be performed. A newly initiated member may not sleep throughout the night for nine consecutive days and must always be seen at the common centre or headquarter known as *zanvari*. Initiated members have certain taboos, rules and regulation to observe in respect of the *Zan-gbeto* cult. Alto there are various esoteric signs and languages of communication used by initiated members and which non-initiated cannot comprehend.

Zan-gbeto cult is not only religious, it is also social. It does perform certain social action for the benefit of the society. In this direction, its primary function is to safe-guard the village against evils, armed robbers, buglers or invaders and to help create peaceful atmosphere in *Ogu* land. In *Ogu* land, it serves as a law enforcement agent and could be referred to as the village police. *Zan-gbeto* could arrest any inmate of the community who goes contrary to the village morality and code of conduct. In Ajara community, near Badagry town, strangers who enter into the town at certain hours between 11.00 p.m and 5a.m. are interrogated. Such strangers would be arrested by *Zan-gbeto* and will be taken to the *Zanvari* (headquarters of *Zan-gbeto*) where the culprit or wanderer would be fined or punished by the *Azogans* and *Zangans*. In Ajara if there are public disturbances of any form, the perpetrators would be arrested by *Zan-gbeto* and taken to Bale (Chief) house where they would be punished. For example, if a man beats his wife and his wife cries to the hearing of their neighbours, *Zan-gbeto* would arrest the man and impose on him a fine of ₦20.00 and a bottle of gin. This is believed to serve as a deterrent to others who might fight their wife. Also *Zan-gbeto* could be seen as a means of entertainment in *Ogu* land. *Zan-gbeto* appears before the people and displays or performs many actions before the people in the public place called *Hunto* on some occasions like burial ceremony of important *Zan-gbeto* chiefs and personalities and *Zan-gbeto* festival days *Hunwe*.

Zan-Gbeto Festival

Zan-gbeto festival is an avenue through which the *Ogu* people express their religious tolerance and humanism. Africans generally believe a lot on this planet. Dr. Nnamdi Azikwe, the first President of Nigeria was only affirming African philosophy of life when he said; “I am not in a hurry to leave this world because it is the only planet I know”²³. And in his odyssey, he said again, “In the course of my life odyssey, I have been convinced that I must be idealistic to justify my existence as a human being, but I must also be material istic to adapt to the concatenations of a materialistic world”²⁴. These quotations of the great Zik of Africa are an aspect of African world-view. E. G. Parrinders also argued, “The African thinks of this world as light, warm, and living, to which the dead are only too glad to return from the underworld of darkness and cold. This is the best of all possible worlds; the African attitude is world affirming not world renouncing. It is therefore a punishment to be detained in Hades, and childlessness is a curse because it blocks the channel of rebirth”²⁵. Africans believe in the celebration of life especially in honour of the Supreme Being, gods and spirits who can make and unmake. They are, *ipso facto*, transcendentalists and humanists. Belief in God and Man is what I have described as Theistic Humanism. Africans are also Universalists or wholistic which is an affirmation of their Humanism, and which underscores their philosophy of oneness and brotherhood of Mankind. In short, Africans are cosmic optimists and not cosmic pessimists. Their cosmic optimism, humanism and celebration of life are expressed in many ways which include the festivals.

Zan-gbeto festival is an annual festival usually held in honour of *Zan-gbeto*, the sea god of peace and good things. The festival is usually a great occasion for the *Ogu* people. Because there is no fixed month or days for the festival, it varies from village to village among the *Ogu* people. In the past, *Zan-gbeto* festival used to take place for months. But nowadays the festival last for a week or weeks as fixed or decided by *Zan-gbeto* Chiefs and the Bales. In Ajara village, the festival takes place once in a year in any chosen month. However with the emergence of modernity the festival rarely takes place in some years. On the first day of the festival, the people normally perform certain rites and rituals with perhaps strangled hens and cocks and pray to their god or spirit (who is believed to be servant of the supreme being) to give them children, safety, good-health and so on. This attitude is what I conceptualized as *Theistic Humanism*. They also go to the four corners of their village and make some incantations for the security of their village. After that they go back to the Bale or the Chief to get permission for the festival to start.

The *Zan-gbeto* masquerades go to houses where they dance and receive gifts on the second day, the *Zan-gbeto* masquerades appear at the public place *Hunto* where they perform dances and music for public entertainment. During this time *Zan-gbeto* masquerades from all parts of *Ogu* land are usually in attendance. At the arena native women known as *Yalode* normally sing and dance, following the *Zan-gbeto* at its back and shouting *Azoo! Azoo!!*, while drums of different sizes and rhythms are master fully and intricately handled by professional traditional drummers and musicians. It is also an occasion for the *Zan-gbetos* to engage in competition in areas like

dancing, performance of different weird and miraculous actions with their knowledge of occult and higher sciences. In the arena, *Zan-gbeto* could give birth to a young *Zan-gbeto*. *Zan-gbeto*'s body *Zanho* could be set ablaze and could be seen to have been apparently burnt to ashes, when all of a sudden the ashes would be seen to have again regenerated into a full and physically existing *Zan-gbeto*. *Zan-gbeto* could also change into a snake and often *Zan-gbeto* power was shown when about twenty people could not pull it down or out of its spot with a rope. Also *Zan-gbeto*'s housing (that is the raffia leaves known as *Zanho*) could be uncovered without people seeing any human being inside, thereby confirming to the people that inside the raffia leaves is a spirit that is invisible. Many other feats are performed with rituals and rites involving the straggling of cocks, goats and so on.

Rationality of *Zan-Gbeto* Tradition

Zan-gbeto cult is a tradition and also religion. It is religiously important to the people. *Zan-gbeto* god is believed to be giving meaning and direction to the life of the people. The belief is backed up by myths and rituals. Some of these rituals and cultic activities are usually displayed during the festival. These rituals and customs generate phenomena which apparently defy common sense and scientific explanation. Take for example; burning of a *Zan-gbeto* masquerade and its eventual regeneration into a full and normal masquerade is wonderful; also the changing of the masquerade into a snake is equally perplexing, so on. Explaining *Zan-gbeto* cult is just like explaining cargo cult or *Azande* belief in witchcraft because the same concepts and thought process are involved. It seems to me that similar cultic activities are involved in Melanesian and African cultural inheritance which Levi-Bruhl allegedly described as prelogical. It follows therefore that criticism of cargo cult for example amounts to a criticism of *Zan-gbeto* cult. Critics of African and Melanesian traditions have always proceeded from the premises that they were all religious and primitive thoughts. *Azande* belief, cargo cult and *Zan-gbeto* belief are to the white man savage ignorance as against the white man's civilized knowledge. This savage ignorance has been variously described as "not rational" and 'other than rational' while the civilized knowledge is rational. Critics of cargo-cult argue that it is irrational and magico-religious. According to Raymond Firth, it is an attempt to "create new illusions to counter disillusion and strain"²⁶. Similar cults have been described as fantasy which is a form of escapism from the reality of disillusionment. There is incompatibility of wants and the means of satisfaction of the natives. He says, "They lack the knowledge necessary to get what they want and this impass turned them to fantasy, that is, resorting to magic without scientific accompaniment?"²⁷ If these critical questions are applicable to African and Melanesian cultures, then what is the disillusionment which the *Ogu* people were under? what is the illusion they have created to solve this problem?; is *Zan-gbeto* cult and festival a fantasy? is there any incompatibility between *Ogu* people wants and the means of satisfaction?; and finally, are there cultic practices or magic unscientific and irrational? These questions, I do hope, will provide us with an analytical frame of reference for explaining *Zan-gbeto* cult. To be disillusioned is to "set free from a mistaken belief". Then, were the *Ogu* people holding a mistaken belief or were they under strain?

The *Ogu* people, like the rest of mankind were not holding any particular mistaken belief, but they were under the strain of doubt and wonder as to how the universe could be explained. Like the ancient Greek philosophers, they were asking, what is the fundamental stuff of the universe? Could the probable answers to this question be the illusion they have created to counter the disillusion of doubt and wonder? If yes, then all religionists throughout the world are under illusion. Christians postulate God with Jesus Christ as the guide and Moslems postulate God with Mohammed as their guide. The Africans appreciated the beauties of nature that gave rise to their belief in God and plurality of divinities. Consequently, they built myths and mythologies to explain nature "it seems that polymonotheism originated from man's wonder about what could be best explanation of nature. Man tries and sees the universe as a religious experience. There are natural forces surrounding him which he could not explain. Therefore he built mythologies as means of understanding the nature."²⁸ For instance, the *Ogu* people could have built the myth about the sea-god, *Zan-gbeto* out of their appreciation of the nature of the sea and the coconut trees at the beach sides. This attempt to explain nature and religion generally is an attempt to explain and rationalize nature. Lucy Mair and Raymond Firth could be wrong in describing 'religion' as irrational or 'other than rational' unless if they were using western scientific methodology as their parameter of rationality.

I find it equally disagreeable that religious explanation of the universe as the *Ogu* did or as the ancient Greek people did is irrational. What is rationality precisely? Is it predicted on doctrine or belief or action? It seems that we can use rationality of an action to justify its doctrine and belief. Jarvie accepted goal directedness of action as the *criterion* of the rationality of the action. *Zan-gbeto* cult has a doctrine about a sea-god that emerged from the sea and landed in *Ogu* land bringing good omens like peace and coconut. The rationality of this doctrine, therefore, is tied up in the goal-directedness of the people's actions. Situational logic can also explain *Zan-gbeto* cult. Explaining cargo-cult, Jarvie attributed "reasonable aims to the actors in the situation and try to show that within their frame of reference their actions, if interpreted as trying to realize those aims are perfectly rational"²⁹. *Zan-gbeto* cult could therefore be rational so long as the people achieve their aims by their actions. For Jarvie, if the myth of a cult embodies a coherent horizon of expectation, then the cult is rational. When we ask whether a cult or tradition is rational, we could mean whether it is integrated with the traditional world-view of the people or with the previous background of myths and ritual of the people. This is a functional way of explaining the society. Functionalism is "empirically interested in the inter-relation of roles, the inter-relation of institutions"³⁰ Functionalist among social anthropologists have been interested in how primitive societies fitted together. Therefore rationalism of any practice is the extent to which it is inter-related with the whole. Because they are interested in what is observable in the ritual, not in the belief; social change to the functionalists, therefore are the changes that have taken place in what people do and its rationalism is the extent to which these changes are integrated to the whole. These cannons of rationality by the functionalists can easily be met by *Zan-gbeto* cult. For one thing, the cult is backed up and supported by the structure of the *Ogu* traditional world-view which is not fundamentally different from that of the rest of the Africans. It is also integrated with the myths and rituals of the people.

Now the next question is; is there any incompatibility between the *Ogu* people's wants and their means of satisfaction? Do they lack the necessary knowledge for the realization of their wants? Because they live close to the sea have a good knowledge of fishing, constructing boats, farming as well as building houses. If this expertise is tied up with a myth (the story of the sea god that bestowed these blessings upon them), does that mean that they are giving a fantasy explanation of the means of satisfaction of their wants? The *Ogu* people want coconuts; fishes, boats and houses, and they have and know the techniques of realizing these ends. I don't think there is any rational discontinuity between the satisfaction of their wants and their cultic religious belief. If the people's explanation of their store of knowledge is fantasy or mythology, then there is something rational in mythological fantasy. Religion in general has been described by some scholars to be a fantasy, yet there is to me, some rational elements. Discussing about cargo cult, Jarvie argued, "The natives have technology. There is difference between rule-of-thumb and scientific theories. The natives techniques does not give them a claim to comparison with us, and their explanatory (magical and animistic) theories can be so compared"³¹. The African *Ogu* people have a technology which may be described as rule-of-thumb theories as distinct from western scientific theories. It may also be described as magical and animistic theories, and which does not have anything against it. The history of human thought passed through mythology, religion, magic to what is now called western science. So magic and animism are phases in the history of human thought before the emergence of science which to some is more rational. Jarvie argued that "theories of empirical sciences are testable, tested, and have survived test. But these theories are no more rational than magical ones"³². Some philosophers like Karl Popper, Watkins and Bartley have argued that scientific theories are more rationally held. This thesis seems to me to be more acceptable than the thesis that African cultic activities are not rational at all. According to Jarvie, that they indulge in magic does not mean that they don't have science. They realize that the two go together. Malinowski perhaps rightly argued; "if by science be understood a body of rules and conceptions, based on experience and derived from it by logical inference, embodied in material achievements and in a fixed form of tradition,... then there is no doubt that even the lowest savage communities have the beginnings of science however rudimentary"³³. Religion and magic are, to many people, part of common sense. It is reasonable for them to hold it. The Azande, for example, believe "that certain of their members are witches exercising a malignant occult influence on the lives of their fellows. They engage in rites to counteract witch-craft; they consult oracles and use magic-medicine to protect themselves from harm"³⁴ Similar cultic-activities takes place in *Zan-gbeto* cult. These cult-activities are based on common sense, and anything that

is common-sensical should be rational. Winch has argued that “intelligibility takes many and varied forms, that is, there is no norm for intelligibility in general”³⁵. Intelligibility or rationality is therefore contextual. This contextuality is not necessarily relativism for a people is said to be rational in their undertaken if they realise their aims and objectives by their practices.

Philosophy in *Zan-Gbeto*

The point at issue here is the question of the philosophy in myths, folk-lore, proverbs and religious beliefs upon which of which *Zan-gbeto* cult hinges. While some see philosophy from the exclusive point of view, the apostles of African philosophy as myths and religious world views see it from the inclusive point of view. The exclusive view is that philosophy should be critical and effective while the inclusive view is that it should be both uncritical and critical, and reflective and unreflective. While the exclusive school fail to appreciate the historical and dialectic nature of philosophy in being at a stage uncritical and at another stage critical, the inclusive school fail to appreciate the self-criticism of philosophy in dialectic mood. However the points of the inclusive school are worthy of note as far as the philosophical import of myths and symbol in African philosophy is concerned. According to K.C. Anyanwu, “philosophy should not be an academic matter but an expression of a people’s culture. As a philosophy, its business is to articulate the principle by which the people can live as a whole man, and its concern is with what is meaningful and significant in experience. It is not a critical philosophy, and critical philosophy cannot start unless there are existing material for it”³⁶ He says that myths may embody ultimate insights and intuition of reality as experiences within a universe of aesthetic continuum. In African culture, myths are used to give certain topics or themes the character of parable or allegory. But in reality, the parable or allegory has a direct reference to human beings, human situations or to society and it has moral, educational and philosophical interests.

Some anthropologists and philosophers would not agree with the dictionary contention that myth only relates the ancient story of gods and heroes. The function of myths goes beyond that, some believe that it concerns legends, folktales and stories of past events not necessarily with regard to gods and heroes. In fairness to the dictionary it could be a mythical matter, a figment, an unconsciously held belief but which renders explanation of social consciousness. Even if it is dream like, yet some dreams are reflections or reply of man’s experiences in his daily life³⁷.

The philosophical dispute concerning African philosophy on whether it is myth or not seems to me to be a misuse of the language ‘philosophy’ and a language game which certainly talks of one and only one thing, that is, that African philosophy exist, but that it has to start critically from the religious world-view of the African. The exclusivist school cannot deny the relevance of myths in the study of African philosophy if they are fully aware that the ancient Greek philosophy is punctuated with myths, for instance, in *Plato’s Republic, Georgias, Phaedo* and *Phaedrus*. In these works you see allegories and prescientific explanations of the universe and yet they are philosophies. The relevance of myth or religious world view as a source of material for philosophic reflection is admitted by the exclusivist school or the logical neo positivists and philosophic criticism and reflection on the religious world view is accepted by the inclusivist school or ethno-philosophers. So the debate is a mere language game that confuses prioritization of either criticism or myth with philosophy when in actual fact philosophy demands that they be placed in dialectical and historical perspective.

Peter Bodunrin argues that not all rational logical and complicated conceptual systems are philosophical. But the goal of any philosophical enterprise (a critical philosophy in Bodunrin’s sense) is rationality and, therefore, if any system rigorously strives to achieve that goal then it is philosophical. And philosophy in dialectical and historical sense demands a movement from one stage of rationality to another in obedience to changing circumstances. What is rational today may not be rational tomorrow since that is always the case, criticism and revision as demanded by the logical neo positivists become necessary. In African philosophy, the Paul Radin’s Autochthonous intellectual class and Gordon Hornings principle of synthesis set the machinery in motion for self-criticism and revision. And William Abraham’s distinction between private and public aspects of African philosophy shows that the public aspect is a criticized, revised and harmonised aspect of

individual and private philosophies of the Autochthonous intellectual class. Therefore the rationality of any system in an age is the philosophy of that age.

The philosophical significance of *Zangbeto* belief is the rationality of the myth upon which it is erected. According to Alasdair MacIntyre, “myth is living or dead, not true or false. You cannot refute a myth because as soon as you treat it as refutable you do not treat it as a myth but as a hypothesis or history,”³⁸ so the Ogu people are not under illusion about their belief in *Zangbeto*. The origin of their belief was in their wonder and curiosity about the origin of the universe. The rationality involved here is what K.C. Anyanwu calls the logic of aesthetics while formal logic deals with, and results to, abstractions, logic of aesthetics is the unity and meaningfulness of individual and community’s experiences in life. Lucy Mair and Raymond Firth may, therefore, be wrong in describing religious as irrational, unless if they were using western scientific methodology as their parameter of rationality.

Universality and rationality is an important object of philosophy. So how rational and universal is symbol in philosophy? Symbols in African culture have no special significance except on the basis of myths. So to establish the philosophical significance of symbols and vice-versa, symbols can be simply defined as objects, words, language and sounds which more often than not have esoteric meanings. The symbols can be simply defined as objects, words, language and sounds which more often than not have esoteric meanings. The symbols in *Zangbeto* cult, therefore, comprises of rituals, rites, sacred words, and names, cult and magical practices. Rituals and rites are symbols because esoteric words and language are the backbone of occult and magical practices.

*All words are spiritual, nothing is more spiritual than words...
Unless we fully realise the profound influence of superstitions
concerning words, we shall not understand the fixity of certain
widespread linguistic habits which still vitiate even the most
careful thing*³⁹

Like the *Mustraisf* and *Isis* of the ancient Greek and Roman world, *Zangbeto* cult require new members to undergo a series of initiation characterised by rituals, rites and the use of sacred words. In understanding *Zangbeto* belief, we cannot underestimate the power of words and language. And the history of philosophy is incomplete without the history of the argument surrounding the relationship between language and reality. In Black Africa, the power of spoken words is given a special place in the magical and animistic practices. We were told that language is a duplicate, a shadow-soul of the whole structure of reality. Hence the doctrine of reality is called the supreme reality or the divine soul, substance. Heraclitus saw in language the most constant thing in a world of ceaseless change and for him the structure of human speech reflects the structure of the world. Aristotle believed that everything appeared to be modelled in its entire character on number and that numbers are the ultimate things in the universe. Pythagoreans were puzzled by number symbols. In fact, Pythagoreanism passed from a doctrine of the world as a procession of numbers out of the one to the construction of everything out of number – soul, each claiming an immortal and separate existence. “All sounds evoke indefinable and yet precise emotions in or, call down among us certain disembodied powers whose footsteps over our hearts we call emotions”⁴⁰ Ancient beliefs may be dead, but the instinct or the hope is strong. In ancient Africa, “man’s greatest power is the power of words. By virtue of this power, he is capable of creating meaning and value, of transforming the world and himself, and of giving meaningful directive to material events... Words have the power to define and to compel. As a result, it is the vehicle of order, the principle of creativity and destruction”⁴¹ In *Zangbeto* cults, the sacred names and ritualistic incantation belong to the category of powerful words. There are various esoteric signs and language of communication used by initiated members and which non-initiated cannot comprehend. These rituals and rites generate phenomena which apparently defy common sense and scientific explanation. Explaining *Zangbeto* cult is just like explaining Cargo-cult or *Azande* belief in witchcraft because the same concepts and thought process are involved. Aesthetically, the *Ogu* universe as depicted in *Zangbeto* belief is meaningful, beautiful and satisfying because it unifies man’s experience into a whole. African universe enables man to see his place in the universe and his relationship to other creations. Like the Dogon universe, the *Ogu* people’s world is presented “as undifferentiated, and they are formless, or meaningless until the, ‘signs’ come to

rest on each of the ‘things’ which they symbolise”⁴²

The African *Ogu* people have a technology which some have described as rule-of-thumb theories as distinct from western scientific theories; some have also described it as magical and animistic. But one of the underlying principles behind the ‘African technology’ is the power of the spoken word. There is no doubt that African science derives much of its strength from the occult powers associated with the power of spoken words. The common criticism on African ritual practices is that it is not scientific, or that it does not follow the model of western science, and so it is irrational. It has been argued that the history of human thought passed through mythology, religion, magic to what is now called western science; so magic and animism could be phases in the history of human thought before the emergence of the so called western science which to some is more rational. Jarvie argued that “theories of empirical sciences are testable, tested, and have survived test. But these theories are no more rational than magical ones”⁴³ Some philosophers like Karl-Popper, Watkins and Bartley have argued that scientific theories are more rationally held. If this thesis means that African science is rational but not as rational as western science then it may be arguable. Jarvie argued that the fact that Africans indulge in magic does not mean that they don’t have science. Members of *Zangbeto* cult engage in rites to counteract witch-craft; they consult oracles and use magic – medicine to protect themselves from harm. These cultic-activities are based on common sense and anything that is common sensical should be rational.

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- “Theistic Panpsychism” is a concept or term which I coined for understanding African etaphysical world-view. It is supposed to show that, although the Africans believe that there is psychic dimension in everything in the universe (Panpsychism), they also believe in the existence of a supreme being (theism). It shows that African panpsychism is strictly theistic and not atheistic. For detail see M. DUKOR, “God and Godlings in African ontology” in *Indian Philosophical Quarterly. XVIII*
- “Theistic Humanism” is at best a doctrine which I think best describes African understanding of God and Man. African culture is, Ipso-facto, Humanistic and Theistic. Classical theories of humanism and theism tend to show that both concepts are irreconcilable. But in African culture they are at unity. Theistic Humanism is therefore a philosophy of the Africans, which has its theoretical and philosophical root in African *polymonotheism and Theistic panpsychism*.
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102. Funso Akere, “Linguistic Assimilation in Socio-Historical Dimension in Urban and Sub-urban Lagos” *Ibid* p. 172
- Ibid* p. 172
- Darwinian Theory of natural selection postulates a differential death rate between two variant sub

classes of population, where the lesser death rate characterizes the better adapted sub class. What is being implied is the survival of the fittest when if applied to cultures would mean that a more viable or powerful culture in the mist of other cultures will survive at the expense of others.

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