Complex Gendered Identity in Africa: Perspectives from Igbo and Yoruba Languages

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Abstract

This is an attempt to address the complexities and paradoxes surrounding other forms of gender identity beyond the physical. These other forms of identities are considered metaphysical and practised within belief systems, cultures and traditions. A postmodern approach lazed on the theoretical framework of inter-subjectivity is used to examine these women's metaphysical identities from Igbo and Yoruba perspectives especially how it has been patterned along gender social relations within these socio-cultural worlds. The argument is how can a non-physical forms of identity raise complex gendered stereotypes and deep rooted stigmatizations which affects the women's social relationships and identity. What is objectionable about paradoxical stereotype is not that they are never true, but rather they are not always true since there is no scientific or universal methodology to either affirm or falsify them. Women metaphysical identities are trapped in cultural religion. The delimitation of this study is that women spiritual identities falls within the sphere of traditional myths, spirituality and religion which is scarcely discuss within contemporary academics. Attempts were made to delineate the ideas from myths without making appeals to spirituality and traditional practices. Thus, our discussion will focus on the deconstruction of these belief systems since it is germane to appropriate the metaphysical belief as well as develop an epistemic territory and re-orientate the historical, existential and phenomenological meaning of women identities and lived experiences. This will help in managing gendered social relations; correct the distorted understanding of

women's identity and enhance proper understanding of being woman and human in our cultural worlds.

Key words: Women, Igbo, Yoruba, Metaphysics, Spiritual Identity, Culture, Language Postmodernism

1. **Introduction:**

The exploitation of women's sexuality through metaphysical identities is one of the perceptions which still keep women in derogatory status within the trado-cultural consciousness in Africa. In ancient Africa, beliefs were birth out of ignorance, though governed by tradition and confirmed by strange coincidence. In post-colonial era, beliefs are entrenched through mental poisoning which inaugurates attitudes of uncontrollable fear and premonition. Ogbenika, 2020:128 comments that the seeming more striking aspect of the traditional coincidences are the barbaric and inhuman discrimination minted on suspected women.

Studied have shown that women's sexuality has been given negative attributes in African societies. The conceptions, expressions of ideas, feeling and believes on witchcraft, spirit-child were all attributes of negative women metaphysical identity. A Metaphysical identity, which gives women a sort of stereotype feelings, that affects them in their social relations. Mbiti opine that witches are mainly women with inherit power by means of which they can abandon their bodies at night and go to meeting. They are conceived similar, as people that have power to suck or eat away the life of their victims. In most African cultures, women are usually blamed for any experience of evil in the society (Ogungbemi, 2007:128; Parrinder, 1974:124; Lawson, 1984:23-4). An example of such concept is the claim that among the Ga people of Guinea Coast of West Africa, women are usually possessed by evil demons. The demons live in venerable women. Since women are closer to their daughters, the spirit is passed on to the beloved of them at death. What needs investigation here therefore is phrase; metaphysical identity. There are two words involved. They are 'metaphysical' and 'Identity'. The two lexical items analyzed in the next paragraph starting from identity.

A school of thought says that Identity can be understood from the perspective of sameness and otherness. Sameness connotes the nature of something without reference to another thing (Amaku, 2005:105). To the scholars, identity connotes the autonomy of being similar as well as the point of departure and return in discussion of the nature of a particular thing. Daily experience and observation teach human that identity is connected by resemblance, contingency or causation (Hume, 1978: 251-263). In essence, identity is inextricably linked to the sense of belonging. It is determined by the view, ideals felling and cultural norms of

the society as express in the language either spoken or written. The motivation is on the premise that through identity people perceive themselves, and others see them, as belonging to certain groups and or others determined by their active engagement (Díaz-Andreu 2005:2). This resemblance necessitates the classification of one as a woman by gender, which is the issue under interrogation in this paper.

The second lexical item is metaphysics. Scholars see metaphysics as the study of what lies beyond the physical world of sensory experience (Popkin and Stroll, 2009:116). The implication of this is that there exists both the physical and metaphysical identities. While the physical human identity has to do with the seen or obvious traits, the metaphysical explanation of human identity includes the most general and fundamental characteristics of human physically mentally and spiritually. Hence, the physical, mental and spiritual traits of gendered identities are the focus. The study therefore adopts the concept of spiritual identification in relation to gender in African society to include the metaphysical. Studies show that spirituality has connections with the human spirit (Hornby, 2000: 1147), whereas identity means who or what someone is. It is not a static thing, but a continual process which is literally, that of identification. Identities are constructed through interaction between people, and the process by which we acquire and maintain our identities requires choice and agency (Hornby, 2000: 953; Hall, 1996). Through agency a human being defines who he/she is. It is by it that one is potentially able to choose the group one want to identify with. Although this selection in this study is always constrained by structures beyond, ones control such as boundaries and one's own body, the active role of the individual leads to identities being historical, fluid, subject to persisting change. There are also socially mediated, identification that are linked to the broader cultural discourse and are performed through embodiment and action. The paper, therefore, deploys the scholarly concept of identity that is not an essentialist, but a strategic and positional one (Díaz-Andreu 2005:3).Here, identities can be hybrid or multiple and the intersection between different types of identities is one of the most enriching aspects of the study. The study agrees that that metaphysical identity is what someone is in relation to his /her spirit. The spiritual identity is contrasted from physical identity.

Consequently, women's spiritual and metaphysical identity means what women are in connection with their human spirits. The presumption is that it is a complex and challenging interactions between internal (self) and external (spiritual or supernatural) forces within an individual. This issue of spiritual identity may be properly considered as a phenomenon of human nature, worthy of examination to determine its cause and effect. Determining its cause, is an addition to human wealth of knowledge; but if otherwise, it must be held as part of human usual constitution.

African traditional belief systems general conceived humans to belong to both biological and spiritual beings; the biological is expressed in the physical world whereas the spiritual is expresses in the non-physical world. There are also two ontological realms of existences; the supernatural (invisible realm) and the natural (visible realm) (Nwala, 2010:46). The belief is allied with the ontological conviction that life exists beyond the physical and extends to the spiritual. In order words, The ontology of any distinctively African world-view is replete with spirit: spirit is the animating, sustaining creative life-force of the universe. Spirit is real. It is as real as matter. It reality is primordial and it is if not superior at least as primitive as that of matter. In its pure state it is unembodied (Idionibiye, 1973:83). The physical world is real as well as an intimate part of the spiritual world. Thus, African thought system cannot condone regimentations because there is a continuous interplay, intermingling and interdependence between spirit (forces) and material world. Okoro also emphasized that Africans consider humans and society to be embodiments of spirituality and physicality (Okoro, 2011:7), thus: Wisdom consists in the harmonization of the compositions of man and his society. This is usually done in a hierarchized order with the singular purpose of unifying the horizontal and vertical factors in man and in the society (Okoro, 2011: 8). Humans maintain relationship in the physical world through the human body and the unseen world of gods and spirit through their spiritual aspect. The African world could best be described in Nwọga (1984:25) concept as a multidimensional field of action that admits three types of reality; physical, spiritual and abstract. In that, Africans 'acknowledge that things may change their nature'. The concept is a worldview that provides the framework for the goals of community and for the hopes and aspiration for the good life of the individual persons. Thus the traditional African cultures evolved world views, which are categorized within traditional cosmology as world-views which produce a way of life based on man's spiritual needs; a socio-religious well-ordered communally integrated way of life. There is no sharp distinction between the religious and the secular, between the natural and the supernatural. Thus cosmological relativism underlies the African worldview. Studies reveal that African traditional religion is excessively pragmatic and utilitarian, because the primary motivation of the traditional human religiosity in was purely spiritual with the aim of striking a balance in relationship, particularly with humans and spirits (Ekwuru, 1999:75). The implications of these is that culture can be true and genial; it can be false and hostile (Ebo and Idika, 2019: 24). But then, culture embodies morality, creativity, collection of wisdom and world-views.

However, in this era of modernization and Christianity, maintaining a balance between humans and spirits in Igbo and Yoruba traditions is highly branded especially in dealing with spiritual identities and their rituals of healing. The identities of women are being presumed through spiritual and metaphysical stereotypes as evident in the choice of

words to express the ideas and believes within the society. Whereas the identity of the men even if 'fetish' is changed. This is so because Western religious consciousness has become the ideal and those traditional beliefs are assumed fetish, irrational and superstitious. This is in the form of positive affirmation which could affect women, men and humanity. Again, this is a way of calling for new spiritual orientation which will foster tolerance and embrace the respect and recognition among and between sexes. We chose to discuss this issue of women's spiritual identities under philosophical anthropology, which includes the linguistic phenomenon. This is because philosophy is distinct in its use of method of rational reflection in an attempt at discovering the most general principles underlying things including linguistic choice and its effect. Philosophy appeals to the very nature or essence of things. One of the presuppositions of philosophy is its attempt at discovering the most fundamental or underlying and general principles of reality in its various dimensions (Ukpokolo, 2004: 5).

Philosophy has been described as the principle of explanation that underlines all things without exception, the element common to gods and men, and animals and stars, the first 'whence' and the last 'wither' of the whole cosmic procession, the conditions of all knowing, and the most general rules of human action (James, 1970:11). This means that philosophy tries to understand what is beyond the foreground of the life situation. Philosophy by interrogating the spiritual identities of women in two cultures (Igbo and Yoruba) deals with the fundamental issues and pursues certain varied but connected inquiries; what is spiritual Identity? What are the nature and connection(s) of the spiritual with the physical? What are the grounds for valid belief in the spiritual? How do we know? This is why the idea of women's spiritual identity is best discussed in philosophical anthropology.

Philosophical anthropology is defined as; A discipline that seeks to unify the several empirical investigations of human nature in an effort to understand individuals as both creatures of their environment and creators of their own values… it refers to the systematic study of man conducted within philosophy (Ukpokolo, 2004:8). Thus, it is within this meaning that the idea of women spiritual identity has become a philosophical issue rather than religious issue. What is central here is the extent to which the study of women spiritual identities can be an object of systematic and scientific study. Philosophical anthropology involves a conceptual analysis of such issues as whether humans possess a specific human nature. Again, it investigates the implications of human possessing diverse natures as in the case of spiritual identity. It is within philosophical anthropology that issues between fragmentation of knowledge and the human condition is discussed. It is relevant to state that the main vehicle of discuss is language. Each society expresses its

culture through language. The implication is language is culture express. Since human beings are taking animals, they talk and discuss ideas, feelings emotions in the accepted speech cade of the society. In fact all human activities have language undertone without which the society cannot exist. This is why the study of women's spiritual identities is open for serious philosophical investigations. The man instrument is the language of each of the two society involved in the study and the linguistic choices made to express the concept for interrogation. The kind of philosophical anthropology proposed here is therefore be based on the following assumptions; a human being is a unified biological organism, capable of action, which has evolved to produce culture express in the language and the meaning deduced from the worse has effect on the members thereby has the ability to be shaped by it (Ukpokolo, 2004:15). This, more so, provokes some accounts on the biological 'make-up' and gender behaviour. It also informs the search for sociobiological ideas about women as well as differences between men and women especially of any identifiable biological basis for female (human) behaviour as a resultant effect of the spoken word. It will further question the roots of those spiritual differences and their divergences in the biological makeup of the two sexes. In the following chapter, metaphysical identities will be discussed from Igbo and Yoruba perspectives. This will be followed by cross examination of those cultural stereotypes then conclusion will come last.

2. **The Igbo Conception of Women's Metaphysical Identity**

In Igbo cosmological anthropology, there are different levels of interdependence; nothing is absolute. "Everything, everybody, however apparent independent, depends upon something else; interdependence exhibited as duality or reciprocity, now as ambivalence or complementarities, has always been the fundamental principle in the Igbo philosophy of life" (Ifemesia, 1979: 67- 8). This interdependence of everything and everybody, more so, account for the traditional belief in the interdependence of humans and spirits. Scholars such Iroegbue, 1995:339-41; Okoro, 2011:12 say that there are categories of spirits. The spirits in igbo language include powerful spirits that can be good spirits *mmuo ọ́ma*, bad spirits *ájo mímuò, chí ojo* to mention but a few. Women also participate in this interdependence between the spirits and humans. However, this interaction could be negative or positive. When it is positive interaction, it means it conforms within the ideals of communal life. But when it is negative, it becomes problem to the society. In this situation, the spirits provides opportunities for the malformation of ties forbidden in the purely human social filed. This function is discharge in two ways; first by providing non-human patterns with whom people can take up relationship forbidden with other human beings. Second, through the mechanism of possessions; by allowing people to 'become' spirits and so to play non-human and unacceptable roles; they are debarred from playing as ordinary human beings.

This is premised on the belief that being human is metaphysics and metaphysics here is a deductive system. The Igbo women's spiritual identity is a complex issue in Igbo culture. Sometimes, it is believed that women are usually possessed by strange and bad powers or beings that foster anti-social activities. The traditional understanding of the power is in two different ways that manifest in individual's ways of life; characters and essentially behaviour. Within the Igbo traditional anthropology, humans are both social and spiritual. Being social is what distinguishes humans living within the community in essence the physical human community, while being spiritual depicts that there is life beyond the physical. Uchegbue captured this believe in the spiritual as; (Hu)man consists of physical and spiritual (or immaterial) aspects. To him, (hu)man is made of physical and spiritual substances. Essentially (hu) man is a biological and spiritual being. The assumption is that the belief logically presupposes the allied ontological conviction that life exists beyond the physical world and extends to the spiritual. The study reveals that 'the basic social understanding of existence is based on the belief that a community of spirits and of the dead exist alongside the community of human beings and that there is a mutual partnership between them (Uchegbue 1995:91). The carnal of the submission is that there is extra-human and supernatural dimension of life and being especially human. The spiritual world is very real and intimate. The Igbo cosmology sees human as having more spiritual essence than biological. Humans, therefore, maintain relationship between the physical and spiritual. This relationship between human and the spiritual world is conceived and completely expressed in the sense of the normal social interaction within the extended family, through the transcendental, invisible and enigmatic way (Uchegbue, 1995:92). There are certain spiritual relationships which can endanger the goodness and fruitfulness of humans' lives on earth; those relationships are considered negative and abnormal. 2.2

2.2 **Women's Spiritual Identities in Classical Igbo Anthropology as Perceive in the Language**

There are different forms of negative spiritual relationships among and within sexes and cultures. For the sake of this study, we shall limit our discussion on women. These negative forms of spiritual identities affect women more than the man. It is diverse among traditions and cultures. These different forms of women spiritual identities in Igbo worldview include; the spirit-child *Nwa mmuo*, the water lady *agbo mmiri*, Spiritual playmates or comrades *Ogbanje, ojembe, ogbonuke*, *Nwanyi ihe na ákwà* (woman of double personality), spiritual spouses *nwunyi mmuo* / *dimmuo* and witches *Amosu*. These cases and categories of spiritual problems are usually dictated traditionally based on their menaces. The concept of the spirit-child *Nwa mmuo* is observed in an instance where a child who is usually an only child, well loved by the parents and relatives develops a complex health issues that

could not be treated and will surely die leaving her biological parents poorer, childless and stressed. It is believed that the spirit-child is sent to a family to punish them. The child will not allow the biological parents to have another child through her spiritual powers and will definitely die unproductive before her parents. Within the Igbo cosmology, the concept of the spirit child is understood as a psychic pact between the specific girl and the spirit world, which is celebrated by oath-taking, representing the girl's acceptance of her mission on earth, who is the girl's parent, friends and relatives. This pact can be broken through the expertise of a strong medicine man (Dibia).

The people who live around riverine area conceive the identity of the water-lady, *agbo mmiri*. The woman or young girl that goes to the stream at odd hours of the day is tagged *agbo mmiri* implying that she is identified with this negative interaction because she is said to be talking and smiling alone along or at the river. She sometimes display negative attitudes against the normal social-cultural milieu of her traditional settings. Within the society such girls may not definitely not get married; because attempt to do so may cause her sudden death on the eve of her wedding day or during child-bearing. At times it is the husband that surfer the 'strange death'. Another manifestation may be the inability to conceive thereby resulting in childlessness. Her barrenness will defy all medications and clinical diagnosis. Women with the listed traits in Igbo communities are viewed as odd especially in terms differing of healing and the inability of their healer to comprehend the nature of their illness. Thus this condition is theorized as anomalous which is in opposition and conflict with normal life of the woman. It is within the cultural setting that she will be identified as possessed by water spirit and traditional ritual are performed on such women to separate them from such act of spiritual being. This information is from a victim who granted an oral interview. The woman, Mrs Thersa Madu in the interview gave a vivid explanation on this prescriptions. She narrated how rituals were done to separate her from such act before she begins to have her own children. This woman's experience is in line with Momoh opinion on this reality in his doctrine of 'existential reality'. He states that in an environment characterized by water, spirit-beings of the water kingdom are usually the major channel of ritual, worship. The phenomenon in Momoh's view is explanation of reality, or an ontological background to the meaning of life. Thus, Interrogating the issue, Momoh opine that

> The simple consideration is the pervasive and strategic role of which an existent plays or had played in one's life'. Whether the existence is natural, fabricated by man or even a superstitious existence is beside the point. The simple question is: … has the existence play any core or central role in the life of individual or community?. Such existent may be natural, fabricated

> by man or even a superstitious existent. If the role is positive, 'chances are that the individual or community will institute a religion or a ritual in honour of that existent (Momoh, 1998:38).

This is to show that the conceptions of spiritual identity of women vary from culture to culture, from community to community. It is important also to note even within the universal status of spiritual identity, existence of identity is always localized, generated, informed by surrounding and existential factors as well as coloured by peculiar epistemic contexts. Some things are similar with the concept of water lady and spiritual spouses. It is believed that both case of identity will not marry since they are connected strongly with their spiritual families in that they have husbands, children and a functional family in the spiritual realm. Until they are properly cutoff they will not have a good family life on earth. The case of Nwanyi ihe na ákwà (woman of double personality), is a situation where a young lady displays two different characters. It is believed that there are two spiritual personalities living in one body. When the first personality is in her, she behaves normally, when the second personality manifests, she behaves abnormally. The trait manifests in women that steal occasionally, fights furiously occasionally. Such woman, after each adventure, apologizes and confesses that she does not know what happened to her. The case may be liken to that of hypnotization where the victim is compel to act. It is traditionally believed that there is the presence of strange personalities who did not fulfil their destinies before their lives were cut short by death; so they are in perpetual search of bodies to accomplish their destines. The effect of this is seen in character deformation. There are traditional means of removing the strange personality in her, and she becomes normal again.

Another woman spiritual is that of spiritual playmate. Spiritual playmates or comrades *Ogbanje, ojembe, ogbonuke* are of different forms. An instance of *ogbonuke* is when young woman is identified as having spiritual playmates through some of her attitudes. As a young child she will be crying excessively, uncontrollably and spontaneously without any overt cause sometimes. The young woman may be suffering from hysterical psychosomatic syndromes. The young woman may as well be excessively careless and causing accidents as a result of the presences of her spiritual playmates. She may still be bedwetting beyond childhood. She may find it difficult to live with others, since Igbo believe that 'we are therefore I am' (Unah 2018:4; Oni, 2019: 169). Within the Igbo cosmology, the *ogbanje* is conceived as a spiritual group or association of children who are members of a group in the spiritual world. They have already taken a decision to be born in the human world in various homes. They also decide that to live for a short life span, all in a group, usually die before reaching puberty (Uchegbue, 1995:95). They as well cause

pains and shame to any member of their spiritual association that deviates from their covenant. There are preventive and curative rituals from the medicine man.

There are also spiritual spouses *nwunye mmuo* / *dimmuo*. The belief in marital relationship between human beings and spiritual beings abound among the Igbo. Uchegbue notes that; This belief is inferred from the marital experience of particular individuals with spiritual entities who came to have sex with them at night, from some personal names, from certain propitiatory and matrimonial rituals performed by some individuals and from many Igbo folktales, oral and written (Uchegbue, 1995: 95-6). There are two identified phenomena, which inform the presence of spiritual spouse in a woman. The first is the case of the wife or husband of one's former life who either craves the continuation of the marital union from the spiritual world or seeks a redress or revenge for the injustice done to her or him in the former life by the living partner. The second is the belief that some gods or divinities have or seek to have marital relationship with human of opposite sex. Considering this concept of identity, scholars opined that in 'Africa deities are sometimes represented in human forms, male deities may have their female counterparts as wives (Ezeanya, 1976: 114). This assumption/belief rooted in the Igbo cosmological belief that the happenings in the world of men are the reflections of the happenings in the world of the spirits. This can be seen as the thrust of the spirit-human relationship is best understood through our known human parlance.

African society have antidote for the conceived negative traits in the spirit being. Consequently, there are preventive and curative rituals within the Igbo medical and psychological closures though it depends of what the spirit husband is asking for. For instance, in the case of an affective and love-seeking spiritual husband, two alternative rituals are performed; (a) a ritual of acceptance and (a) a ritual exchange. Both ways involve lots of demands in terms of both material and psychological.

The other form of spiritual identity is the witches *Amosu*. The term witch connotes a supernatural, mysterious power devoid of scientific explanation. Scholars argue that to say that something is mysterious does not necessarily mean that it is beyond explanation. The possibility of an empirical explanation may exist at least in the future (Oluwole, 1989). One of the scholar who worked on the concept of witches, Mbiti (1970: 262-263) states that people, mainly women, with inherent power that makes it possible for them to abandon their bodies at night to attend and participate in meetings with people of similar traits (other witches) or 'suck' or 'eat-away' the life of their victims are witches. He opine that 'sorcery is an anti-social employment of mystical power', Such people do mix poisonous ingredients into the food or drink of someone to harm him and his belongings. He

concludes that mainly women get blamed for experiences of evil kind. Many women have suffered and continue to suffer under such accusations. Within the Igbo cosmology, it is generally believed that eighty per cent of victims of such accusations are women; it is only on few instances that men are victims. In the society, there are epistemic structures of knowing, confirming, preventing and curing these spiritual identities. Most of the preventive and curative prescriptions are traditionally rooted and has no scientific bases. These days with modernity and Christianity, the practices are seen as obsolete, pagan practices and lacking in orthodox means. Recently, the Pentecostal missionaries have come to affirm the existence of these spiritual identities through the use of this terms 'deliverance, and possession'. One of the ways through which these spiritual identities are observed is through their behaviour, social menace, and attitude. The society assumes that people with witchcraft power reveal their inner real person that is their spiritual side through their behaviour, they as well exhibit odd attitude at unexpected times. Generally, women with issues of spiritual identities are usually unfair to their relations, parents, spouses, friends of who that are their suppose victims (suffer misfortunes originated from them). Space will not allow us to discuss all these here and the traditional explanations of these spiritual identities. Since the paper is not set to explain all the traditional spiritual identity. It will focus on the ontological and phenomenological analysis rather than description with dealing on their menaces and curative rituals as believed with Igbo Ontology. The Igbo Concept is presented in a tableaux form below

Table I: Women's Spiritual identities and their menaces in Igbo perspective

Spiritual Identity	**Menace**[1]
Ogbanje, ojemgbe (Spiritual playmates/ comrades)	Hysterical psychosomatic syndromes, carelessness and accidents, incessant sickness, abnormal bed wetting
Nwuye mmo (Spiritual Spouses)	Loss and wretchedness, psychosomatic syndromes, disappointment in life, spendthrift, kleptomania, constant sexual intercourse in dreams.
Nwanyi ihe na ákwà (Woman of double personality)	Stubbornness, excessively quarrelsome, outlaw, unusual behaviours
(*agbo mmiri*) (water-lady)	Constant disappearance for days and weeks, soliloquizing,

[1] It is important to note that these mal Volant activities of spiritual spouses are believed to take place when one fails to identify and appease them or reject their marriage proposals by way of refusing to establish shrine for them. To accept them is to enter into long rites of ord ination which may eventually lead one to be a priest or *Dibia*.

Nwa mmuo (Spirit-child)	Beloved child in wretched home, strange sickness, short lived.
A*mosu (*Witch)	Usually wretched, isolated, unfriendly, exhibiting bitterness at human progress and interactions.

It is important to note that these mal Volant activities of spiritual spouses are believed to take place when one fails to identify and appease them or reject their marriage proposals by way of refusing to establish shrine for them. To accept them is to enter into long rites of ordination, which may eventually lead one to be a priest or Dibia. Their curative measures are traditionally accessed and are in various forms; we are living their curative and preventive measures for further research and discussions. Now let us of examine spiritual identity from the Yoruba perspective.

3. The Yoruba Conception of Women's Spiritual Identity

To understand the nature and status of women's identity in Yoruba, we must first understand that the identity of women in traditional thought is coaxed. This is seen in Yoruba mythological explanation of the woman. While some see them with positive disposition, some do they portrayed women as betrayals, untrustworthy, have no endurance and sexually weak and wicked set of mankind. Most of these negative concepts are however, enveloped in the paternal view of womanhood. Some of such identities/paternal views are narrated in the next sub sections for better understanding.

3.2 Yoruba Women identity in the Positive Domain

In Yoruba view to some extent, women are spiritually helpers and assistance to the male counterpart. Faguwa 1950 dwell much on this fact in his sending a spiritual assistant to save Àkàrà Oògùn from problem in one of his hunting expedition à beautiful lady by name ìràlọ́wọ́ 'Help' came from heaven to assist him to get out of the difficulty. He later stayed with Ìwàpẹ̀lẹ́ 'Gentleness' another beautiful lady in the city of mystery.(Faguwa 1950:12-20). In spite of the Yoruba consciousness of the woman as help, endurance etc the woman's good attributes are always abused.

Such abuse is evident in the oral traditions of the Ìkálẹ̀. Generally in Yoruba cosmology women with spiritual knowledge of paternal cults within the society must not declare such knowledge in the open. Otherwise such women may pay with their lives. Because women are forbidden to have spiritual knowled of Òrò." Bí obìnrin bá fojú kan Orò, Orò á gbe" a woman who (sees) have knowledge of Orò cult will be consumed by the cult. The case of Ayélékegé a sage in Ikale myth is an example of such spiritual identity of women. Oral tradition of the Ikale has it that Ayélékegé was the only elder in the community with the

knowledge of the "orò cult at a stage in the history. She offered to teach the youth the practices of the cult at a time of need. After getting the full tutorial and imbibing the cult practices worship etc. the same youth accused the woman of violating the taboo of Obìnrin kì n rí orò " it is a taboo for women to have knowledge of "Orò cult'. Any woman with such knowledge is not expected to disclose it. Ayelekege was sentenced to death by the very youths she offered to help. (Thanks to Dr Ehinmore who offers this information).

It is pertinent to note here that women are members of the cult for they prepare delicacies for the members and interact with them. Women with this spiritual endowment are called Yeye Ègúngún. Even though such women can declare their membership of Egúngún as well as Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ́ cults, they must not declare that of Orò. Attempt to violate such taboo, will cause such woman her life" Àwo Egúngún lobìnrin lè ṣe,awo Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ́ lobìnrin lè mọ̀. Bí obìnrin fojú kan Orò, Orò á gbe"(Sunday Adeniyi 1973 Ẹ kìlọ̀ Fọ́mọ Ọdẹ Record).

3.3 Women as Weaklings (Beings that lack Emotional and Self Control)

The negative paternal version of women identity goes on to portray women as beings lacking in enduring spirit. The is captured in the relationship between Òrúnmila and his wife, Orò, in the spoken word as told in the myth, of Ọ̀rúmìlà and Ọrọ̀ his wife, which freed Ọ̀rúnmìlà from the charges of neglect and abandoment of his wife but declared the wife guilty for accepting help from men who took advantage of her helpless situation. Òrúnmila was away for economic reasons after the family hard the third child. Òrúnmila settled his wife at Ife with provision that will make her comfortable for seventeen days. Òrúnmila did not return as planned. Orò ran out of money and provisions. As a house wife from a notable family, she never engaged in any economic activity. Therefore, means of surviving was difficult. The problem became complicated with the indefinite absence of her husband. She joined women in the vicinity to collect firewood for sale to generate money. However, on one of the trips to the farm, as a beautiful woman, Ondááró seduced her. He gave her a hundred thousand cowries. From the relationship with Onàdáró, ỌrỌ̀ became pregnant with a child. Ònàdáró denied his involment after finding out that she was Òrúnmila's wife. She became a single mother to Agbé. She lived on the hundred thousand cowries. After exhausting the money, she had to join others again in the old business, but was deceived by On[kosu[n, who paid her two hundred thousand cowries. The union resulted in another pregnancy that produced Aluko. She suffered similar fate as with that of Ondááró, she could not discipline herself as in the third attempt to find money for her upkeep. She had a union with Onkọlà, who gave her one million cowries. The union resulted her bringing forth Àgbìgbò, she also raise Àgbìgbò as a single mother…(Abimbola, 1979: 67-9)

From the narrative, Both the spiritual and physical identity of women have been biased within the tradition mythology. It is so integrated into our traditional folktale and myths in such a way that a woman is not free in the society. The female is defined as a being that stands in antagonistic opposition and reciprocity with the male gender. The idea of stereotypical women's identity is traditional and historical; this ideology has been transferred from one generation to another. Next is to consider women's spiritual identity in traditional Yoruba thought.

3.2 Women as Ẹlẹyẹ / Ìyà mi; (witches):

The spiritual identity of women within the Yoruba traditional thought is not very clear. Yoruba proverbs seems to be positive in the portrayal of women as witches, for example; Bóbìnrin bá pé nílé ọkọ a dàyẹ̌ (a woman who lives long in the matrimonial home is always tagged a witch). This implies that it is not too common for a woman to endure matrimonial hardship till old aged. However the Ifa Oracle sees a woman as an ingrate and wicked spiritual being. This claim is captured in Ọsa Ẹlẹyẹ; A pá ń la nigi Ájé Osé abigi réréẹ̌rẹ̌ Adia fún Òrúnmilà Ifa n'lo léè gbe ọrọ̀ ti i ṣe ọmọ Olówu… (Ibid, 67) Big trees are witches abode Osé with big canopy Ọ̀rúnmilà consulted his oracle While on his bead to propose to Orò That is the daughter of Olówu … The above quotation implies that Yoruba assumes that witches adorn big trees particularly Ose. In the Yoruba traditional cosmology, witches entered the earth through Olódùmarè or Ọlọ́run. Yoruba believed that the Ẹlẹyẹ witches were female beings that descended from heaven. Witches were among the four hundred and one spiritual beings recorded in Ọ̀sá Méji which narrates the myth on the journey of the 4001 spiritual beings thus: On the journey of all spiritual beings to the earth, all wore clothes. The witches were naked because they were ingrate and wicked. The myth says that

Gbogbo won ló ri aso bora	They were all wearing clothes
Ṣùgbọ́n ihòòhò ni àwọn iyàmi wà	But my mothers were naked …
Nígbà ti won dé bodê	On their arrival at the gate of heaven
Ní wọ ò lè lo mó	They were unable to precede the journey
Ojú ńti won …	They were ashamed and feeling shy …

The Eleye (witches) pleaded with other spiritual beings to help them cover their nakedness but they all refused, only Òrúnmila offered assistance. But they refused to come out of Òrúnmila after bringing them from heaven. Consequently, after consulting the Oracle, Òrúnmila had to take them back to the gate of heaven where he met them. There are lots of arguments on why the female witches (Ẹlẹyẹ) came naked from heaven among other spiritual beings; we will not go into this argument in this paper. This goes to express how

the society perceives the kind of spiritual identity mostly associated with women. Scholars like Ogungbemi present a different view of Yorùbá women spiritual identity. The scholar argues that witches in Yoruba belief were created to make Yoruba trust God and worship him; to him, without the witches, the Yoruba will not have recourse to worship the Supreme Being Deity. This is because in Yoruba cosmology, witches are the major causes of misfortunes, illness, poverty and death. It is common to accuse old women of witchcraft. However no Yorùbá person dear addressed any woman, publicly, as witche instead, euphemism like àwọn ìya wa 'our mothers', or agbalagba ('the elders') are used (Ogbungbemi, 2007: 128). Yoruba believe the cults of witches are mostly women who pass their witchcraft spirits to their daughters not sons. This is expressed in their speech as 'Fi gbogbo ọmọ bi obìnrin', 'ẹyẹ ń yí lu ẹyẹ' (she gave birth to only female children, which multiplies the witchcraft spirit). It is also traditionally believed that passing the art to their daughters will enable them to increase their population and give them their control of their guilds (Ibid, 129). Even though there are good and bad witches, the tensions created in families and communities by the belief in witchcraft are polarizing the essence of human social relations and essence of communal living. This explains why witches are separated from physical human transactions in the society. The fear of attack and manipulation of innocent people informs the Yoruba believe as express in the traditional thought, that whatever belongs to witches is sacred; therefore set aside to avoid their wrath. This obedience/the keeping of the witches taboo is captured in Òsá Mejì.

Otún ẹyẹ kangó	The witches' right side are hard
Òsì ẹyẹ kingo	The left sides are hard
Òòsa ló ní kéyẹ mó jowú òan	The gods forbids witches from devouring its special cotton cake, …
A díá fún Talàbí	He was Talàbí's oracle consultant..
Ífá ḿ bệ láàrin ipónjú	Ifa was facing a great difficulty
Ẻẻrìn lì yán, Mi omí dòwọn	It was dry season, there was drought
Àwón Ẹlẹyẹ gbé odòo ti wonsilệ	The witches dug a well
Àwón èèyàn náà sì gbé ti won	Human beings also dug well.
Ní àwọn Ẹlẹyẹ bá logogo káà kiri pé	Witches made a decree that prohibited human beings from their water source.

Consequently, human beings did not fetch water from the witches' water source. However, human water source dried up Talàbí ventured to fetch from the witches' water source. His had unplesant eọprience from the endavour. The unpleasant experience is narrated in the myth in clear Yoruba language to warn disobedient people.

Ní Talàbí bá lọ pemi nì odò àwón Ẹlẹyẹ	Talàbí successfully fetched water
Agbé ḿ àwón Ẹlẹyẹ sì fi sọ odò	Because Agbe was fast asleep
Nj̃é kí Talàbí ó màa gbé agbè omi náà rú	Tàlàbí attemped to place the jurg on his head
Ní àdá òòsa tí mú lówó ba bá agbè náà	Mistakenly, he hited the gorge with his cutlass
Ní Agbé bá jí	Agbe woke up from his sleep
Agbe bá figbe bọnu	Agbé alerted the witches
… Gbogbo àwón Ẹlẹyẹ ba tú jéde	All the witches came out
… Talàbí hǫ Wo ti yá a	Talàbí took to his heels
Awon Ẹlẹyẹ gbá …	The witches pursued him hard (Abimbola, 1979: 88-9)

The above demonstrates concept and treatment of witches in Yoruba life. The fact is that within the Yoruba cosmology, witches are separated from human endeavours. The witches are sets of beings that are always obeyed to avoid their wrath. In Osa Meji, every one obeyed Eleye by abstaining from their water source. In clear linguistics terms, the withes protested the ill treatment of segregation by warning and declaring punishment forever disobey. For disobeying, the decree, Talabi, faced danger that no body including Alafin Abiodun (the king) except Òrúnmila's abode recurred him. This is a clear indication of how the idea of the witch affects the psychology of the people and their way of life. There other women spiritual identity in Yoruba anthropology. They include emèrè (female), elénre (male), ọmọ-omi, etc. Each of this idendites will be discussed onr after the other in the neọt sub-section of this paper.

3.3 **The Emere Cult:**

Emèrè/elénre are peculiar to both sexes but more on women and female children. It is believe within the traditional ontology that pregnant women get in contact with the spirit in many ways which could affect the pregnancy. Within the Yoruba cosmology, a pregnant woman is not supposed to be out from twelve noon to one pm to aviod with contact spiritual entities that replace the baby in the womb. The Elenre (female) and Enéré (male) depicts the spiritual identities of humans in Yoruba cosmology. Varying spiritual identities based on their traditional sources are categorized in Yoruba believe.

Table II below shows their sources and the place they have meetings.

Names	Sources	Place of meeting
ọmọ-omi or Olómi, emere-omi	Omi (Water) note that they are bath with cold water when born	Inside water
(àbíkú) Emere-ọ̀gédé/ìbẹ́pẹ Emèrè- òfúrugú Emèrè-orí àpáta Emere orí àtàn	Banana, paw-paw They stay in the sky rocks Dump hills/refuse bins	Under banana/ pawpaw stalks sky flat rocks refuse bin
Àlùjọ̀nú and ọ̀rọ̀n	(Bewitched) Trees for example *Àgbálùmọ̀* (cherry tree), *Ọparun* (Bamabo) tree, Ìrókò	Oro lives inside (bewitched) trees as well as big trees
Àjẹ́ –witch	Olódùmare	Nocturnal meetings

These are some of the various spiritual identities in Yoruba cosmology.

In the case of the *àbíkú* spirit child, they usually die young. In some cases, they are given marks on their bodies when they die; and when another child is born, the child comes with the marks inscribed on the dead child. In such instances, a higher form of power is consulted so as to stop the child from untimely death. This idea of àbíkú (re-occurring still birth) and spiritual identities is widely believed by Yoruba people. It has also given rise to the high attendance and patronage of the white garment churches in Yoruba land. However, modern medical car has proved that most of the said cases are related to health issues.

In Yoruba land, it is widely believed that emèrè is the general name for spiritual identity pertaining to those that have their source fruit yielding trees as well as flat rocks. Consequently the spirit emere is linked to the various sources as perceive by the people. There are also the àlùjọ̀nú and ọ̀rọ̀n: They are spiritual identities pertaining to trees. It is generally believed that àlùjọ̀nú and ọrọ are harmless beings, but can be manipulated to papetrate evil by wicked people.

There are also the ọmọ-omi (marine/ mermaid child) spirit who are harmless as well. They always have mission to acomplish amon human bieing. To be able to perform, they always assume the form of a females (human beings). Most often, only memders of the cult and people who seek power or refuge from the sect move down to their world for association and intiation

4. Philosophy Interrogates women's Spiritual Identity in Igbo and Yoruba Philosophy

From the discussion above, as well as the linguistic elements relating to women spiritual identities among the Igbo and the Yoruba nations of southern Nigeria, one can say that, although, the societies in the pre-colonial traditional settings were conscious of the difference of gender. The gender deference as perceived from the parochial point of view that sees women as delicate sets of human being that need help from the opposite gender. The famine gender in the societies under investigation can easily be manipulated because of their emotional and erratic responses to issues. However, when they are aggrieved, the consequences are always hard felt. The case of Àlàbí and the *Ẹlẹyẹ* in the Yorùbá mythology establishes this assumption. The implication is that these two linguistic groups did not develop stereotypes in which ideally women's spiritual identities were outrageously and mischievously exploited. The issues of spirit-child, spiritual spouses and spiritual comrades and their rituals of healing within the communities as perceived in their speech were handled with utmost care to avoid any spitefully contrived to exploit feminism. From discussion in spiritual identity in Igbo and Yoruba languages and literatures, narratives from people who claim to have encounter with the spirit world, many ideas and opinions about what these issues of spiritual identity are like with the two societies are formed for philosophical interogation. Philosophy may not discover any new empirical facts but it reflects on the fact we already have to see what or where they lead to and they all hang together. This is to say that these issues of spiritual identity and their ritual of healings were direct response to perceived theological, spiritual and metaphysical problems of those eras within a specific time in history.

4.1. Complex Identities in a Postmodern World:

Given this age of modernity, these ideas of spiritual identities reflect the need for identifying in contract to the true nature and socio-cultural 'situatedness' of the women. Since spiritual identities in these cultures are stereotypes, it brings to the fore the need to reshape the social behaviour of women especially those stereotyped. It more so calls for reconceptualization especially in terms of the foundations of learning, social, cultural and even legal and political relations. This is also suggestive of the idea of the comparative worth of women's lives and personalities. Comparative worth defines women as people in need of protection because they are different from men and there is need to polish this principle of comparative worth beyond philosophical limits. It is obvious within these cultures that there is something true about their spiritual identities, studies on them have not been systematic and comprehensive. The understanding of them is still within the epistemic closures of cultures that practice them. For a clearer philosophical analysis of the challenges of women's spiritual identities, we will discuss them under three headings; the

problem of context, women's spiritual identities and resistant culture and finally dealing with dilemma from a postmodernist perspective.

4.2 **The Problem of Context**

This study on women's spiritual identities is contextual and relative, creating a perceptual problem within philosophy. The problem of women's spiritual identity is that it is culturally oriented. Since there are variations of the conceptions of spiritual identities given these cultures, an examination of the problem of context is useful in understanding the cosmological basis these cultural practices are built on. Again, there are difficulties in attempting to use critical concepts, ideas, theories, terms to understand the nature of spiritual identities of the traditional woman. It is difficult to prescribe alternatives to these spiritual identity models. These create gap in understanding and dealing with issues boarding on the reality and challenges of spiritual identities. This deficiency is not grounded in women domination and oppression but serves as critiques that relates to contextualization of feminist issues. But then, it creates the ideology that sees men as fair, and more socially, spiritually and psychologically accurate. This is because the idea of spiritual identities between these two cultures pertains more to women than men. The fact that women were portrayed as oppressed stereotypes, gender minorities and inferior: Women's spiritual identities add to this as well. This study also presents to us the problem of the pluralistic nature of women's spiritual identities. This is because it dwells within our cultural setting, showing itself in various forms and types, making the problems of women's spiritual identities subjective and relative. The meaning of spiritual identity varies within cultural settings as exemplified in Igbo and Yoruba cultural settings. Since the spiritual identities of women are cultural, it also gives rise to the problem of methods of explanation. There is lack of concepts with equivalent meanings when translated from source language to target language. This idea has either been over-simplified or lack correct words and connotations for in English language; hence, it is often dismissed as superstitions and myths (Otakpo, 2016: 28-9).

Another problem generated by women's spiritual identity is that it is controlled by a traditionally understood 'cause-effect mechanism.' It posits the lack of scientific method of verification, testing of hypothesis, no controlling principles, laws or theorems, and moves within the concepts of epistemic closure or secrecy. This is to say that because of the varying cultural realms it operates, its activities are explained by reference to cause and effect within the particular culture: This raises the problem of explanatory models. It is worthwhile to note that women's spiritual identities are not accounted for in critical literature. Thus, it exhibits the same proclivities of patriarchy that renders that account of human incomplete. The explanation to this is that women's spiritual experiences are also

part of human experiences and as such should be accounted for. The issue of context presents to us the need to censure the idea of spiritual identity as premised on a notion that people are mystified by conservative cultural ideology and consequently cannot remake the world until they see how contingent such idea is. Thus, it is built on the principle of error in that their version of stereotype by consent does not present a realistic picture of women domination by men or spiritual aspects and their psychological consequences.

4.2. Women's metaphysical Identity and Resistant Culture:

The problem of spiritual identity is challenging the confidence of the traditional woman in her development model. This has led to women's inauthentic existence and inability to press for justice in the face of blatant cruelty against their persons (Akomolafe and Ukpong, 2020:115). This is evident in the challenging population structure of traditional and cultural practitioners which vary and add to the high uncertainty in women's movement, social, political as well as women's rights groups. In Ekwuru's (2009: 59) words; "… one thing I must tell you is that those things which the white men (modernity and Christianity) came to destroy are still with us and shame to us if we abandon the religion and practice of our fathers." These controversial issues for women spiritual identities are part of the problems that escalated with the clash of cultures; what may be called the traditional Igbo / Yoruba verses the modern Igbo / Yoruba? his is a struggle between deculturisation and depersonalisation. The place of women's spiritual identities in Igbo and Yoruba cultures are evident in the art and literature of each culture. Even with the influence of Western education and religion (Christianity and Islam), the problem of women's spiritual identities still persist. The exigence of this situation of dual cultural existence puts the woman in a state of a tragic clash of values, and unconsciously imbues in their social personality a form of schizophrenic pathology with paranoid tendencies. These women lack the strength to resist such practices because "women lack adequate education and constitute a large percentage of uniformed groups in Nigeria" (Phinos, 2020:3). This has brought the woman under a stereotyped socio-anthropological surveillance. 5 Dealing with dilemma from a postmodernist perspective: To offer a simple solution to the dilemma of women's spiritual identities is to think of a possible way of contradicting our message. Attempt to explain the Igbo and Yoruba the concept may seems to be a destabilization of a capitulation of the Igbo and Yoruba ontology. In that if one argues that spiritual identity is different from physical or intellectual identity then where is the place of the essential ingredients that constituent humanity such as human freewill, determinism and moral responsibility? Since humans are both Homo sapiens and rational, where is the place of self-consciousness and the basis of value? The problems of spiritual

identities of women create paradox of existence. It also raises the problem of personality and division of the self.

The problem of spiritual identity has to a large extent created polarity in human existence. This is because women do not live in the objective world alone. The world belongs to men and women, other animals and things. Philosophically speaking, women's spiritual identities raise issues in the conceptions of human nature, culture, destiny among others as told in linguistic performance. Philosophical discussions on them should be deepened. In essence dismissing them as superstition, may be counterproductive. Setting values that could liberate Igbo and Yoruba women from cultural oppression and marginalization would help Africa to achieve concrete development (Akomolafe and Ukpong, 2020:114). This will inhabit the philosophical tensions between identity and women. The step may serve as inspiration to developing a philosophical anthropology of reconstruction thereby, be an attempt to reconstruct women's identity itself in the light of the difference cultural makings.

The implication is that history has shown that women's spiritual identity can coexist happily with formal commitment to objectivity, neutrality and with old optimistic faith to reason, truth, blind justice and neutrality. Part of the objectives of this essay is to propose a way to help women and the society at large rethink and overcome these stereotypes. This research proposed three projects; (i). Reconstruction of the existing culture (the culture of spiritual identity and its manifestations) through consolidation with a more rational culture. This is purely inventive not recovery moves. (ii.) To make conscious efforts to enter into this discourse of spiritual identities (discourse on this area is minimal within scholarly writing) within indigenous belief systems; that is to mix with it, transform it to make it acknowledged instead of marginalized, stereotyped or supressed or as forgotten history. This is because; some traditional women still holds this system tenaciously. (iii.) It is time to put resilient culture towards a more integrative view of human community and human liberation. From another perspective, we can argue here that there is anthropological crisis of determining the reflexibility of the true nature of woman (and man) in terms of ascertaining the purpose of human life and destiny. One finds it difficult to distinguish African (Igbo or Yoruba) anthropology with the west or east. In the midst of this type of confusion, the African (Igbo and Yoruba) has lost the pristine respect for the sacredness of human life and dignity. Thus this study prescribes inter subjectivity as a theoretical frame upon which human social-cultural relations can be built. Since human experiences and descriptions of spiritual identity thereof can no more be shown to correspond to such an 'objective' description, (especially in contrast to the understanding normal identity), then there is need to accommodate these variations, not as stereotypes but as part of the human

accounts of identity variation. It is also true that we cannot establish the 'objectivity' of our experiences' content, there is need to resist a slide into relativism by insisting that they are mediated by rationally delineated categories which supposedly assure the transcendental or universal nature of their form. This will provide an absolute standard against which we might check the veridicality of our descriptions of, and communications concerning women's spiritual identities. There is need to understand the interpersonal and intercultural states of women's spiritual identity especially through communication. It is through the addition of various subjective accounts of spiritual identity that a proper understanding of women spiritual identity will be realized even beyond the two cultures in this study. Spiritual identity as a complex and challenging interactions between internal and external (spiritual) forces between the individual agency and structure of power can be changed by reducing cultural essentialism and accepting universal truths and justice within the intersubjective frame. The idea of change must flow directly from a focus on ideology, which is a major weakness that separates the actual from the possible. The prominence of ideology is that it prevents people from thinking in terms that are less than human hence from implementing a freer social condition. Thus ideology is the first logical step to cancel stereotyping and yield social transformation. Not only that the idea of consciousness-raising on the implications and effects of modelling a woman's identity in the code of spiritual identity must have to be enlightened. This leads us to self-consciousness, and other parameter such as storytelling, awareness creation to combat this social stereotyping. It will involve a strategic thinking about the philosophical and social implication of the meanings and programmes we endorse in our cultures. For example, what are the implications of arguing for and against women's spiritual identity? If both have negative implications we should suggest the need to reframe the issue; to ask previously unanswered question about the relevance or stability of spiritual identity. Critical thinking about norms and cultural practices should open up unexamined aspects of our cultural systems, conversations about altering norms; bring about new ways of reasoning, and taking definitions of existing terms. Also definitions must be justified by exploration of cultural contexts and experiences of existing but excluded voices and offering wholly new concepts, themes, theories, and terminologies. 6. Conclusion: This work is to expand the contexts and literature on women and their place our social cultural world especially within Igbo and Yoruba cosmology. By pulling the contextual points of these two cultures together, we work toward making conceptions of women's spiritual identity and understanding of human nature more clearly by trying to commensurate the cultural and indigenous ideology and analysing their contemporary relevance. This research is to transform our understanding of two African (Igbo and Yoruba) to how complexities with African social and political culture have been made to question gender

and identity. It adds to our understanding of the problem of achieving human solidarity and proper accommodation in a multicultural postmodern world.

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