

Divination As A Moral Compass And Physical Imagery Of God In African Traditional Religion

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Abstract

Divination is a pivotal aspect of African Traditional Religion (ATR). In African indigenous cosmologies and spiritual systems, divination is the means through which the Divine to speak with humans, offering insight, guidance, and solutions to community and individual. This communicative role is what is referred to as prophetic role of divination. Divination also performs diagnostic and therapeutic role, aiming to identify the hidden causes of tragedies, illnesses, and social strife and proposing solutions. Oracles, spirit possession, and symbolic items help diviners communicate with the spiritual world. Divination is examined as a religious activity, epistemic framework, and moral compass in African world view. It emphasizes its responsibilities in justice, leadership, health, and ethics, highlighting its relevance in current African spiritual life and its similarities to prophetic traditions in global religion. This research adapts a qualitative methodology, using ethnographic fieldwork, practitioner and community interviews, and historical text analysis for its data analysis. Kleinhempel's African Indigenous Knowledge Systems (AIKS) and Mezirow's Transformational Theory underpin this work. These theories suggest that divination as a cultural epistemology bridges the spiritual and physical. Findings reveals that divination rituals are rites of passage, helping people through personal crises and self-discovery. Diviners also mediate conflicts and promote community harmony. The study recommends that diviners and modern medicine should collaborate to provide holistic care.

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Introduction

African Traditional Religion (ATR) divination constitutes a prophetic ministry that effects transformation in individuals and society. Numerous African cosmologies employ divination to facilitate communication between the spiritual and physical realms, aiding humanity in comprehending divine will, addressing disasters, and reinstating moral order (Kgatle, 2023). Kleinhempel (2024) observed that divination in Yoruba cosmology, exemplified by the Yoruba Ifá corpus, entails prophetic mediation, wherein the diviner deciphers messages from deities or ancestors to aid people and communities in achieving holistic well-being. Divination is not an artifact of pre-modern spirituality; it continues to influence contemporary Africa. According to Nwachukwu (2023), it fosters self-awareness, collective healing, and moral realignment through diagnostic insight and prescription support. Divinatory components persist in Christian prophetic movements, particularly within the New Prophetic Churches of Southern Africa and Nigeria, masquerading as “prophetic consultations,” which amalgamate indigenous spiritual epistemologies with Christian paradigms. This continuity demonstrates divination’s versatility and prophetic significance. This research posits that divination, as a manifestation of the prophetic mission within African religion, is essential to human evolution. This research refutes reductionist interpretations that categorize it as superstition and frames it as a dynamic method of revelation that enables individuals to confront existential, moral, and social crises through divine knowledge and collective awareness.

Statement of the Problem

Divination is essential to African Traditional Religion (ATR) for divine contact and moral guidance; nevertheless, religious scholarship has overlooked its theological and transformative possibilities. Western epistemology and Christian missionary efforts denounced divination as paganism or superstition, relegating it to the outside of intellectual and religious discourse (Kleinhempel, 2024). Divination has been distorted into fortune-telling instead of serving as a prophetic and redemptive ministry that addresses existential, ethical, and social dilemmas (Nwachukwu, 2023). The swift expansion of contemporary prophetic movements, especially within Pentecostal and Neo-Prophetic churches in Africa, indicates a resurgence of divinatory practices under novel theological frameworks. This phenomenon presents significant issues regarding authenticity, syncretism, and the relationship between historical prophetic systems and current Christianity. Consequently, divination as a prophetic role in African religions should be analyzed as a catalyst for personal, social, and moral transformation in Africa.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

This study rigorously analyzes divination as the prophetic ministry within African religion and its role in facilitating human transformation in African communities. Objectively, it examines the theological and intellectual foundations of prophetic divination in African Traditional Religion. Analyze the impact of divination on African individuals, ethics, and communities. It further examines indigenous divinatory methods and prophetic manifestations within contemporary African Christianity.

Theoretical Framework

This work is grounded in African Indigenous Knowledge Systems (AIKS) as articulated by Kleinhempel (2024) and Transformational Theory as proposed by Mezirow (1991). Theories suggest that African Indigenous Knowledge Systems (AIKS) conceptualize divination as a culturally embedded epistemology that connects the spiritual and physical realms. Divination is regarded as a sacred form of communication rooted in ancestral knowledge, collective ethics, and the equilibrium of the cosmos. Nwachukwu (2023) asserts that divination can identify social and moral issues and provide insights. Diviners analyze celestial communications to assist individuals and communities in achieving equilibrium and restoration. Transformational Theory, as developed by Mezirow (1991) and applied to African religio-cultural contexts by Kgatle (2023), highlights the role of critical reflection and spiritual insight in facilitating profound structural changes in thought, belief, and behavior. Divination facilitates self-awareness, moral rejuvenation, and societal reorientation. The integration of AIKS and Transformational Theory offers a framework for analyzing the prophetic function of divination and its impact on holistic human transformation within African communities.

Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative methodology which involves African divination's daily activities, meanings, and transformative aspects using a descriptive and phenomenological technique. Qualitative research is suitable for understanding cultural and spiritual issues that cannot be quantified (Creswell, 2018). Books, journal papers, and credible online databases on African Traditional Religion, divination, and prophetic movements will provide data. To understand divination's prophetic role, semi-structured interviews with traditional diviners, religious leaders, and African spirituality researchers are adapted. AIKS and Transformational Theory guided interpretations to show how divination transforms people and communities. Respect and confidentiality were given to all participants. The study avoided misrepresenting indigenous religion beliefs and practices and was culturally sensitive. To ensure research ethics, the Faculty of Arts, University of Calabar Ethics committee approved the research with approval number UC/FA/EC/2025/011.

Literature Review

In African Traditional Religion (ATR), divination is essential for spiritual-human contact. Scholars agree that divination is a prophetic ministry that exposes divine purposes and guides moral and existential decisions (Nwachukwu, 2023; Kleinhempel, 2024). Diviners are prophetic mediators who diagnose problems, offer solutions, and foster social peace. The Yoruba Ifá divination method links human destiny (ayanmo) with divine wisdom (Kleinhempel, 2024) through a structured theological and ethical corpus. Arm chair scholars and missionaries often misconstrued the predictive essence of divination, categorizing it as mere superstition or occultism. Modern African scholars are of the view that divination is a source of knowledge grounded in divine revelation and collective moral principles as postulated by Kgatle (2023). Divination elucidates and confronts challenges by revealing their spiritual or ethical underpinnings, thereby offering avenues for restoration and harmony (Mbiti and Nwachukwu 2023). Religion, morality, and community are intertwined in African culture, in recent studies there evident found, that there are similarities between traditional divination and present African Christian prophetic activities. Kgatle (2023) and Matshobane (2023) assert that New Prophetic Churches in Southern Africa frequently engage in divinatory consultations, cloaked in Christian terminology such as “prophetic revelation” or “word of knowledge.” Although articulated through a biblical lens, these practices continue to provide guidance, healing, and transformation. African prophetic traditions have endured and evolved in response to shifting religious contexts. Divination fosters a deeper understanding of oneself, encourages moral renewal, and enhances communal bonds. The comprehension of spiritual principles and the rectification of moral values transform individuals and communities, reinstating both visible and unseen equilibrium (Kleinhempel, 2024). Contemporary prophetic movements tend to commodify and distort divinatory practices, presenting a significant concern (Matshobane, 2023). Academics advocate for a renewed theological discourse that recognizes divination as a legitimate prophetic institution fostering moral and spiritual growth in Africa. Divination within African Traditional Religions represents a vibrant prophetic practice that is fundamental to the essence of African spirituality, as indicated by scholarly sources. It intertwines historical legacy with contemporary prophetic insights via divine revelation, moral evolution, and societal rejuvenation.

Scholars increasingly consider divination as a real epistemic framework in African worldviews, rather than just superstition or ritual. Uwaezuoke & Eyo (2023) contend in “Divination as a Theory in African Epistemology” that African divinatory systems incorporate physical and quasi-physical phenomena. These systems validate knowledge claims and orient humans in the universe. According to “African Divinatory Systems and the Assertions of Ethnophilosophy,” divination is profoundly rooted in orality, myth, and philosophical thought in African cultures and helps communities comprehend the universe and their place in it. This reframing challenges colonial-era epistemologies that disregarded “non-written” or “non-scientific” knowledge. Healing, transformation, and divination are interwoven. A large body of literature shows that divination is essential to physical, psychological, and moral recovery. Kleinhempel (2024) shows that Bantu divination is legally protected and recognized in therapy in *The Reception of Bantu Divination in Modern South Africa*. It provides diagnosis and therapy across spiritual, psychological, and medical domains, which secular modernity typically ignores. The research “exploring the role of divination in traditional medicine in Africa: a critical perspective” describes how cultures employ divination to find the origins of illness and misfortune. Because they offer meaning and solutions that biomedical models cannot, diviners are trusted. Divination transforms human experience, reducing physical or psychological suffering and restoring moral balance, identity, and social cohesion.

Divination and Prophetic Ministry are related because of Syncretism. Many studies suggest that current African Christian prophetic ministries draw or intersect with divinatory logic and practice,

potentially creating hybrid or syncretistic forms. According to Kgatle's "Consultations in New Prophetic Churches" (2023), new prophetic churches in South Africa often perform "prophetic consultations" that diagnose suffering, prescribe remedies (sometimes sacred items or rituals), and charge fees, similar to ATR. In "Reimagining the Practice of Pentecostal Prophecy in Southern Africa", Kgatle (2024) argues that prophetic titles, consultations, objects, and forensic prophecy overlap heavily with divinatory patterns. Where is the line between Christian prophetic ministry and divination? Do such overlaps indicate syncretism, adaptation, or religious continuity? Challenges, Criticisms, and Ethics while many scholars support divination's positive and transformational roles, there are ongoing challenges and ethical problems. They include commercialization and exploitation supporters. Deliverance ministries and prophetic consultations may exploit susceptible people with fees, sacred objects, or rituals. Kgatle's investigations show that New Prophetic Churches charge fees and prescribe products like ATR healers, raising concerns about pastoral responsibility and spiritual consumerism. Scholars say the ability to identify genuine prophetic ministry from opportunistic or fake prophecy is still a challenge. Some literature claims that prophetic ministries that take too much from ATR or use "familiar spirits" risk theological and ethical mismatch.

Modernity, technology, and change indicate that digitization of divination, as in moral challenges and technological prospects of computerized Ifá divination (Fayemi, Akin-Otiko, and Ofuasia, 2025), raises concerns about preserving the sacredness of oral/divinatory corpus, misuse, and whether digital divination undermines ritual context. Recently published material shows how divination is being reimagined in legal, therapeutic, and societal contexts. Kleinhempel (2024) reports that psychotherapists in South Africa are using Bantu divination for holistic treatment and emotional well-being. He added that divination in the technological age reveals that modern mental health paradigms are acknowledging divinatory systems as part of religious/spiritual life that affects mental health. Communities in social, political, or existential crises use divination or prophetic ministry to manage uncertainty, affirm identity, and restore hope, according to literature. Although less quantifiable, indigenous community case studies in Nigeria and Southern Africa show that divination is nevertheless significant in times of crises. Gaps and directions in the literature reveal numerous key gaps for future investigation. According to empirical studies on transformation outcomes, many sources mention divination's role, but few give longitudinal data on how individuals or communities change after prophetic or divinatory contacts. Scholarly comparative studies are largely from Southern Africa (South Africa, etc.) and West Africa (Nigeria, Yoruba cosmology). Central Africa, East Africa, and smaller language groups are understudied. Ethical oversight and theological self-critique also show that religious institutions need to improve prophetic or divinatory regulation, accountability, and protection of vulnerable people. Computerized divination, applications, and digitization are also sacred topics in divination. As mentioned, hazards, theological implications, and sanctity need further study. In order to bridge indigenous and Christian prophetic frameworks, more theoretical clarity is needed on how practitioners and orthodox theology perceive Christian prophetic service that resembles divination. Numerous texts demonstrate how divination transforms people. In light of these themes, the literature suggests several ways divination functions as prophetic ministry and transforms. Divination can reveal hidden causes of misfortune, injustice, or moral imbalance in meaningful ways. Issues of cure and moral guidance are common. After revealing difficulties, diviners or prophets advise rituals, moral activities, or spiritual practices for moral rejuvenation. The ritual and spiritual reassurance of divinatory practice often alleviate fear, shame, anxiety, and social stigma. Divination also maintains community norms, settles dispute, and restores equilibrium between people and society. Divination helps people connect with ancestors, destiny, spiritual forces, and hope, purpose, and belonging. However, ethical, theological, and institutional issues like misuses, syncretism (dilution), commercialization, and contradictions between tradition and Christian orthodoxy limit its transformative potential.

Major Findings and Discussion

The findings of this research is analyzed based on the research objectives formulated, tested using research questionnaires, oral interviews, theoretical framework, and literature review rooted in interpretivist epistemology with privileges meanings, lived experiences, and cultural interpretations as well as data gathered through semi-structured interviews with practitioners, custodians of indigenous knowledge, and practitioners of African indigenous Christianity

The Theological and Philosophical Foundations of Divination in African Traditional Religion as a prophetic ministry

African Traditional Religion (ATR) divination is theologically anchored in the African worldview that sees reality as a continuum between the divine, spiritual, and material, according to the study. The Supreme Being, divinities, ancestors, and spirits interact with humans to maintain morality and order (Mbiti, 1990; Idowu, 1973). Divination is a sacred act that reveals and interprets divine will for human benefit. Field interviews with diviners and community elders showed that traditional diviners like the babalawo, dibia, and isangoma consider their work as spiritual rather than magical. They claim to be divine messengers. During field work an interviewee responded thus “the diviner attunes to the divine voice as conveyed through the ancestors.” The theological interpretations of divination as a prophetic ministry within African Traditional Religions elucidate divine guidance, identify moral ailments, and advocate for reconciliation and healing (Olupona, 2014). Divination represents a profound worldview that employs cowries, kola nuts, oracles, and patterns as mediums for engaging in communication with the divine. It bears a resemblance to the Abrahamic prophets who impart divine teachings aimed at moral reformation (Mbiti, 1990). Consequently, ATR divination reveals a profound theological foundation rooted in revelation, mediation, and transformation.

The results indicate that divination is situated within a comprehensive African framework of knowledge that perceives understanding as interconnected and ethical. Understanding the divine emerges from collective experiences, intuitive insights, and a commitment to moral integrity (Gyekye, 1995; Wiredu, 1980). In the course of fieldwork, the legitimacy of the diviner is anchored in moral integrity (*iwa pele*) and social trust, reflecting the prophetic virtue of righteousness found in various religious traditions. This ethical and knowledge-based foundation endorses divination as a philosophical endeavor aimed at uncovering truth, justice, and the wellbeing of humanity. African philosophy situates truth within the realms of communal harmony and ethical obligation, as articulated by Gyekye (1995). A diviner who interprets spiritual signs to address conflicts or promote well-being embodies the quest for meaning and moral structure inherent in African philosophy. Divination may be regarded as a profound exploration of existence, employing symbolic interpretation and ethical discernment to uncover transcendent truths. This positions divination as a prophetic endeavor that reveals concealed realities and necessitates ethical and societal transformation.

Divination Contributes To Personal, Moral, and Communal Transformation Within African Societies

This research indicates that African Traditional Religion (ATR) divination facilitates transformation through the provision of moral insight, psychological healing, and spiritual guidance. Divination served as a means for introspection and correction throughout various cultures. Diviners assist individuals in seeking repentance and renewal by exploring the ethical and spiritual underpinnings of calamity (Mbiti, 1990; Idowu, 1973). Field research indicates that individuals often seek divination during periods of existential crisis, illness, failure, infertility, or social estrangement. Beyond elucidating causality, divination delineates ethical and ritualistic practices aimed at reinstating equilibrium with oneself, others, and the spiritual realm. This aligns with Gyekye's (1995) perspective that the attainment of moral self-awareness and personal transformation arises from the recognition of one's moral responsibilities within the cosmic framework. Divination serves as a profound and principled dialogue that assists individuals in harmonizing their existence with both transcendent and collective goals. Within the realm of African spirituality, contemplation, ethical accountability, and a revitalized sense of purpose contribute significantly to individual growth (Olupona, 2014). Research indicates that divination serves as a framework for moral guidance within African cultures. The ideals encompass truth, fairness, compassion, and a sense of duty to the community. Diviners serve as intermediaries between humanity and the divine, as well as between the moral imperatives of the community in diverse African societies. Throughout the course of fieldwork, participants referred to divination as “the voice that rectifies injustices and uncovers concealed flaws.” Divination fosters ethical considerations through nuanced interpretation and guidance. Diviners compel individuals and communities to embrace ethical principles by revealing deceit, inequity, and spiritual apathy (Parrinder, 1969).

This function aligns with the philosophical perspectives of African ethics, which are teleological in nature, aiming for harmony and the attainment of the good life (*Ubuntu*). Consequently, divination necessitates a call for introspection and the establishment of appropriate relationships (Wiredu, 1980). Divination fosters communal engagement and spiritual benevolence via established rituals and ethical principles. Divination fosters a sense of community, advocates for justice, and cultivates peace. The

research found that collective gatherings in times of drought, illness, leadership challenges, and conflicts pursue divine insight.

Diviners mediate community conflict and recommend atonement or reconciliation procedures. Such practises strengthen the African belief that spiritual harmony is essential to communal well-being (Mbiti, 1990). Divination predates chieftaincy installation, agricultural Planning, and conflict resolution in numerous cultures. According to Idowu (1973), African social ethics is based on divine order in moral and political life. The communal role of divination fosters Ubuntu, "I am because we are." Divination preserves community by restoring justice, healing relationships, and reinforcing duty. African moral philosophy is communal, therefore moral transformation requires individual and community renewal, according to Gyekye (1995).

The Relationship between Traditional Divinatory Practices and Prophetic Expressions in Contemporary African Christianity

Field observations and literary research show a considerable continuity between African Traditional Religion (ATR) divinatory practices and modern African Christianity prophetic utterances. The processes of revelation, mediators, direction, healing, and moral correction in both systems show continuity. During fieldwork, Pentecostal and Charismatic church members identified prophetic insight, spiritual discernment, and the "word of knowledge" as Holy Spirit gifts that allow the prophet to unveil hidden things and provide divine remedies. However, practitioners and observers found structural parallels between prophetic activities and traditional divination (Olupona, 2014; Adogbo, 2010). In both cases, a spiritually gifted person receives divine information through symbolic, visionary, or intuitive ways and interprets it for personal and communal instruction. African religious consciousness does not clearly distinguish the sacred from the secular, hence Christian prophets in Africa often operate inside a cultural matrix molded by indigenous revelation (Mbiti, 1990). This illustrates a seamless continuity as opposed to a muddled amalgamation of the prophetic systems. The research findings indicate that modern African Christianity reinterprets divinatory rituals within the framework of Christian theology, while still acknowledging certain continuities. Although Pentecostal and prophetic churches condemn divination as "pagan" or "idolatrous," they inadvertently employ its reasoning within their prophetic ministries. Field investigations reveal that numerous prophetic services encompass diagnostic revelation, symbolic objects (such as oil, water, and salt), and ritualized prayers, akin to the practices of divination. Christian prophets assert that their insights are derived from the Holy Spirit and Christ, whereas practitioners of ATR rely on ancestral or spiritual intermediaries (Idowu, 1973). This adaptation exemplifies Bediako (1995)'s reinterpretation of African religious consciousness within the framework of Christian categories. Christianity assimilates into African cosmology via the prophetic ministry, which responds to existential needs mediated by divination, such as healing, destiny, and protection. The prophetic movement within African Christianity persists, further integrating the divinatory impulse into its practices.

Divination and Christian prophecy exhibit a shared epistemological framework, grounded in the conviction that inspired intermediaries possess the capacity to unveil divine truths. Both hold a conviction regarding the divine immanence and the interpenetration of spiritual and material realms (Mbiti, 1990; Gyekye, 1995). From a philosophical perspective, the African holistic ontology intertwines knowledge, morality, and spirituality. According to field evidence, traditional diviners and Christian prophets assert that genuine revelation necessitates a foundation of morality, truthfulness, and service. The ethical framework within African philosophy posits that moral integrity is a prerequisite for spiritual authority (Wiredu, 1980).

Consequently, conventional divination and Christian prophecy possess a foundational epistemic and ethical basis, articulated through various theological expressions. Divination seeks to elucidate divine intent through the mediation of ancestors and spiritual entities, whereas Christian prophecy relies on the revelation of Christ and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Both aspire to effectuate transformation on both individual and societal levels.

Recommendations

Based on the synthesis of findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

- African traditional religious scholars I universities and seminaries should reconstruct their purview about African divinatory systems as genuine prophetic revelation within African religious milieu and scholarship.

- Divination's concepts of revelation, discernment, and moral renewal should be developed in contextual and intercultural religious curriculum rather than dismissed as superstition.
- Indigenous knowledge systems should be strengthened by government, policymakers, cultural organizations, and academia.
- To maintain authenticity, integrity, and community accountability, traditional religious councils, elders, and cultural groups should create ethical codes and certification methods for practitioners. This will reestablish public trust in divination as a spiritual vocation rather than an exploitative venture, enhancing its redemptive and transforming power.
- Given the theological similarities between African divination and Pentecostal/African indigenous Christianity, prophetic ministries, inter-religious and intra-African theological discussion is sacrosanct.
- Traditional leaders and churches can collaborate on revelation, healing, and moral guidance in a respectful and transformative environment. Such discussion will promote spiritual reconciliation and contextual mission.
- Divination in transformative leadership and conflict resolution is crucial. Divination reinterpreted through Transformational Theory stipulated by Mezirow (1991) can model an ethical framework for leadership and moral decision-making.
- Mediation and peacemaking by traditional diviners promotes harmony and justice. Thus, governments, NGOs, and religious groups should use qualified traditional practitioners for community mediation, moral teaching, and restorative justice.
- Cultural festivals and awareness campaigns should be emphasizes to present divination as a wise and moral tradition, not occultism or superstition.
- Further research is needed to compare African divinatory hermeneutics to global prophetic traditions.

Conclusion

African divinatory traditions are rooted in a comprehensive understanding that integrates spiritual, ethical, and communal aspects of existence, as outlined by the AIKS framework. This indigenous framework perceives knowledge as interconnected and influenced by spiritual insight, aiming to restore balance among the divine, humanity, and the natural world. Field evidence substantiated this perspective, demonstrating that divination serves as a spiritual framework for acquiring divine wisdom, facilitating guidance, healing, and moral renewal. Consequently, divination serves as an authentic manifestation of African prophetic awareness, deeply anchored in its theological and philosophical heritage. The research indicates that divination facilitates both individual and societal transformation by fostering critical reflection, reinterpreting experiences, and encouraging behavioral change, as articulated in Mezirow's Transformational Theory. Divinatory consultations assist individuals and communities in navigating moral disarray, reaffirming their core principles, and revitalizing their spirits. This process mirrors Mezirow's perspective transformation, wherein individuals reevaluate their worldview to attain heightened moral and spiritual consciousness. Divination reshapes convictions, perspectives, and actions in relation to ethical integrity and communal wholeness. The research revealed notable continuities and alterations between traditional divination practices and prophetic expressions within modern African Christianity. Setting theological differences aside, both elucidate and reshape the divine blueprint for individual and societal metamorphosis.

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