

## **EFFECTS OF THE PROLIFERATION OF ZENG (MAGICAL OBJECTS) ON THE MUMUYE OF TARABA STATE**

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### **Abstract**

Mumuye society, like any other African, places high regard and observances of its religious beliefs and practices, which foster harmonious relationships between the sacred and profane. *Zeng* are sophisticated conglomerated material objects like human nails, hairs of animals, salt, bones of human beings, pubic hairs of humans and animals, broken bottles, pieces of rag, zinc, iron, aluminium, rubber, plant residues, teeth of witches and wizards, or other items that are magically collected and empowered with human psychic and spiritual powers to harm or destroy people or other things by their handlers. This study examines the effects of *zeng* (magical objects) on the Mumuye of Taraba State. The primary objective of the study was to identify and understand the underlying effects of the widespread presence of *zeng* among the Mumuye. The research utilized a combination of ethnographic methods and a phenomenological approach to delve into the intricate dynamics of *zeng* effects. Data was gathered from both primary and secondary sources. The study employs rigorous qualitative analysis to derive meaningful insights from the collected data on the duo effects of *zeng* among the Mumuye of Taraba State. The study discovered security, hunting purpose, safeguarding of farms, animal pens, and territory against invading enemies, mutual respect and competitions, fear/phobia, violation of people's fundamental rights, mutual suspicion and hatred, tarnishing of one's reputation/image, scaring investors, rural-urban migration, escalation of tension and rivalry among individuals and communities, underdevelopment, poverty, and the need to awaken people's consciousness to take antidotes against *zeng* attacks are some of the effects associated with *zeng* as examined by the study. The research recommends that people should be aware of other effects of *zeng in order* to be at peace with the latest ones. People should learn to be their brother's keeper and also consult herbal experts to give them antidotes or

fortified counter magical rings, talismans, caps, and eye silvery and powdery concoctions against the attacks and effects of *zeng*.

**Keywords:** Effects, Mumuye, Taraba and *Zeng*

## **Introduction**

The human person is both a creator and preserver of culture. As one of the rational creatures created by God, humans are intended to exercise absolute control over the cosmic universe, harnessing various forces for individual use. Developing negative attitudes in societal activities affects the level of thinking and has pragmatic consequences for human experiences (Anjov 26). Thus, humans are responsible for exploiting the resources of the cosmic universe, and through their activities, significant impacts are recorded on people's lives and other aspects of the cosmic universe. Culture, as an aspect of human activity, is symbolized in the arts, literature, customs, and traditions of a community or society (Adega, *A Guide to African Religion in the Diaspora* 25).

Inventive geniuses are revered and directed towards improving life in the cosmic universe created by God, where humans are considered rational beings at the centre of the universe, capable of controlling it. This view gains more significance considering the operation, utilisation, and harnessing of different mystical powers, particularly in the proliferation of *zeng* within the human and spiritual realms, either deliberately or inadvertently, to cause harm, cure ill health, provide general protection for individual and communal well-being, or destroy lives and other entities.

In support of the claim made above, Danfulani maintains that the cosmological beliefs of African indigenous groups hinge on the spiritual, human, and mystical powers, which are inseparable from each other because they are populated by different spiritual beings (22). This African cosmological worldview is indeed populated by various spirit beings, involving a continual existence of the supernatural world and the belief that Africans exert great influence over their world of existence (20).

## **Effects of the Proliferation of *Zeng* (Magical Objects) on the Mumuye of Taraba State**

The effects of the proliferation of *zeng* on the Mumuye of Taraba State are part and parcel of the cosmological worldview, where man is in between the two worlds—physical and spiritual. Thus, these effects of *zeng* are broadly classified into two forms; positive and negative, as examined below:

### **Positive Effects of *Zeng***

The positive effects of *zeng* on the Mumuye on the Mumuye of Taraba State are thus examined:

## **Security**

*Zeng* is used for self defense. Concurrently, the challenges of insecurity bedeviling Nigeria possessed a myriad of social, political, historical, and economic roots (Lawal and Danladi 94). However, concurrently, the challenges of banditry, kidnappers, bandits, insurgents in Nigeria possess a myriad of social, political historical and economic roots. Thus, the prosperity of a nation depends on the prevalence of security (Akinpeli108).

Prior to the coming of modern weapons, *zeng* is still been used for the purpose of security even today. In view of the above thought, *zeng* is used for self-defence of farms, animal pens, and protection against invading enemies. *Zeng* is used also in protecting oneself, herds of cattle, sheep, goats, and farms, *jaa vaa* (shrine) (Nzavah Garba, Oral interview).

## **Hunting**

Hunting is an essential aspect of Mumuye way of life. They engaged in *bali /bele* (hunting festival) for games. Thus, going to hunt wild games as bush meat (*yupo/wopo jenti*) using varieties of sophisticated and fast *zeng*, especially on speedy animals like antelope, lions, hyena, wild birds, cobra and a host of others, is an indispensable aspect of Mumuye way of life (Kwazeng Mading, Oral Interview).

## **Regulating of Unwanted Behaviours**

Experts who engaged in the use of *zeng* to mitigate immoral behaviours like cheating and being dubious in dealing with fellow men. Ladies who are not humbled enough to demonstrate high sense respect, humility, self-reliance and sincerity are often punished with *zeng* to serve as deterrents for others (Wuje Saja, Oral Interview). Thus, with the invention of *zeng*, many ladies who are prostitutes, boyfriends, or husband's snatchers, *zeng* now use give them warning to desist from such immoral practice (Jalon Foken, Oral Interview).

## **Zeng as Gadfly**

*Zeng* as observed, serves as a gadfly that stings people into consciousness to seek immediate antidote against its dreadful impact. Nzalaa Shonba maintains similarly that the use of *zeng* is important because many people have resorted to consulting experts to give them antidotes, counteracting rings, caps, bangles, rings, and eye medicine (Zubairu Sani, Oral Interview).

## **Mutual Exchange of Powers**

Due to effects of magical object proliferation in Mumuye society, the practice fosters mutual exchange of powers among experts (Yakubu, Mago, Oral Interview). Hence, the researcher was further informed during an interview session that, blacksmiths, hunters, local barbers,

farmers, herdsmen, and custodians of *jaavaa* (secret cult) are highly in possession of *zeng* which they used for mutual exchange of its powers among their members (Bitrus Simam, Oral Interview).

### **Competition**

Competition is a situation in which people or organisations compete with each other for something (Hornby 8th ed. 293). It has become necessary for experts of magical objects to compete with one another using *zeng* (Jethro Pius, Oral Interview). The research was further told that, experts of *Zeng applauded* and engaged in the use of magical objects to foster competition in order to see whose own magical objects are the most sophisticated, weak and require revitalization. Thus, every participant is expected to prepare himself or herself to compete favourably with other contenders in using *zeng* (Jonathan Dabang, Oral Interview).

### **Entertainment**

Entertainment is an essential aspect of social nature of man, being a social being. The positive effect of *zeng* is used for entertainment of experts among themselves (Jonathan Monkin, Oral Interview).

### **Pleasure**

Every human being is a pleasure-seeking rational animal. Pleasure is highly sought as a result of the effect of *zeng* among experts. Pleasure seekers of *zeng* as further observed, some experts of *zeng* enjoyed the pleasure of using *zeng* at those usual gatherings (Zubairu Sani, Oral Interview).

### **To Respect Nature at Work**

Nature is a creation of the animator-creator, which man is seen to be placed in charge of (Wuje Saja, Oral Interview). One of the positive effects of *zeng* as observed further is that, it clings people with nature for harmonious inter-relationships, where man is considered a dependent being, who is given a link of survival with nature (Jethro Pius, Oral Interview).

### **Showcase of Spiritual Powers**

Showcases of spiritual powers belonged to experts who possessed such powers as in their dealings with fellow men. Thus, every human creature has been endowed by God with its own force of life, its own power to sustain life (Magesa 50). One cannot remove the act of showcasing spiritual powers when it comes to considering the positive effects of magical object operations among their users (Yakubu Mago, Oral interview).

### **Command Respect**

Respect is an ardent virtue that is indispensable in facets of African culture. In fact, its significance is interwoven in all spheres of human endeavours (Francis Napu, Oral Interview). As far as the positive effects of *zeng* are concerned, experts command respect due to their knowledge and expertise in the use of *zeng* (Jonathan Monkin, Oral Interview).

### **Rebranding of Indigenous Science**

Rebranding of indigenous science is an aspect that has come to lime light because of the positive effects of *zeng* on the Mumuye of Taraba State (Bazing Bakoshi, Oral Interview). Jalon Foken is also of the view that, due to the positive effect of *zeng* there arose the quest to rebrand indigenous knowledge system especially *zeng* for continuity's sake amidst modern sciences (Oral Interview).

### **Negative Effects of Zeng**

*Zeng* has negative effects among the Mumuye of Taraba State, which include:

#### **Fear /Phobias / Trauma**

The African view of "I am because we are" and "in securing ours, I secure mine" (Ogbenika 17) has been threatened by the fear and trauma caused as a result of the proliferation of magical objects. One of the effects of magical proliferation and attacks by *zeng* on the Mumuye is the induction of fear among both natives and even foreigners. Phobia is a state instilled in the minds of people by an action or encounter with something (Usman 47).

According to Ikechukwu Oputa Aloy, those who have been attacked or are yet to be attacked by magical objects developed phobia and are scared away from interacting with fellow Mumuye, whom they do not know, due to the fear of magical object attacks (Oral Interview). Teresa James Koro asserts similarly, saying that, since her attack with *Zeng*, she has been receiving an antidote from a herbal expert. When ever she hears people discuss *Zeng*, about *zeng* developed phobia (Oral Interview).

#### **Violation of Human Rights and the Sanctity of Human Lives**

The proliferation of magical objects poses a serious violation of human rights and the sanctity of human lives, as possessors of these objects inflict pain and destruction on others. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, proclaimed on December 10, 1948, in Articles 1 and 3, underscores that "all human beings are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood," and that "everyone has the right to life, liberty, and security of person" (as qtd. in Anyacho, *Essential Themes* 91).

In a captivating view, Julius Nyasi Laabanya reiterated that, violating human rights is a serious sin against God and humanity. When people hear of magical object attacks, they consider it

evil and a violation of the sanctity of life and property (Oral Interview). However, there is an extraordinary increase in threats to lives due to man's inventive knowledge (Evangelium Vitae No. 2). The Holy Qur'an (Sura Al Furqan 68) justifies taking a life only for a "just cause" and emphasizes that "life is a sacred gift for which we are responsible." Sura Al-Ma'ida's verses 1-2 maintain that taking a life unjustly is against Allah's wishes.

It is distressing to hear people's accounts of being attacked by magical objects, highlighting the frustration and dehumanization caused by such practices, which are still carried out with the negative aim of envy and witchhunting (Jethro Pius, Oral Interview). A right is a justifiable claim to obtain or act in a particular manner if entitled to do so (Omorgbe 110).

In recent years, there has been an increase in the abuse and violation of rights worldwide, with persistent abuse of human rights and destruction of property (Kwa'alla xvii). This situation is similar to the use of magical objects among the Mumuye of Taraba State. Proliferators of *zeng* among the Mumuye used these objects to attack and destroy lives and property daily without regret, thereby violating the right to live and sanctity of human lives (Nzavah Garba, Oral Interview).

### **Mutual suspicion and hatred**

The proliferation of *zeng* and its effects on the Mumuye of Taraba State have succeeded in creating mutual suspicion and hatred among the people due to persistent attacks on lives and property. Consequently, handlers of magical objects feel bad if their identities are later revealed (Goreko Banang, Oral Interview). It is common to see people wearing sensors necklaces, antidote rings, walking staffs, eye silvery powder, *soo-jaa naa* and *waa yuu* (wrest bangles and fortified caps) (in Mumuye to counteract attacks by magical objects (Bello Deega, Oral Interview).

### **Disrespect to Mumuye Religious Worldview on Magic**

A culture that embraces the totality of a people's ways of life, worldviews, rituals, belief systems, and their dos and don'ts is very important (Adega, *A Guide to African Religion in the Diaspora* 25). Regarding disrespect for the Mumuye religious worldview and the use of magical objects, it has been viewed as sheer syncretism, which is a process of culture change where the traits and elements of one culture are given new meanings or functions when adopted by another (Lehman and Myers 414).

However, African religious culture is deeply rooted in Africans as their existential code. This experience is ongoing today, with people needing quick intervention from herbal experts for tests before taking the sick to the hospital to prevent further attacks (Bitrus Simam, Oral Interview).

### **Indiscriminate Abuse of *Zeng* (Magical Objects)**

There is a high and continuous rise in the misuse of magical objects among practitioners, which has turned the Mumuye society into a horrifying one, where the value and sanctity of human lives and property are disregarded and are on the verge of collapse. People fear being eliminated if adequate antidotes are not taken against *zeng* attacks. Hence, many handlers of *zeng* magical objects proliferate these magical objects indiscriminately without considering innocent people. Hence, indiscriminate abuse of *zeng* that, both young and old are engaged in proliferating magical objects, which have remained worrisome in Mumuye society today (Kalako Jinzere, Oral Interview).

### **Tarnishing One's Own Reputation**

The Mumuye society is still been portrayed by outsiders as a highly primitive, retarded, and violent one, where the use of magical objects to attack lives and property hinders any meaningful development from being realised or achieved (Chuckwudi Ekene, Oral Interview). Similarly, those who used magical objects for positive purposes are also grouped with those who used them for negative purposes as well because, they can be hired to kill and destroy lives and property, thereby tarnishing their moral image (Michael Samari Dong, Oral Interview).

### **Disrespect for the Mumuye Traditional Healing System and Proliferation of Fake Herbal Medicine Men**

The rate of disrespect exhibited for the African traditional healing system and the proliferation of fake herbal medicine men is worrisome today (Nzalaa Shonba, Oral interview). Thus, such disdain shown for Mumuye traditional healing and the rise of counterfeit medicine men among the Mumuye is very disheartening. In the same vein, this disregard has led to the proliferation of magical objects by their possessors to prove to skeptics that, before the advent of Western medicine, the Mumuye traditional healing system had been very effective and served many purposes among the people (Francis Napu, Oral Interview).

### **Escalation of Tension and Rivalry among Individuals and Communities**

Escalation of tension and rivalry is a remote cause of intolerance inherent in the human mind or human faculties, often incited by human actions (Dzurgba, *The Psychology of Religion*, 56). These dual effects of *zeng* among the Mumuye frequently heighten tensions and rivalries within families and communities. Some families have been entangled in various conflicts due to escalating tensions caused by *zeng* operations among hunters, blacksmiths, local barbers, and local alcohol sellers, secret cult members of *vaa / vaka*, and traditional herbal experts (Teresa James Koro, Oral Interview). It is observable that, family crises denote relationships strained to the breaking point, leading to the dissolution of family units (Uche and Onovo 63).

## **Underdevelopment**

The Mumuye society suffers from pervasive underdevelopment across all sectors. The magical proliferation of *zeng* has significantly also contributed to this underdevelopment, thereby eliminating potential leaders and hindering meaningful developmental initiatives from being realized (Jethro Pius, Oral Interview). Yakubu Mago did not mince to the researcher when he opines similarly that, one negative effect of *zing* on the Mumuye of Taraba State is the level the practice has dragged the development of the country backward (Oral Interview).

## **Rural-Urban Migration**

The increasing migration of youth from Mumuye communities, especially rural to urban, is highly alarming and concerning today due to also the pervasive fear of *zeng* proliferation and attacks (Bello Deega, Oral Interview). In view of this, some Mumuye have migrated to cities in search of better life opportunities, viewing their departure to urban areas as an escape from magical object attacks and the distressing news about these threats (Goreko Banang, Oral Interview). Underdevelopment as an experienced human phenomenon has been retarded in amumuye society due to the proliferation of magical objects (Chuckwudi Ekene, Oral Interview).

As further observed, many youths have left rural villages for urban areas due to the fear of magical object attacks, leaving the elderly to contend with life and preserve traditions without passing them down to future generations (Zubairu Sani, Oral Interview). Similarly, Yakubu Mago also lamented such a move when his life was threatened while purchasing tubers of yam for his uncle. He later on relocated to another place to buy those tubers of yam (Oral interview).

## **Conclusion**

Proliferation of magical objects is as ancient as its practitioners, deeply embedded in Mumuye worldview and passed down through generations by their custodians. Magical objects form a significant part of the Mumuye cosmological worldview, where experts manipulate supernatural forces to achieve desired effects on lives and other aspects of existence. Despite pinpointing some of the related duo effects associated with the proliferation of magical objects on the Mumuye, one cannot definitively assert that there are no additional positive and negative effects driving their prevalence among the Mumuye, both historically and presently.

The research identifies these positive and negative effects among others, to exist in duo forms: positive and negative, indicating that the proliferation of magical objects in Mumuye society, both past and present, bears these duo effects. Hence, there is a necessity for people to acquaint themselves with this emerging trend on the positive and negative effects of *zeng* in order to broaden their understanding and awareness of the complexities surrounding the proliferation



of magical objects and other related effects which are still obtained in the past and present Mumuye society.

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### List of Informants

S/N	NAME	Gender	Age	Occupation	Place	Date
1.	Bazing Bakoshi	Male	60	Farmer	Mallum, Ardo-Kola L.G.A	08/9/2023
2.	Bello Deega	Male	58	Hunter/farmer	Gana, Yorro L.G.A Dong 'A'	5/8/2024
3.	Bitrus Simam	Male	40	Hunter/ healer	Monkin, Zing L.G.A.	2/7/2024
4.	Chuckwudi Ekene	Male	38	Businessman	Monkin, Zing LG.A	2/7/2024
5.	Francis Napu	Male	97	Cultic custodian	Yorro L.G. A Booli Santa, Dong 'A', Zing L.G.A	
6.	Goreko Bonang	Male	30	Student	Dampan, Yorro L.G.A	21/6/2024
7.	Ikechuckwu Oputa Aloy	Male	50	Electrician	Sunkani, Ardo Kola L.G.A	12/7/2023
8.	Jalon Foken	Female	45	House wife /local alcoholic seller	Danjako, Jalingo L.G.A	1/8/2024
9.	Jethro Pius	Male	65	Servant	KpantiNapu, Yorro L.G.A	24/7/2024
10.	Julius Nyasi L.	Male	60	Priest	Zing L.G.A	28/8/2023

11.	Jonathan Dabang	Male	45	Business man	Banga Dutse, Lau L.G.A	7/8/2024
12.	Jonathan Monkin	Male	44	Photographer	Mike Six, Jalingo	2/6/2024
13.	Kwazeng Mading	Male	41	Mason/farmer	Santuwa, Yorro L.G.A	3/8/2024
14.	Kalako Jinzere	Male	45	Medicineman	Shavoh	5/8/2024
15.	Francis Napu	Male	96	Custodian / hunter	Lamma, Zing L.G.A	30/6/2024
16.	Michael Samari Dong	Male	48	Farmer/securityman	Dong-Gamu, Zing L.G.A	19/11/2023
17.	Nzavah Garba	Male	56	hunter/ farmer	Mile Six, Jalingo L.G.A	2/8/2024
18.	Nzalaa Shonba	Male	43	business man	Allan Ganah, Yorro L.G.A	12/6/2024
19.	Teresa James Koro	Female	51	Housewife/farmer	Pupule, Yorro L.G.A	24/4/2023
20.	Wuje Saja	Female	39	Wine brewer	Wagwala, Jalingo L.G.A	2/8/2024
21.	Yakubu Mago	Male	78	Medicineman	Sankadindin , Lau L.G.A	5/8/2024
22.	Zubairu Sani	Male	70	rain making cult custodian	Yorro Bang, Yorro L.G.A	28/3/2024