

Aladura Spirituality and the Theological Epistemology of Affect in African Pneumatic Christianity: A Reflection



Black Heritage

PHOTO: Spirit Revealing

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Synopsis

- **Motivation**
- **Aim and Methodology**
- **Concept Clarification**
- **African Pneumatic Christianity**
- **Some Constitutive Elements of Aladura Spirituality**
- **Senghor's "reason by embrace"**
- **From Senghor to Affect Theory**
- **World-making Potential**
- **Conclusion**



1. Motivation

- Rise of performative Christianity: sonic excess, bodily intensity, communal rapture.
- Practices once frowned upon now embraced in mainstream churches.
- Fascination: how embodied performance connects to the Transcendent.

2. Aim and Methodology

- Aim: Situate Aladura spirituality in the 'politics' of affect.
- Method: Ethnographic observations, worship recordings, interviews.
- Focus: lived experiences, not abstract philosophical criteria.
- Positionality: Believer with no interest beyond academic



3. Concept Clarification

- **Aladura:** “People of prayer” (Yoruba revival, 1920s–30s).
- **Spirituality:** lived connection to the Transcendent.
- **Aladura Spirituality:** Lived religious experience of the Aladura centered on prayer, divine healing, prophecy and reliance on the Holy Spirit.
- **Theological Epistemology:** knowledge claims about God.
- **Affect:** bodily feelings, rhythms, moods shaping experience.
- **Affect Theory:** emotions as central to identity, culture, and social relations.

4. African Pneumatic Christianity

- **Spirit-centered Christianity (pneuma = Holy Spirit).**
- **Practices: glossolalia, healing, prophecy, deliverance.**
- **Holy Spirit as experiential, communal force.**
- **God felt in drumbeats, fervent prayers, prophetic utterances, healing rituals.**

5. Some Constitutive Elements of Aladura Spirituality

Prayer

- Embodied, rhythmic, communal.
- Music, drumming, incense create charged atmosphere.



“It’s as if I somehow became two. It’s as if I was working with the Holy Spirit. I saw a part of me observing what was going on. Yes! I was aware of me in a trance.

The atmosphere became charged as the prayer continued... Music also plays an important role. Music and deep worshipping ... involving turari (incense). It’s as if you’re connected to another realm.”

Constitutive Elements of Aladura Spirituality

Prophecy

- Guidance for moral, political, social issues.
- Truth-seeking akin to philosophy's epistemic quest (Akinadewo, 2025).



Healing

- Holistic: biological, social, spiritual, moral.
- Rituals restore relationships, dignity, and balance.

6. Senghor's "Reason by Embrace"

- Contrasts Western "eye reason" (analytical, detached) with African "reason by embrace" (rhythm, emotion, communion).
- Knowledge through participation, rhythm, and feeling.
- Famous reworking: "I dance the other, therefore I am."
- Anticipated affect theory's emphasis on emotion and embodiment.

7. From Senghor to Affect Theory

- **What might Senghor be responding to? Responded to colonial denigration (Levy-Bruhl's "prelogical" claim).**
- **Affirmed African epistemology as valid and global.**
- **Parallels with Sara Ahmed, Lauren Berlant, Brian Massumi:**
 - **Affect as social force.**
 - **Rhythm, dance, communal worship as epistemic sites.**
- **Aladura worship exemplifies this embodied knowledge-making.**

8. World-making Potential

- The connection with a globalised world: double-edged sword.
 - Risks homogenising Christianity.
 - Offers platform for African voices.
- Aladura spirituality as world-making practice:
 - Affect constructs reality, community, meaning.
 - Dialogue between African spirituality and global modernity.

7. Final word

- Aladura Spirituality demonstrates affect as epistemology.
- Senghor's "reason by embrace" enriches theological discourse.
- African Pneumatic Christianity contributes to global conversations on affect, embodiment, and spirituality.

**Thank
YOU**

