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Soothsaying and the Supernatural Powers as an Open Sesame to Life Success in Some African Writings

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Abstract: This article examines soothsaying and supernatural powers as a marvelously effective means for bringing about a desired result. In fact, divination and supernatural forces are part of African culture and tradition which are used to solve social, economic and political problems. The article shows how soothsaying and the supernatural powers are deeply rooted in African practices and how Africans trust on them to succeed.

Keywords: Soothsaying, Supernatural Powers, Open Sesame, Life Success.

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INTRODUCTION

Man has always believed in a force that transcends him from which he seeks refuge and success. This transcendental force symbolizes God, divinities, and spirits. Between the transcendental force and man, we have the soothsayer who serves as intermediary. The latter predicts the future of man and invites him sometimes to make sacrifices to obtain or avoid what has been predicted to him. The soothsayer uses the supernatural powers that he or she obtains from supernatural forces to solve man's problems. Consequently, through time and space, man becomes addicted to the use of soothsaying and the supernatural powers to achieve his goals. The following article is about the importance of soothsaying and the supernatural powers to succeed grounded on an African worldview.

Ibrahim (1976); Omer-Cooper (1966); Ki-Zerbo (1978); Kunene (1989); Mofolo (1925); & Gabriel (2017) talk about a Zulu society where kings, queen mothers, princes, but also ordinary people made use of the supernatural powers with the help of soothsayers to succeed. Senzangakhona, the father of Chaka, used soothsaying and supernatural powers to solve his problem of getting a male child. Nandi, the mother of Chaka, used soothsaying and supernatural powers to protect herself and her infant Chaka. The latter in his turn also used soothsaying and supernatural powers to become a great warrior and then a great king. When we read the above books, we can see that even those who were not from the royal families sought protection and success through soothsaying and the supernatural powers.

On the other hand, Niane (1965); Gbagbo (1979); Sissao (2012); Buschinger (2012); Kesteloot & Dieng (2000); & Deme (2010) talk about Sundiata's success thanks to the use of soothsaying and the supernatural powers. In these books also the use of soothsaying and supernatural powers are evident. The supernatural was part of the Mandingo society and was used at all levels. King Nare Maghan, father of Sundiata, succeeded to leave a good heir thanks to soothsaying and supernatural powers. Queen Sogolon, mother of Sundiata, succeeded to protect her family thanks to the use of the supernatural. And Sundiata succeeded to vanquish Soumarao, the great Sosso sorcerer king, to take back his kingdom and become a great king thanks to soothsaying and the supernatural powers. Like the documents that deal with the epic of Chaka, those dealing with Sundiata also point out the usage of soothsaying and the supernatural powers to succeed by the ordinary people for their own account. We have the example of hunters and blacksmiths.

In Zulu as well as in Mandingo societies, people consulted soothsayers and used the supernatural powers. Soothsaying had become so important in the above societies that no one dared to do anything without having the future read to him by a soothsayer. Chaka's and Sundiata's births have been foretold by diviners. Besides, the births of our heroes have been prepared by divine forces which had worked behind the scenes as Monette puts it. For example, Chaka's arrival has been prepared by the invisible forces that prevented Senzangakhona's wives from bearing male

children. Mofolo consents that, “[...] Senzangakhona [...] had no male child in any of his houses [...] [but] girls only.” (1925) This led to his fear of dying without an heir and his decision to take a new wife to obtain male children.

As for Sundiata's birth, the divine forces that worked behind the scenes are a hunter diviner and the buffalo of Do. The hunter diviner said to king Naré Maghan “[...] fine king your successor is not yet born. I see two hunters coming to your city [...] a woman accompanies them [...] she will be the mother of him who will make the name of Mali immortal for ever. [Furthermore, The buffalo of Do told one of the two hunters predicted by the hunter diviner that] The king promises the hand of the most beautiful maiden of Do to the victor [...] you must choose [...] Sogolon Kedjou, or Sogolon Kondouto, because she is my wraith. She will be an extraordinary woman [...]” (Niane, 1965)

The second part of this citation shows that women too are highly involved in the use of the supernatural powers to succeed. Tandina (2005) mentions women's political success in epic mostly due to the use of the supernatural powers. The article paints women as non passive, non resigned but dynamic and optimistic. In epic narratives, women held and played very important places and roles that Tandina concludes that: “It is all that which lets us state that, before being the narrative of virility, epic is the narrative of femininity.”¹ For instance, Konare Ba (1977); Kesteloot & Dieng (2000); Abdoulaye (2004); & Aissata (2005) talk about queens Kassay and Sarraounia that used the supernatural powers to succeed.

Konare Ba (1977) tells the story of Queen Kassay and her son, Mamar. The name Kassay itself is an African name given to a cult priestess of Wanzerbé. So the Queen herself was versed in the art of witchcraft as Sogolon the mother of Sundiata. Kassay received from her lover, a jinn, a prediction about the arrival of a son that King Sonni, Kassay's brother, could not kill. Tandina (2005: 100) supports that later on Queen Kassay helped her predicted infant, Mamar, through her supernatural powers to win his multiple wars. Kassay also made the success of Issaka Korombe, a Zarma warrior. In fact, Aissata (2005) explains that, “It's by giving suck to the zarma warrior Issa Korombé that Kassaï, the one breast woman, the hero maker, transmitted to him powers which made him the master of war («wangougna») who put an end to Touareg and Fulani hegemony over the Zarmas of the region of Boboye”²

Abdoulaye and Aissata point out the upbringing of Queen Sarraounia by a man, Dawa. The latter was the friend of the king, father of Sarraounia. Dawa was master of the bush, a hunter. He brought up Sarraounia because the latter lost her mother when she was a baby. The heroine was educated as young boys are educated to become a great warrior. In addition to the military training, Sarraounia was initiated to the secrecy of plants by Dawa who is also a soothsayer. Later on she became the chief and priestess of the animist Azna. Aissata (2005) recognizes that “Sarraounia transcends the state of woman and even that of human being to assume the marks of a goddess like Athena and Aphrodite [...]”³ She fought the colonizers with traditional weapons and the supernatural powers. Even though she was vanquished by the colonizers, some people believe that her supernatural powers caused the ruin of the colonizers who were assassinated by their skirmishers.

“L'épopée zarma de Issa Korombé” in *Les épopées d'Afrique Noire* from Kesteloot and Dieng paints soothsayers as great educators and advisors whose advising should not be taken lightly. In fact, Issa Korombé was initiated in the use of the supernatural powers by a woman of Wanzerbé whose magical strength gave him a quasi-invincibility. The latter, coupled with his strengthening and predictions from his marabout and soothsayer, Alfa Gounou, allowed him to reconquer his territory from fulanis. However, the day he was going to die, Alfa Gounou told him that he had to withdraw from the battle ground because that day was not a favorable one to him. But Issa Korombé replied, “God forbid, no one will tell it after me” (Kesteloot & Dieng, 2000). So, he was killed after he had played a great havoc in the rank of his enemies. The Fulani beheaded him and hanged his head on a pole. Issa Korombé knows that he will die if he does not respect the words of his soothsayer. But he chose dignity over shame and died with honor. Moreover, Ibrahim (1976); Omer-Cooper (1966); Ki-Zerbo (1978); Kunene (1989); Mofolo (1925); & Gabriel (2017) that I mentioned earlier show that not following the instructions given by soothsayers in the usage of the supernatural powers can also be hazardous. Chaka overused the supernatural powers and paid a great price for this. However, paying a price could not stop Africans from worshipping their ancestors' gods and practicing their traditions. Even with their conversion into Christianity and Islam some African people continue consulting soothsayers and using the supernatural powers. They recourse to them to reach their objectives in life.

In the article *Magic and the Supernatural* edited by Hendrix and Shannon, many writers examine witchcraft, magic, superstition, and supernatural powers for goal achieving in Africa. Rossler (2012) talks about supernatural guides through which adults can guide or initiate young people to the secrecy of the use of the supernatural power. These

¹ « C'est tout cela qui nous fait dire que l'épopée, avant d'être le récit de la virilité, est le récit de la féminité. » (2005: 97)

² « C'est en faisant têter le guerrier zarma Issa Korombé que Kassaï, la femme au sein unique, la faiseuse de héros, lui transmet les pouvoirs qui furent de lui le maître de guerre («Wangougna») qui mit fin à l'hégémonie des Touaregs et des Peuls sur les Zarmas de la région du Boboye. »

³ « [...] Sarraounia transcende la femme et même l'être humain pour emprunter les traits d'une déesse à l'instar d'une Athena ou d'une Aphrodite [...] »

supernatural guides help the initiates to become self-confident and help them to use properly their supernatural powers to succeed. Rossler remembers that "[...] Ma-ma-oo [an old woman, who] [...] knows that the monsters are not necessarily vile and obnoxious [...] encourages the protagonist [Lisamarie] to explore the supernatural world with an open mind." (2012).

Two other anthropologist female writers, Bent and Gavin, talk about the criteria for being a witch as well as the limit of magic and its price. They explain in this long quotation that:

Being a witch, [...] requires a great deal more than simply being born in a region known for magical side effects. It is a vocation that requires great resilience, intelligence, intestinal fortitude [...] and a lack of fear. [...] witchcraft is not just the use of magic: it is also knowing when not to use magic [...] there are limits on what magic can be used for, and any magical undertaking has consequences. The more you use magic, the more you will become reliant upon using it. Another consequence is that you can gradually become corrupted by the power of magic. So if you intend to use magic, you best be sure there is no other alternative, and that you are willing to accept any of the consequences for having done so [...] To use magic, you have to accept that you are taking it from other places and that there will be a price [...] This is why witches are reluctant to use magic unless absolutely necessary. Witches understand the importance of not misusing or abusing magic [...] Magic is potent [...] but it comes with a price, particularly for those who are extremely adept at using it. (2012)

This quotation from the article *The Maids, Mother and 'The Other One' of the Discworld* mentions the criteria for being a witch, the limit of magic, and the price of magic. It shows that acquiring the supernatural powers that people consider as source of achievement is not a child's joke.

As far as Okeja (2012) is concerned, she mentions in her work the usage of magic in all the domains in Africa precisely in Nigeria for the sake of success. This omnipresence of magic in Africa exists up to now. Okeja gives details in this long quotation:

The phenomenon of Magic has been a recurrent decimal in African consciousness. Even the wave of globalization which has made it possible for people within Africa to share in humanity's demystification of this phenomenon has not been able to calm the tempest of belief in and fear of this phenomenon[...] In the schools, market place, church, government and other offices, streams, rivers, homes, forests, the floor of the stock exchange market, newspapers, bridges, government houses, state and federal houses of assembly, senate house, football stadium and even at the presidency etc., the feeling, reports or affirmation of the manifestation of these phenomena is commonplace. There is, in short, so much belief, fear and purposeful recourse to the phenomenon of magic in Africa[...] It makes clear the fact that even the most educated Africans (most educated Nigerians in this context) are not excepted from the belief in this phenomenon[...] So, instead of a market economy, many African countries now have a praying economy (Okeja, 2012)

In this quotation, Okeja also points out the attitude of African people, mostly leaders who stick at the use of the supernatural even for the development of their countries. This shows that the use of the supernatural powers to succeed is deeply rooted in African tradition and belief. I am now going to talk about some epic books and articles that also show that the above practices are still current in West Africa.

To begin with, Conrad (2005) uses historical as well as epic sources to talk about divinization (soothsaying) and the different means used to foretell the future. Among these means we have cowries, small stones, sticks, kola nuts or horsehair into a calabash full of water and interpret their buoyancy or read their patterns, etc. Conrad also mentions the different activities performed by initiated persons or soothsayers. In fact, he classifies social activities according to social classes and the use of the supernatural powers to perform these activities. He shows that there can have interweaving between these social trades: one artist can perform more than two trades. Paraphrasing Conrad I can say that there are some jobs that demand particular knowledge and skills since they are linked to the use of the supernatural powers. Shrine priests, carvers of masks and other ritual objects, herbalists, healers, midwives, hunters, and various kinds of diviners confront supernatural beings daily and specialize in appeasing and manipulating the ones who shape the course of events.

In *Chaka* we learn that herbalists and healers are confronted to supernatural beings while picking leaves, cutting bark or roots from some trees. These herbalists and healers are mostly soothsayers that should be well prepared before performing these tasks. Mofolo reports:

There was a tree in Bokone [...] It was said that before a person could cut it, he had to be strengthened with medicines, and then only could he go to it, because if he cut it without having strengthened himself, he would die at once. It was said that, when a person chopped it, it cried like a goat, and besides, its sap was red like human blood. The person chopping it had to be naked, totally nude. It was a tree of witchcraft [...] [and] [...] was kept [...] like the medicine for healing fractures." (1925)

Getting ready before cutting any part of a tree for medicinal reasons is indeed a delicate task for soothsayers. There is a specific day and time for cutting some trees. Most of the time one has to please the spirit that is living in the tree with a sacrifice or by reciting incantations before cutting any part of the tree. These sacrifices and incantations are the prices paid by soothsayers to be in touch with the supernatural forces and serve as intermediaries between human beings and the supernatural forces. Conrad asserts that:

[...] of all the occupational specialists, blacksmiths are generally regarded as the most qualified to mediate between humans and supernatural beings. Not all blacksmiths are willing or able to attempt the manipulation of spiritual power [...] One reason blacksmiths have the inside track on healing and sorcery is that their ability to create essential tools and weapons out of raw materials is akin to magic (*dalilu*). It is blacksmiths who perform circumcisions, but only a few dare to. This is because the powerful spiritual force called *nyama* is released in dangerous amounts as soon as the initiate's flesh is cut. It is believed that if the circumciser does not know how to protect himself, he can be blinded. When dangerous animals are killed, they release enormous amounts of *nyama*, so many of the greatest hunters have been blacksmiths. Other occult practices dominated by blacksmiths include rainmaking and divination (Conrad, 2005).

This analysis from Conrad shows that a blacksmith can do the job of a carver or that of a circumciser. Nevertheless, the expert that is involved in many trade should be well initiated to avoid occult problems; for almost all the traditional trades like forging, hunting, circumcising...etc are linked to divinities that the expert has to know before venturing in any specific trade. The above quotation shows how dangerous it can be for an uninitiated to venture into a profession he does not master.

Hampate Bâ's *L'Etrange Destin de Wangrin* and Niane's *Sundiata: an Epic of Old Mali* all show case soothsayers practicing the job of midwives. In Hampate Bâ's book we learn how an old midwife and the father of Wangrin, both versed in the art of witchcraft, succeeded in assisting Wangrin's mother when she was in parturition. Hampate Bâ remembers:

She was assisted by a toothless and white-haired matron. The latter [...] gently sang the matrimonial melody taught by Nyakuruba, the goddess of motherhood. [When it was time to cut the umbilical cord] Wangrin's father... took out his fetish lodged in the skin of a black cat. He drew from his satchel a bag containing an operative vegetal powder and his sacrificial knife. The father entered the maternity hut... grabbed a new calabash which he filled with water. He poured the vegetal powder into it. Then he began to invoke Nyakuruba and all the gods of marriage and motherhood. He spat in the water as he recited the ritual litanies. When he was done, he threw his sacrificial knife into the calabash filled with water. A few moments later, he took it out all dripping with water. With a sharp and precise blow, he cut the umbilical cord which welded Wangrin to his brothers. Old woman seized the little brothers. She wrapped them in a piece of loincloth made of cotton strips put together. She put in the same package seven millet flour pancakes, seven cowries, seven cotton duvets, seven cola nuts, seven small white pebbles, a tuft of the newborn's hair and, finally, a piece of cotton strip stained by the first excrements and urine of the baby, then she went to bury the whole in a place known only to herself and to the mother of the baby."⁴ (1973)

This long quotation shows how complex the work of traditional midwives can be. Midwives should be initiated and versed in the art of witchcraft to better fulfill this very important social task. Consequently, when, "Sogolon's time came. The King commanded the nine greatest midwives of Mali to come to Niani, and they were [...] constantly in attendance on the damsel of Do." (Niane, 1965) The task of midwives is somehow very dangerous because it involves blood. In fact, a woman in parturition loses blood and some spirits are attracted by blood, especially human blood. The presence of supernatural forces in delivery places can be dangerous for the woman who is delivering, her baby and the midwives. Consequently, midwives have to be versed in the art of witchcraft in order to protect themselves, the women in parturition and their babies.

I have mentioned above that blacksmiths practice many trades. The Sorko too are supernatural powers holders who can practice many jobs. Conrad agrees that the Sorko are the "masters of the water". They are specialists in everything that have to do with the river. They are at the same time fishers, hunters, wood carvers, farmers, and

⁴ "Elle était assistée d'une matrone édentée et chenue. Celle-ci... [chantait] doucement la mélodie matrimoniale enseignée par Nyakuruba, la déesse de la maternité [Quand le moment de couper le cordon ombilical fut venu] Le père de Wangrin ... sortit son fétiche logé dans une peau de chat noir. Il tira de sa besace un sachet contenant une poudre végétale opérative et son couteau sacrificiel. Le père entra dans la case-maternité ... se saisit d'unealebasse neuve qu'il remplit d'eau. Il y versa la poudre végétale. Puis il se mit à invoquer Nyakuruba et tous les dieux du mariage et de la maternité. Il crachotait dans l'eau au fur et à mesure qu'il récitait les litanies rituelles. Quand il eut fini, il jeta dans laalebasse remplie d'eau son couteau sacrificiel. Quelques instants après, il le sortit tout ruisselant d'eau. D'un coup sec et précis, il coupa le cordon ombilical qui soudait Wangrin à ses 'petits frères'. La vieille chenue se saisit des 'petits frères'. Elle les enveloppa dans un morceau de pagne fait de bandes de coton assemblées. Elle mit dans le même paquet sept galettes de farine de mil, sept cauris, sept duvets de coton, sept noix de cola, sept petits cailloux blancs, une touffe de cheveux du nouveau-né et, enfin, un morceau de bande de coton taché des premiers excréments et urines du bébé, puis elle alla enterrer le tout dans un lieu connu d'elle seule et de l'accouchée." (Bâ, 1973: 13, 14, 16, 17)

transporters. They are also genie priests. One of their most important genies is *Mayé*, who had a genie mother and a blacksmith father. *Mayé* is the genie of floods and is found wherever the water begins to rise. (2005) The Sorko are indeed the master of the water. They are the ones who warn the population if any dangerous animal comes in the river. They are the ones who soothe the hearts of unhappy spirits of the river through sacrifices and incantations. Hunters, blacksmiths, midwives, fishermen are mostly soothsayers and they keep alive their culture and tradition based on the use of the supernatural powers.

Chunia Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* show the usefulness of spiritual masks carved in wood for deities. Achebe reports in *Arrow of God* that spiritual masks are not carved anywhere like other object. He remembers Ezeulu's first son, Edogo, a caver who "[...] could not do it in the home under the profane gaze of women and children but had to retire to the spirit-house built for such work at a secluded corner of the [...] market place where no one who had not been initiated into the secret of masks would dare to approach." (Achebe, 1959) Moreover, in *Things Fall Apart* Achebe illustrates through Chika and Cheilo, who have succeeded as shrine priestesses. The deity to whom they are priestesses is called Agbala, the oracle of Hills and Caves, a powerful Igbo deity. Achebe reports:

[...] people came from far and near to consult it. They came when misfortune dogged their steps or when they had a dispute with their neighbors. They came to discover what the future held for them or to consult the spirits of their departed fathers [...] The priestess in those days was a woman called Chika. She was full of the power of her god, and she was greatly feared. [As for Chielo, she] was a widow with two children. She was very friendly with Ekwefi [A wife of Okonkwo] and they shared a common shed in the market [...] Anyone seeing Chielo in ordinary life would hardly believe she was the same person who prophesied when the spirit of Agbala was upon her. (1959)

Chielo too was feared and respected by everybody because of her supernatural powers. Nevertheless, we can see her cooking food with other women at ceremonies. This quotation from Achebe shows that soothsaying is part of African beliefs and that the experts in soothsaying are respected and feared. Besides, soothsayers as individuals, are after all human beings living in a given society. They can experience joy or unhappiness like any other social members like Chielo. Moreover they can have social occupations like Chielo, the great priestess, who is earning her life doing commerce.

The reason leading to the fear and respect of chief priests and priestesses is that they can harm those who try to oppose them using supernatural powers.

Ana (2013) in her research paper talks about voodoo, a traditional religion that exist mainly in Nigeria, Benin, Togo, and Ghana. Voodoo is based on witchcraft, the latter is defined as "[...] the ability to harm someone through the use of mystical power [and] Voodoo is a religion based on the existence of an invisible world interconnected to the visible world." (Ana, 2013) In Ana's document, she points out the use of voodoo in human trafficking. In fact, women who desire to go in Europe but do not have money to go, are given the opportunity by traffickers in exchange of working for them as prostitutes till they recover the money they spent on them. For this reason a contract based on voodoo is signed by the victims and the traffickers under the supervision of the voodoo priest. Ana explains in this long quotation:

Once the woman's travel is arranged, the deal is sealed at a shrine. According to the Nigerian National Agency for Prohibition of Traffic in Persons (NAPTIP) about 90 per cent of girls that are '[sic]' been trafficked to Europe are taken to shrines to take "oaths of secrecy". The oaths are taken in ceremonies that include body parts from the person on whom the oath is being administered, as well as from one of her relatives, usually her mother or sister. The use of body parts such as fingernails, blood, sweat, teeth and/or pubic hairs "*give the voodoo priest possession of some part of the victim, creating a sense of fear and an unwillingness to speak out.*" Other 'magical' items, such as animal blood, kola nuts, water, palm oil, earth taken from a graveyard, alcohol and herbs are also part of these ceremonies. Sometimes women are also asked to take baths and drink or eat "magical" food. Then, voodoo priests make a small packet with the body parts, some woman's intimate clothes and other symbolic elements, such as pieces of the Ogun deity or soap. These packages "*become a concrete expression of the agreement*" and are kept by the voodoo priest or the traffickers until the debt is paid. In order to reinforce the pact a "*second round of oaths*" is often made in the country of destination. (2013)

The inference that can be drawn from the above quoted section of Ana's research paper is that the use of the supernatural powers to succeed has evolved through time and space. People use the supernatural powers to make business at the example of these traffickers who travelled from Africa to Europe carrying with them their religion and belief to protect themselves and to succeed. Ana asserts that these "[...] ritual oaths seal the pact between victims and traffickers; but they also protect women during their travel to Europe, and offer them success in their future work, making them even more desirable for customers." (2013) Moreover, this citation shows that the supernatural powers play the role of arbiter and judge. These ritual oaths between the women and traffickers prevent the former from breaking the

contract until they finished paying back the traffickers. As the arbiter and the judge punish the contract breaker, it is the same way that the supernatural powers punish those who perjured. Ana avers that:

The inobservance of the pact can “*anger the gods*” and “*jeopardize the victim’s life*”. Women are strongly persuaded that terrible things (illness, deaths, madness) will befall them and their families if they don’t repay the debt. [Nevertheless,] A close collaboration with African communities, *marabouts* and churches is essential in understanding these beliefs and in setting up strategies and mechanisms to eradicate these abuses. (2013: 8, 13)

Ana proposes *marabouts* and church priests as solution to the problem of the use of the supernatural powers that is used to compel women into prostitution. *Marabouts* and church priests can help these women to break the supernatural deal that they have signed with traffickers and voodoo priests. However, some of these monotheist religion leaders use also the supernatural powers in their practices to heal, to protect, or to enrich their clients.

Balogun (2011) examines the syncretic beliefs and practices amongst Muslims in Lagos State, Nigeria. He points out many aspects of the supernatural powers that represent a religious syncretism by monotheists priests: *marabouts* and church priests. Some of these aspects are superstition, magic, jinn invocation, charms, amulets, talismans, divination, etc. Balogun makes it clear to his audience while describing the contemporary Arab world that:

Prophet Muhammad (SAW) was also sent as a universal messenger in the Arabian Peninsular. Many scholars describe their practices at this period as barbaric practices. In fact, this period is known in Islāmic history as the *jāhiliyyah* (barbaric) period. But the term ‘barbarism’ has attracted controversy among scholars, Hitti argues that the term *jāhiliyyah* usually rendered as ‘time of ignorance’ or ‘barbarism’ only means ‘...the period in which the Arabs had no dispensation, nor inspired Prophet, nor revealed book, for ignorance and barbarism can hardly be applied to such a cultured and lettered society [...] the Arabs had a pantheon of idols, they had cultic centres located at oases, and they went there like pilgrims. Their religion also included: fetishism (worshipping of stone), animism (worshipping of spirits, *jinn*), manism (ancestor-worship), totemism, astral triad (sun-moon Venus), as well as monotheism (Allah). They used to worship their idols throughout the year. They also believed in sacrifices, divination, shamanism, magic, witchcraft and sorcery. They equally had a number of superstitions. (2011: 126, 127)

Balogun points out the widespread use of superstition that I qualify as personal soothsaying because whenever something special occurs in the life of a person he or she will wait for a good or bad result according to the action that happened. For instance:

To open an umbrella in the house will bring bad luck. Clothes worn inside out will bring good luck. An itchy palm means money will come your way. A bird that comes in through your window brings bad luck. It is a bad luck to chase someone with a broom. To drop a spoon means a child will visit you. You must get out of bed on the same side you got in or you will have bad luck. To give someone a purse or wallet without money in it, will bring that person bad luck. We should not cross a pregnant woman’s legs lest she will give birth to a child that resembles that person. (Balogun, 2011)

The above superstitions are self-soothsaying, they are known by everybody in Africa in general, especially in Nigeria, in the Yoruba society. If one of them occurs in the life of a person, the latter already knows what is awaiting for him, thus giving them a divination aspect. Savickaite asserts that “[...] human being was superstitious and still is [...] The need to believe in supernatural, feel safe, predict some future events is common to human being (2012).

To return to the syncretic aspect mentioned above, we know that Islam forbids the use of charm, amulet or talisman, etc to seek for good health, protection and success. Islam also forbids divination using jinns or other methods to foretell the future but many *marabout* use them to have money and satisfy their clients.

Balogun reports that:

Orthodox Muslim theologians agree that amulets and talismans, if they contain *shirk* or *kufr* elements, are *ḥarām* (unlawful). However, they express two varying opinions on amulets and talismans whose content is nothing but verses of the Qur’ān, Names and Attributes of Allah or other lawful prayers. While some, such as ‘Abdullah Ibn ‘Amr bn al-As considers it permissible, arguing that after all, its content cannot be said to be *kufr* or *shirk*, others, including Abdullah Ibn Masud, Ibn Abbas and some *Tābi’ūn* among the followers of Ibn Masud such as Ibrahim Ibn Yazid an-Nakhi have ruled against it. [As for divination] The Qur’ān has made it abundantly clear that the knowledge of the unknown belongs to Allah exclusively. Whatever means that is employed either through astrology, palm reading, cards, drawing in sand, casting arrows, reading numbers and reading patterns in animal’s entrails. Allah says: ‘He knows the unseen, and to none does He disclose anything of the mysteries of His own unfathomable knowledge’. (2011)

The significant interest of this quotation is its mention of the use of the supernatural powers and soothsaying by marabouts to succeed. Balogun affirms more clearly that marabouts called *Aafaa* are soothsayers and supernatural users. He claims that:

The Muslim diviner achieves his aim through the use of mediums, oracles, being possessed, divinatory objects, intuitive knowledge and other secret knowledge. Patrick Ryan asserts that an accommodating *Aafaa* (Muslim Cleric) among the Yoruba accommodates Islām to a Yoruba need for divinatory and manipulative control; he divines into the mystery of life. There seems to be no clear distinction between these roles of the *Aafaa* and herbalism practised by the Traditional Diviner *Babalawo* and his ability to divine. The Muslim *Aafaa* diviner delves into this art through his Arabic literacy and his learned or inherited traditional divinatory techniques from his cultural environment. Divination and its prescription share in common the aim of controlling nature, either by unravelling the present, the past and the future or by manipulating circumstances through the use of natural or artificial means. There are available among the *Aafaa* (Muslim Clerics) in Lagos many different methods used for divination. All these methods when closely and critically perused and analysed, share the common trait of assigning to Arabic of almost any sort (manuals, statements, numbers, prayers, *Sūrah* (chapter) of the Qur'ān), a numinous potency even beyond the normal veneration for the Qur'ān known throughout the Muslim world. Uthman ibn Fodio defined as syncretic all attempts at divinatory control, control that he defined as tantamount to delving into God's knowledge. This practice involves *shirk*, the association with God of powers other than He. Allah alone is the one whose right it is to know the future and whose healing word is not to be associated with the pharmacopoeia of alien forces. (2011: 286, 287)

Some Muslim priests called marabouts make use of the supernatural powers in their practices even though it is forbidden by Islam. This shows that the supernatural power plays important role when it is used positively. Marabouts and church priests add it in their practices to solve their customers' problems as the traditional soothsayers do.

There are also some modern literary works that mention soothsaying and supernatural powers as an open sesame for success, among these works we have "*Le grenier Volant*" from Mounkaila, "*Zabarkan et Mali Béro: Les ancêtres des Zarma*" from Alpha Gado, *La geste de Fanta Maa* from Hayidara, and *L'épopée peule de Boûbou Ardo Galo: Héros et rebelle* from Seydou. The two first documents are articles that mention the use of the supernatural by Zarma people to avoid bloodshed. In fact, Mali Béro and his friends killed the Touareg prince and his friends who used their clothes as towels at any moment they go to bath in the pond of the village. War was at hand and Mali Béro consulted his slave, a soothsayer and magician called Almine. Mounkaila agrees that: "Mâli's first slave was called Almine. The latter was the master of secret recourses of the group"⁵. Almine got a barn base made by the Zarma. All the Zarma people embarked on the barn base. Almine uttered incantations, then with a whip he whipped the barn base at its four sides: east, west, north and south. The barn base flew with the Zarma out of the dangerous area. They landed in some places before they had finally landed in Sargane. This shows once again that soothsaying and the supernatural powers can be used in good use.

Concerning the two last documents, they are books that mention two different heroes: Fanta Maa and Boûbou Ardo Galo. Hayidara (1987) talks about soothsaying and magic in the Bozo ethnic group. In this document, the hero, Fanta Maa is painted as the savior of his community through the use of soothsaying and the supernatural powers. Hayidara reports in this long quotation that:

A crocodile was in the east, in a city-state called Nyanyu [this crocodile having eaten the animals of the villagers began to chase the men in the village to devour them]
They used all means to get rid of the crocodile; nothing helped.
[...] They sent the Bozo to an embassy in the land of Fanta Maa.
[...] He said, "Next Friday is not the right Friday;
the following Friday, either.
The following Friday, [i.e. the third Friday]
he said: "Only then could I [come and get you rid of this crocodile, then he added]
the ram of sacrifice to the genie of the waters,
as well as the white bull,
as well as a hundred white cola nuts,
[...] With a white rooster.
[You bring me] all this that I will offer as a sacrifice to the Genie of the waters"
[...] Now Maa was about to consult the spell.
He practiced divination by dust;
yes he practiced geomancy.
In the mystery of God, he was looking for the double of the crocodile.
He then realized that the crocodile was not an ordinary beast.

⁵ « Mâli possédait un premier esclave du nom d'Almine. L'homme était le grand maître des recours secrets du groupe. » (1988: 375)

Killing the crocodile would be much more difficult
than he, Maa, would have believed.
It wasn't just a crocodile, it was something else.
That's what the dust gave him to read.
[...] He continued his quest [for the double] of the crocodile.
He continued to sacrifice.
[...] He [Maa] continued with his bewitching operations and he played the call.
He mounted his stratagem.
When his stratagem was sure
and that he was convinced to have bewitched the crocodile,
he said to his younger [brother], "[Now] we are going to fight the crocodile.
He was standing in his canoe, the canoe that was assigned to him.
There were the jars of medicine; there were his fetishes and his bags of hexes.
There was his call. And the call was screaming.
He had bewitched the crocodile with the call so that he had nothing to fear from the watch.
The call screeched and seemed to speak a strange language.
The Bozo still use the water today.
the crocodile appeared; he raised his head and huffed ...
[The crocodile tried magic tricks on Maa several times, which Maa thwarted with those amulets and magic
potions he has with him in the canoe. So the crocodile asked Maa to spare him, saying:]
O Maa! I am not a crocodile, me! [I am the crown prince transformed into a crocodile to punish the village]
He said: "This one here installed [on the throne]
[...] He's a bastard; he is not a son of our father.
He is not a son of Nyanu.
My father married his mother while he was sucking, and he raised him.
Her mother has become the favorite.
It pleased the dignitaries of the Court.
They banded together to induct him,
when my father died,
thus moving me away from power,
and placing him in my place [...]
O Maa! save me.
spare me by the grace of your mother Fanta ...
And all the [other] dead mothers, it [the crocodile] called on them one by one. "
He [Fanta Maa] says, "I won't spare you."
[So, he harpooned the crocodile with his three magical harpoons soaked in deadly poison]"⁶

⁶ « Un crocodile se trouvait à l'est, dans une cité-Etat appelée Nyanu [ce crocodile ayant mangé les bêtes des villageois commença à chasser les hommes jusqu'au village pour les dévorer]
Ils usèrent de tous les moyens pour se débarrasser du crocodile ; rien n'y fit.
[...] Ils envoyèrent en ambassade des Bozo dans le pays de Fanta Maa.
[...] Il dit: « Le vendredi prochain n'est pas le bon vendredi;
le vendredi suivant, non plus.
Le vendredi d'après, [c'est-à-dire le troisième vendredi]
il dit : « Alors seulement je pourrais [venir vous débarrasser de ce monstre, puis il ajouta]
le bélier de sacrifice au Génie des eaux,
ainsi que le taureau blanc,
ainsi que cent noix de cola blanche,
[...] avec un coq blanc.
[Vous m'apportez] tout cela que j'offrirai en sacrifice au Génie des eaux ».
[...] A présent, Maa s'appropriait à consulter le sort.
Il pratiquait la divination par la poussière ;
oui il pratiquait la géomancie.
Dans le mystère de Dieu, il cherchait le double du crocodile.
Il s'aperçut alors que le crocodile n'était pas une bête ordinaire.
Arriver à bout du crocodile serait bien plus ardu
que lui Maa n'aurait cru.
Il ne s'agissait pas d'un simple crocodile, mais d'autre chose.
C'est ce que lui donna à lire la poussière.
[...] Il poursuivit sa quête [du double] du crocodile.
Il continua à sacrifier.
Lui [Maa] continua ses opérations d'envoûtement et il joua de l'appeau.
Il monta son stratagème.
Lorsque son stratagème fut sûr
et qu'il fut convaincu d'avoir ensorcelé le crocodile,
il dit à son [frère] cadet : « [Maintenant] nous allons combattre le crocodile.

As far as Boûbou Ardo Galo is concerned, Seydou (2010) paints him as a rebel to the Islam religion who succeeded in humiliating Muslim leaders owing to the use of the supernatural powers.

[During Chêkou Amadou's scholars' attack and the attack led by Chêkou Amadou himself on Boûbou Ardo Galo, because he refused to practice Islam; the supernatural was at the rendezvous.]

Boûbou got up, [...]

He had a belt

of snake;

He tied it around his belly,

He tied another one around

his chest.

The people of Massina could not see him, could not see his horse, and could not see his spear!

He entered into the midst of them

driving his spear into them and pulling it out...

[Then when Boubou and his in-law, Chêkou Amadou met on the battle field];

Boubou [...] lifted his bubu and uncovered his side

he tells his father-in-law to hit him!

His father-in-law hit him on the side, the spear did not penetrate,

he also struck him with his spear on the other side, the spear did not penetrate.

He said to his father-in-law, "Don't you have a sword? He says he had one.

He hit with the sword, it did not enter.⁷

It follows from the above that Boûbou Ardo Galo's invulnerability to the Muslims' weapons humiliated them. Because Islam religion comes to dethrone ancestral practices that Boûbou used to protect himself and humiliate Muslims.

Il se tenait dans sa pirogue, la pirogue qui lui fut affectée.

Là se trouvaient les jarres de médicaments ; là se trouvaient ses fétiches et ses sacs à maléfices.

Là se trouvait son appeau. Et l'appeau criait.

Il avait, à l'aide de l'appeau, ensorcelé le crocodile, de sorte qu'il n'ait rien à craindre du montre.

L'appeau criait et semblait tenir un langage étrange.

Aujourd'hui encore les Bozo utilisent l'appeau.

le crocodile apparut ; il leva la tête et souffla...

[Le crocodile tenta plusieurs fois des tours de magie sur Maa que ce dernier déjoua avec ces amulettes et potions magiques qu'il a avec lui dans la pirogue. Alors le crocodile demanda à Maa de l'épargner en disant :]

O Maa ! Je ne suis pas un crocodile, moi ! [Je suis le prince héritier transformé en crocodile pour punir le village]

Il dit : « Celui-ci que voici installé [sur le trône]

[...] c'est un bâtard ; ce n'est pas un fils de notre père.

Ce n'est pas un fils de Nyanu.

Mon père a épousé sa mère qui l'avait au sein, et il l'a élevé.

Sa mère est devenue la favorite.

Il a plu aux dignitaires de la Cour.

Ils se sont ligüés pour l'introniser,

à la mort de mon père,

m'écarter ainsi du pouvoir,

et le mettant à ma place [...]

O Maa ! épargne-moi.

épargne-moi par la grâce de ta mère Fanta...

Et toutes les [autres] mères défuntes, il [le crocodile] les invoqua une a une.»

Il [Fanta Maa] dit : « Je ne t'épargnerai pas ».

[Alors, harponna le crocodile avec ces trois harpons magiques imbibés d'un poison mortel] (Hayidara, 1987: 157, 161, 165, 167, 169, 171, 175, 177, 181, 185, 187)

⁷[Lors de l'attaque des lettrés de Chêkou Amadou et de l'attaque que le Chêkou conduisit lui-même sur Boubou Ardo Galo, parce qu'il refusa de pratiquer l'Islam ; le super naturel était au rendez-vous.]

Boubou se leva, [...]

Il avait une ceinture

En serpent ;

Il l'attacha autour de son ventre,

Une autre, il l'attacha autour

De sa poitrine.

Les gens du Massina ne le voyaient pas, ne voyaient pas son cheval, ne voyaient pas sa lance !

Il s'engagea au milieu d'eux

enfonçant la lance et le tirant...

[Puis, lorsque Boubou et son beau-père se rencontrèrent sur le champ de bataille] ;

Boubou [...] souleva son boubou et se découvrit le flanc

il dit à son beau-père d'y porter ses coups !

Son beau-père le frappa ici, la lance ne pénétra pas,

il frappa aussi là, la lance ne pénétra pas.

Il dit à son beau-père : « N'as-tu pas une épée ? » Il dit qu'il en avait.

Il frappa, elle ne pénétra pas. (Seydou, 2010 : 173, 189)

The latter however, succeeded to kill the hero by the use of supernatural forces: the jinn. In light of all the above, I can conclude that soothsaying and the supernatural powers used to be strongly used to achieve social, economic and political successes.

CONCLUSION

The article has discussed some data that have discussed soothsaying, supernatural powers, and success. With the exception of Ana (2013); & Balogun (2011), all the scholars that I have analyzed in this article have shown cases of soothsaying and supernatural powers as means to ensure success. Among these scholars we have Niane (1965); Mofolo (1925); Ki-Zerbo (1978); Kesteloot & Dieng (2000); Aissata (2005); Conrad (2005); Hampate Ba (1973); & Monette (2013) etc.

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