

## Epistemic Analysis of Negative Implications of Paranormal Belief on Nigeria Socio-political Milieu

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**Abstract:** This work sought to analyse the negative implications of paranormal belief on African development. The negative impact of this belief system destroys the personal, social relations and organization in our communities, and as well impedes scientific and technological advancement. This work made use of analytic and critical method. It postulates that majority of Africans and particularly Nigerians have a strong belief for paranormal phenomena. Thus, the over reliance on supernatural phenomena militate against hard work which is crucial for human survival in the society.

**Keywords:** paranormal, supernatural, phenomena, social, relation, community, scientific and technological.

### INTRODUCTION

There is a popular belief among Africans that there is no smoke without fire which implies that nothing happens by chance for them. Every event has a cause. The metaphysical principle of cause and effect is imbedded in African mindset in such a manner that they believe that every problem of life like academic, business, career, marital, finding suitor, ailments of various kind and so on has some invisible or supernatural forces behind them.

Hence, black or magical powers are used to control the forces of nature in African traditional worldview either to avert problem or attack one's enemy. Such mysterious powers can be found manifest in witchcraft, sorcery, divination, occult, medicine, rain making, magic, to mention but a few. The African nay Nigerian belief in paranormal deals with the tenacious belief in black magic, occult power and practices. Even the advanced countries of Europe and America express high belief in occult power and practices.

The belief in paranormal is very predominant in Nigeria society today. The over reliance of Nigerians on the efficacy of magical powers has made youths conceive magic as an easy way to success instead of hard work. They engage in some occult beliefs and practices like yahoo business popularly known as (oke ite) in Igbo dialect in a bid to become rich. People offer sacrifices to idols, spirits and ancestors in the shrine, rivers or road corners in order to attract good fortunes to themselves rather than working hard. Nowadays, ritual killings seem to be predominant for political success and making money ritual.

### Conceptual Clarification of Basic Terms

The term “paranormal” is ambiguous. In a common man's understanding, it is defined as “designating or of psychic or mental phenomena outside the range of normal”. (Paranormal definition and meaning, 2022) Paranormal deals with mysterious or supernatural occurrence that are not possible to give explanation by identified natural forces or science. Paranormal phenomena are events “described in popular culture, folk, and other non-scientific bodies of knowledge, whose existence within these contexts is described as being beyond the scope of normal scientific understanding” (Wikipedia Contributors, 2022). In other words, paranormal addresses those metaphysical reality or knowledge beyond the scope of sensory perception.

Hence, the concept of paranormal is an umbrella term used to describe a wide range of purported anomalous phenomena which include extra sensory perception, precognition, out of body experience, divination, ritual, magic, and various claims of breakthroughs whose causal mechanism are extra physical and scientifically unexplainable. But, the scientific investigation of paranormal started in the 20<sup>th</sup> century with the prevalence of such phenomena in Europe and America which are classified into two basic types such as Paranormal Cognition (PNC) or Extra-Sensory Perception (ESP) and Psychokinesis (Ajei, M, 2009).

The first category, Paranormal Cognition (PNC) is characterized into five parts: telepathy, clairvoyance, precognition, and retrocognition. Telepathy deals with the interaction with other minds outside the channels of the senses. Today, it is possible to read other people's mind through the means of telepathy. Clairvoyance on its own part is

the ability to get information or knowledge of things by means of extrasensory perception. It also encapsulates the power that some people like metaphysicians or spiritualists use to see the future and communicate with the dead (clairaudience). (Britannica, T, 2022) This practice is related to necromancy. Necromancy is the occult practice or black magic of summoning the spirit of the dead prevalent in Africa and other parts of the world for divination. (Wikipedia Contributors, 2022) Another form of Paranormal Cognition (PNC) is precognition which has to do with foreknowledge of things or events through extrasensory perception either by intuition or dream which is devoid of reasoning. Finally, retrocognition is the opposite of precognition. It deals with the ability of mind to access the knowledge of past events extra mentally.

However, the other classification of paranormal phenomena is psychokinesis. Psychokinesis is also known as telekinesis in parapsychology. Psychokinesis or telekinesis is derived from Greek words "Psycho" or "tele" meaning "soul" or "far off" and "kinesis" which means "movement". So, psychokinesis is "a hypothetical psychic ability allowing a person to influence a physical system without physical interaction". (Wikipedia Contributors, 2022) Martin Ajei conceives that this practice is associated with witchcraft which is one of the key aspect of paranormal belief in Africa. (Ajei, M)

Paranormal Belief in African traditional Worldview Witchcraft, black magic and sorcery are predominant in African belief system and other "tribal religion in all cultures". No wonder, IWC van Wyk conceives that witchcraft is a foremost problem in Africa which constitutes one of the subject matters of African philosophy and religion. (Van Wyk, I.W.C, 2004) Hence, African belief in witchcraft has resulted to witch-hunts and killing which created serious challenge to African communities in the past years. Witch-killings are motivated among other things by fear of evil forces. Nigerians see witches as people who use mystical powers to harm others. So, they shield themselves against witchcraft by using certain medicines, and people who give these medicines are known as "herbalists" or "medicine men". In some cases, these people who use mystical power for human wellbeing are referred to as "diviners", "medium", "rainmakers" and "traditional priest". The problem with Nigerians is that people who claim to solve these mystical problems sometimes

share in the cycle of evil they seek to protect others from.

Furthermore, the notion of witchcraft in African worldview is conceived not only in terms of medical but also social dimension. Witchcraft is shrouded with mystery which is devoid of any scientific explanation. On this note, Arinze Agbanusi envisages that Nigerians like other Africans assume the reality of witchcraft which has some serious health implication such that diverse kinds of ailments ranging from common malaria to "cancer, hypertension, kidney failure, ulcer, hepatitis, heart attack and stroke" are attributed to witchcraft. He suggests that African belief in witchcraft has implication on public health in West Africa because it is believed that some ailments people suffer are spiritual. It is even conceived that the extent of harm done to an individual depends on the level and operation of the witch or wizard. Thus, he posits:

Both the kind of a witch or wizard can cause and his or her method of operation depends largely on his or her level in witchcraft. Generally, witches and wizard operate by making incantations while manipulating some fetish objects. But those who are high up in the hierarchy can transform themselves into animals and operate under the cover of some animals. The animals usually involved are the owl, the snake, the pussycat, the cockroach, the hawk and the bat (Agbanusi, A, 2016).

In addition to sucking blood and causing many catastrophes, it is also conceived that witchcraft activities "can hinder the socio-economic or the socio-political progress of their victim".

However, the traditional African medicine addresses the spiritual dimension of certain ailments. In the traditional African communities prior to the coming of Europeans, Africans conceive sickness both in the physical and spiritual dimensions. According to Ezekwesili-Ofili Josephine Ozioma and Okaka Antoinette Nwamaka Chinwe, "illness must be treated by both physical and spiritual means using divination, incantations, animal sacrifice, exorcism and herbs" (Ozioma, E.O.J. *et al.*, 2015). The traditional African medicine is characterized into three such as "divination, spiritualism and herbalism". Thus, traditional healers who provide these services are known as medicine men or herbalists. Other category of people who belong to this set according to them are diviners, medium,

witchdoctors, seers, spiritualists, priestesses, high priests, rain makers to mention but a few. It portrays that one is expected to be initiated into secret society before she or he can attain this knowledge of traditional African medicine (Ezekwesili-Ofili).

Furthermore, the traditional health practitioners or diviners examine the cause of ailment through divination. Hence, divination is a major means of detecting or diagnosing ailments. This is a method of consulting the spirit realm in order to diagnose the cause of sickness through “the use of cowry shells, throwing of bones, shells, money, seeds, dice, domino-like objects, or even dominos themselves, and other objects that have been appointed by the diviner and the spirit to represent certain polarities on strips of leather or flat pieces of wood” (Ezekwesili-Ofili). They combine physical or natural with the spiritual or supernatural dimensions of healing. Sometimes, the spiritual aspect of healing requires spiritual protection by the use of talisman, charm, amulet if the attack is perceived to emanate from evil spirit (Ezekwesili-Ofili). Sacrifice is required in some cases to appease the gods, spirits or ancestors. The diviner appeases the gods, ancestors or spirits if the sickness is as a result of invocation of a curse or violation of taboos. Exorcism can be performed by chief priest in the case of evil spirits believed to be tormenting the culprits through madness. On the part of the physical dimension of healing, herbs are prescribed including some instruction on its preparation and dosage of application. Sometimes the physical aspect of healing is accompanied by counseling on how to be of good behaviour to avoid warding off the good spirits from withdrawing their blessings and protection.

Rain makers are also included among the good magicians or medicine men that use mystical power for the wellbeing of humans in African societies. They use their mystical powers for weather forecasting. Sussy Gumo observes that African science of rain making has two interconnected parts namely material and spiritual. The rain making ritual is determined by the timing of the season. It is accompanied with a type of magic or prayer through which rainmakers manipulate conditions to bring about rain or drought either to bless or curse community (Gumo, S, 2017). The magic of rainmaking is practiced secretly but they can transfer this power at the point of death. The ritual of rainmaking which varies from place to place is analysed in Kenya as thus:

It has emerged that kilumi is generally began with libations and prayers followed by the beating of drums, blowing of whistles, shaking of rattles, singing, and intense, vigorous dancing. The community believed that unseen rainmaking ancestral spirits attended the dances...also accompanied by sacrifices (such as the blood of animals, milk, seeds, crops, beer, or cooked food) to appease the spirits. This is because droughts were considered to be curses for wrongdoing. Successful kilumi ended with celebrations, as the community members expected a favourable response of rain from spirits (Gumo, S).

The traditional knowledge of rainmaking is spiritual. In Nigeria for instance, especially at the eastern part of the country those who perform ceremonies like funeral, marriage, chieftaincy, new yam festivals and so on employ the services of rainmakers to control rain in order not to spoil their occasions.

Nevertheless, the traditional African medicine became unpopular during the colonial days in Africa because it is associated with witchcraft, magic, charms and symbols either to cast or remove spells. Orthodox or modern medicine is new in Africa which addresses only the physical dimension of ill-health. But, there may be the need to complement orthodox medicine with traditional African medicine in this modern time which has to do with the spiritual aspect of healing.

#### Effects of Paranormal Belief on Nigeria Society

African belief in paranormal is based on magic. Magic is a mode of thinking distinct from scientific modes which focuses on the power of invisible forces to influence event in order to effect change in material sphere (Encyclopedia Britannica Contributors, 2021). But, the over reliance of Nigerians on the efficacy of magical powers has impacted negatively on the techno-scientific development of the country. It militates against radical thinking and invention that is characteristics of sciento-technical rationality. Thus, Nigerian belief in paranormal lacks scientific explanation that is distinctive of modern scientific knowledge and technology.

Again, the negative effects of this belief system are endemic in many fabrics of the society. In the medical aspect, some people reject orthodox medicine on the grounds that their ailments have spiritual source. It is a common practice in Nigeria to feature some illness like “incessant malaria, miscarriage, AIDS, leprosy, stroke, chicken pox to

occult and supernatural forces” (Asogwa, N.U, 2014). As a result of this, people consult a native doctor or medicine men for the cure instead of psychotherapists or conventional medical practitioners (Asogwa). These practices contravene the tenets of human and social development, and has resulted in many avoidable deaths of citizens.

Coming to legal aspect, it has motivated some people to engage in illegal activities thinking that their charms will save them in the court of law. Hence, Nigerian belief in occult and paranormal phenomena has led many people to commit certain crimes on the ground that magical power in occult and paranormal can protect them from calamities resulting from the outcome of these crimes. For instance, people who use magical power to steal and kidnap others believe that the spiritual power in black magic will make them to escape without being caught. The same thing applies to thugs who involve themselves in electoral malpractice and violence.

On safety, some people drive recklessly on the road thinking that their charm will save them from accidents. The charm can be in form of black thread or teddy doll hanging at the front screen of the vehicle. A driver who uses charm to drive is believed that the driver will miss in the situation of terrible accident.

Willy-nilly, African medicine men, diviners or dibias, medium, witchdoctors, seers, spiritualists, priestesses, high priests, and so on play the basic role in propagating or spreading the belief of paranormal phenomena. They perform their duties of finding the root cause of many problems people are suffering in their communities through divination and fortune telling. Divination and fortune telling is a process of probing into the spiritual or supernatural realm in order to decipher the causes of problems and foretell the future. But, this method of probing into the supernatural realm to discover the causes of misfortune have divided many communities, families and severed many good relationships. Many innocent people have been accused of one crime or the other through divination ranging from witchcraft, poisoning, murder, stealing, blocking people’s progress or that of the society as a whole. (Ibid) In some cases, they are banished or sent away from their communities to evil forest as a result divinatory consultations.

In addition, many life challenges in this present day Nigeria like hardship or poverty has made

some medicine men, diviners or dibias, priestesses, or high priests to exploit the gullibility of people. It is very unfortunate that many evil practices in Nigeria communities are caused by strong belief in the occult and paranormal phenomena. For instance, the practice of oath-taking by strong deity has manipulated the gullibility of people to think that the only way to acquit people who are accused of different crimes is for them to swear by a powerful deity. It has a hidden motive of serving the selfish interests of chief priest of the deity either to enrich themselves or to kill their enemies. Some people out of fear have admitted that they committed the crime rather than taking oath. Hence, they are meant to suffer unjustly for the evil they do not perpetrate. Some of them are banished from their communities. On the other hand, those who have taken the oath to prove their innocence have died mysteriously and all their properties are taken to the dreaded shrine to enrich the chief priest. Hence, the relatives of those who were alleged to have been killed by the deity convey their corpses to the shrine to be buried in a shallow grave. Hiding under the cloak of this evil practice, some chief priests may harvest secretly the delicate organs of their victims and sell them to evil men and women for other evil purposes like money rituals.

Over emphasis on the efficacies of paranormal phenomena in Nigeria has created a negative orientation on the mind of the masses to think that magic is the only reliable way to success. I cite an example with my friend who is progressing in his rice farming at Awka in Anambra State, a native doctor passing by his farm told him that the extent of progress witnessed in his farm has required that he will offer a sacrifice with anything that has blood. But, he refused. Few days after his refusal, he nearly cut off his finger with the sickle he was using to harvest the rice. But, this does not mean that he wounded himself just because he refused to do what the native doctor told him. Cutting his finger can be a situation of accident which may be a natural occurrence or it may also be out of his own carelessness.

It is unfortunate that Nigerian belief in occult and paranormal phenomena have impacted negatively on the African children and youths to think that magic is an easy way to success above science, reason and hard work (Enna, D.M. *et al.*, 2015). This mind set is the ideology behind different forms of occult practices in Nigeria like secret societies, occult killings and rituals in a bid to become rich. In this present time, engagement in

secret societies and all forms of occult practices is popularly regarded as yahoo business and yahoo plus. Our youths in the universities and other institutions of higher learning are no longer interested in hard work in academic success rather they engage in yahoo business in a bid to get rich, drive exotic cars and build mansions to attract women. This anomaly has contributed so much to the problem of insecurity Nigeria is experiencing at this present time.

## EVALUATION

Belief in paranormal phenomena has great relevant implications on Nigeria society. It may serve to promote right conduct and social cohesion in the community. For instance, in the olden and present day Nigerian societies like in Igbo land, black magic is used to punish culprits who commit adultery, stealing and other evils in many communities. (Sundermeier, T, 2021) Nowadays, we use to see in social media like facebook and instagram some incidence of people using black magic to punish others. The story of a man who sent bees to attack the person who stole his car is a good example. In other cases, we have seen the incidence of men who use black magic or power to punish other men who committed adultery with their wives by making their genitals to stock with those of their wives until they come. Thus, witchcraft ensures “that people do not step out of line” to encroach into other people’s properties like land, stealing, adultery, as well as other forms of grievous offence in the community.

In addition to morality, the paranormal or metaphysical belief of traditional African worldview may still be relevant in this contemporary period especially in the area of herbal medicine. Some sicknesses or ailments people suffer today have both the spiritual and physical dimension. Thus, traditional African herbal medicine can be applicable to complement orthodox medicine to address the spiritual dimension of ailments. Nevertheless, traditional African medicine is facing some challenges in this present era. Apart from the negative impact of colonialism that stigmatized and banned traditional medicine, there is a mutual disharmony that exists between traditional healers and Western-trained physicians (Abdullahi, A.A, 2011). Thus, Nigerian medical school has neglected the knowledge of traditional African medicine as it is obtainable in China, Indian and other parts of the world. But, one of the basic problems confronting traditional African medicine in Africa is that the traditional

medicine men are slow in developing the field as a result of over reliance on paranormal, which comprises lack of interest in sharing the knowledge.

However, the African nay Nigerian belief in the occult and paranormal phenomena has contributed more harm than good in the society. The notion of quick money syndrome through occult and magic has beclouded the minds of the present day Nigerians both children, youths and adults to be lazy by seeing magic as an easy to success. Some agencies in Nigeria like entertainment tend to promote this anomaly. The Nigerian film industry and Nollywood have influenced the mind of Nigerians especially the youths adversely by portraying magic, superstition, extreme spirituality, ritual and occult as an effective way of solving their problems of life challenges instead of scientific reasoning, creativity and innovation (Enna, D.M. *et al.*, 2015). This negative ideology has contributed amidst others to the scientific and technological underdevelopment of Nigeria. Thus, Nollywood can serve as a motivating force for techno-scientific development of Nigeria by using science-fiction to stir our local scientists and industrialists or technologists to creativity and innovation (Ibid).

On the other hand, the over-reliance of African nay Nigerian on the efficacy of paranormal phenomena portends danger for techno-scientific development. Paranormal phenomena shares a mythico-religious ideology that is conservative and deterministic which militates against radical and rational thinking of scientific discoveries and invention (Maduabuchi, R.O, 2019). Sciento-technical rationality is the driving force of modern science which trend to motivate human mind to inquire, explore and discover new things. Such ideology is important to motivate Nigerian children, youths and adults to work hard to grow and develop their local science.

## CONCLUSION

The work has analysed the negative implications of paranormal belief on Nigeria socio-political milieu. Today Nigeria society is bedeviled with many problems ranging from political instability, economic hardship and insecurity. The negative impact of paranormal is such that some of the evil practices in the Nigerian society today emanate as a result of strong belief in paranormal phenomena. This work serves to create a general awareness on some of the evil practices that are inherent in Nigeria’s belief in paranormal and occult.

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