

## An Empirical Methodology of the Study of Witchcraft and its implementation in African cultures

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**Abstract:** In Africa the study of witchcraft is hampered by methodological problems which are the result of the use of Eurocentric materialistic belittling paradigm. To avoid this pitfall, this paper offers a new empirical methodological approach which relies on: (1) The scientificity of African indigenous epistemology and the superiority of its bases compared to Eurocentric view; this eschews any connotation of superstition as far as African values are concerned. (2) The distinct existence of the divine, human and demonic initiatory lore in African culture; this distinction corners witchcraft to the demonic field. (3) The possibility of studying witchcraft empirically as the reverse of the practice of the divine mystery. For the implementation of this methodology in relation to African cultures, this paper recommends Kôngo religion as the best starting paradigm, because it is a scientific episteme and it enables the scholar to seize the different trends of African traditional religion in a unifying theory.

**Keywords:** Witchcraft; Vodun; Kôngo; aze: kindoki; sorcery.

### INTRODUCTION

In the *Encyclopedia of African Religion*, edited by Molefi Asante and Ama Mazama, four entries adding up to sixteen pages are devoted to Vodun, Mami-Wata and Mawu-Lisa; while the word *aze* (explained as the Fon, a Benin language, word for black and white magic) [1] is not mentioned a single time. Does this picture the embarrassment of scholars once they embark in the study of this African religion? How to understand the place and role, if there is any, of witchcraft in Vodun, or in African traditional religion (ATR) in general? This question is in reality that of the methodology to be used to arrive to the understanding of witchcraft in relation to ATR.

According to Mulemba-Mukengeshayi N'sakila (1986), two methodologies are so far used in the study of witchcraft in Africa:

- Direct experience: this approach implies the “direct personal experience” (p. 243) of the researcher among the witches; it requires a formal initiation in witchcraft. For N'sakila this approach involves three main difficulties:
  - It is not easy to traduce in positive concepts what belongs to the fluidic domain of witchcraft.
  - The discourse produced cannot be verified by the non-initiated.
- The very fact of being initiated implies a certain restriction which impedes the researcher to fully reveal what he has experienced.
- Abstractive induction: for this approach “witchcraft is a social reality” (p. 244) whose existence is judged by its

effects on the physical plane and by its diverse expressions in social life” (p-244). This approach is used by  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the researchers, they recourse to the discourses of the witches, the bewitched and the anti-witch to abstract elements that can be generalized.

As far as these two methodologies are concerned, the difficulties involved in the study of witchcraft is accrued by the seeming impossibility to grasp this notion empirically, as an author claims it: “Everything connected with witchcraft takes place in a fantasy realm which is almost *ex hypothesi*, intangible and beyond empirical verification” [2]. This issue of the empirical nature of the study is also aggravated by the fact that scholars try to understand an African holistic notion by being anchored in the Eurocentric materialistic paradigm which eschews any scientific link between the visible and the invisible, a dichotomous view of the universe [3].

While in most of cases scholars start their studies of witchcraft in Africa from the Eurocentric notion of knowledge which eschews any direct participation of the invisible, i.e., the ethereal and the spiritual, in the scientific domain, their approach runs the risk of reducing the African notion of witchcraft to a mere superstitious fear; thus one understands the warning of Asante: “The challenge to scholars in postmodern era is to devise ways to explore African phenomena that avoid pitfalls of Western theories and methods” [4].

This paper aims to propose an empirical methodology of the study of witchcraft in Africa. Based on the fact that the knowledge of witchcraft can be abstracted from the discourse of the anti-witch, our approach will rely on the discourse of the Institut des Sciences Animiques (ISA), an Afrocentric research and initiatory centre based in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), whose focal point is African spirituality and epistemology. The ISA has accumulated a nine years experience in the fight against witchcraft.

The importance of the approach of the ISA is that its discourse is based on Kongo culture, on the practice of its divine mystery which is the sacerdotal initiatory teachings of the Bukongo, the Kongo religion. The Bukongo is a religion whose doctrines are scientifically verifiable, through the kemetic cosmological argument (KCA) [5]. Starting from an empirical, observable, fact (the existence of individualities and particular circumstances in this temporal universe) and proceeding by deduction through the use of the law of causality and the principle of sufficient reason, the KCA is a systematic natural theology which offers a falsifiable presentation of the substratum of the Bukongo.

Thus the approach of the ISA is the implementation of a science; and in studying witchcraft as the reverse of the practice of a scientific divine mystery, the ISA eschews the element of inductivism which is basic to "abstractive induction" and constitutes one of its weaknesses; this new approach, by studying witchcraft from the analysis of its opposite, i.e., of the system which works to destroy it, leads to the following schemes:

- The problem of witchcraft in Africa must be grasped through solar epistemology, the approach of African traditional indigenous knowledge. Contrary to Eurocentric epistemology, called lunar due to its focus on matter, like the moon on the earth, solar epistemology perceives the universe in an indefectible unity of the visible and the invisible.
- The problem of witchcraft must be seized through the divine, human and demonic divisions of the African initiatory mysteries. The traditional African religious studies, like any traditional educational system, were initiatory. The higher African initiations into the mysteries included the divine and the human divisions; while the demonic was a deviation condemned by society [6].
- The practice of sorcery<sup>1</sup>, a negative craft, must be understood in Africa as the empirical reverse of the practice of the divine mystery. This distinction is instrumental in that the notion of witchcraft, as perceived by Eurocentric lexicographers, will be shown to pertain essentially to demonic mystery.

<sup>1</sup> We don't see any difference between sorcery and witchcraft; both notions are taken as synonymous.

Therefore, we will show that scholars can grasp the African equivalent of this concept of witchcraft (the use of power gained from the assistance or control of evil spirits in order to harm (*Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*)) through the empirical observation of the opposite practice, i.e., the use of the divine mystery.

In our exposition of this new methodology, we will contrast two perceptions of witchcraft:

- The approach of the Vodun where *aze* is understood as being both white and black magic [1].
- The approach of the Bukongo, the Kongo religion, which discloses the difference existing between *kindoki* (mystery) and *n'soki* (witchcraft).

The paradigm of the Bukongo will be recommended as the best, because the validity of its theology can be proved through the KCA and it allows scholars to grasp the issue of witchcraft in African traditions through the divine, human and demonic hues. This implies that the *kindoki* vs. *n'soki* perception can explain *aze* as the use of human mystery or of the demonic, while the essentially ambivalent notion of *aze* can't explain the Kongo paradigm of witchcraft for two reasons:

- The distinction Kongo culture makes between *kindoki* (mystery) and *n'soki* (witchcraft) cannot be explained by a paradigm which doesn't separate mystery from witchcraft in *aze*.
- As knowledge, mystery, the *kindoki* is a neutral notion that doesn't necessarily involve black magic as *aze* does.

## THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL ISSUE

The methodological approaches used by scholars in the study of witchcraft are contingent to Eurocentric epistemology, because, as Mabika Nkata [7] warns:

*"Until now, we have to recognize that our academic philosophical training is modeled on Western Philosophy. Our whole thought was structured by the philosophical paradigm inherent in Western Culture. It is important to emphasize because getting out of this philosophical dominant paradigm would be in itself a feat in the history of human ideas" (p. 10).*

This domineering Eurocentric epistemology is centered on the presupposition that reality is material; it eschews any influence of the supernatural on science in another manner than heuristically. Therefore, seen through this epistemology any allusion to witchcraft can only evoke the label of superstition [7].

In a recent essay [8], the ISA has demonstrated the existence of two main approaches available to the scientific community for the understanding of nature:

- Eurocentric approach, called lunar due to its focus on matter, symbolized by the moon orbiting around the earth (figure of matter). This approach is based on the following a priori presuppositions:
  - Reality is material
  - The universe is uniform
  - The senses do tell us the truth.
- African indigenous knowledge (AIK), so far deemed unscientific, has been demonstrated by the ISA to be a scientific valid approach based on the following a posteriori facts:
  - All reality is in God and is spiritual;
  - Any knowledge is comprised within the knowledge of God;
  - Matter is only a limited perception of spiritual reality.

While the a priori bases of lunar epistemology cannot be demonstrated, solar epistemology is anchored on facts whose validity can be evidenced through the KCA. The KCA starts from the existence of individualities and particular circumstances in this universe, to demonstrate deductively, thanks to the law of causality and to the principle of sufficient reason, the nature of God, the doctrines of the solar religion, especially the Bukôngo, and the dynamics of the universe.

The systematic natural theology offered by the KCA arrives to a cosmology which enables one to explain the movements and stability of the bodies of the universe, at the astronomic and subatomic levels, through a single theory: a solar holistic “theory of everything”, a Newtonian cosmology which is mathematically verified. This outcome implies that the solar epistemology cannot any more be eschewed as an unscientific backward gimmick.

In contrast to lunar epistemology, solar epistemology implies that the ultimate explanation of every phenomenon must be found in the metaphysical level. Elizabeth Andrade hints to this when she says: “The African idea is that the world extends beyond the limits of empiricism” [9]. Therefore, seizing the problem of witchcraft in Africa through solar holistic epistemology eschews any rushed label of superstitions imposed on African views on this matter.

All this development shows that one of the big problems African scholars have in the study of witchcraft in their traditions is in reality their seeming inability to demonstrate and defend the scientific validity of the epistemological approach of AIK. As shown above, this issue has been marvelously solved by the ISA.

## UNDERSTANDING THE ANTI-WITCHCRAFT APPROACH OF THE ISA

### The KCA and the concept of evil

The KCA is a scientific exposition of the Bukôngo devised by the ISA [8]. This systematic natural theology can be summarily exposed as follow:

- There are individualities and particular circumstances in this temporal universe; therefore our universe is an individuality;
- This possession of a particular individuality is a contingency;
- There is a necessary cause explaining the possession of this individuality and including it;
- Being related to an individual contingent universe, this cause is an individuality;
- The possession by this necessary cause of an individuality implies the existence of other necessary causes endowed at least with a potential causation;
- The possession of an individuality, even by a necessary cause, is a contingency;
- There is an ultimate necessary cause which includes all the relative necessary individualities and explains their contingency;
- Being the greatest possible being, this ultimate cause is God, the Most High;
- The Most High is absolutely infinite, infinite in the quantity of the necessary relative individualities He includes, and in the quality of His individuality;
- The absolutely infinite nature of the Most-high implies that He is the sum total of reality; no reality exists outside the absolute infinity.

The Most-high God thus defined is transcendent and represents exactly the concept of the Supreme Being entertained in the Bukôngo, i.e., in ATR. Van Wing [10] confirms this transcendent nature of the Most-high: ‘Nzâmbi is unique, apart from everything else, invisible and yet living, acting in sovereignty, independent, elusive and inaccessible.’ (p. 305). To this Bittremieux [11] adds:

*‘Nzâmbi cannot have equal, He is not even (...) the “primus inter pares” or the term of an animist evolution, a polytheist one, or another, but the One, the Inaccessible, the Great Chief, who from his empyrean dominates everything’ (p. 133).*

The presentation of the Most-high through the KCA as including all reality implies that creation, the temporal order, is a limited perspective of the eternal necessary plane in the temporal consciousness of a Son of God, the creator. But, as a necessary being, the creator cannot contain simultaneously a temporal and an eternal consciousness, therefore the former is illusory. However, the illusory nature of the temporal plane is not attributed to the good that appears in it, because its substance is the Most-high, the All-in-all,

but to the limitation that the perspective tries to imprint on that good.

Since the KCA depicts the phenomena of our temporal universe as contingent illusory perspectives of spiritual reality which is totally good, and God being the sum total of reality, evil is only the result of a reversed perceptive caused by the bad use of free will [8]. Moreover, as the good that appears in any temporal perspective has its substance in the Most-high who is absolutely infinite, evil is without real substance, i.e., evil has only the substance that we give it in our ignorance. This deductive implication of the systematic natural theology of the Bukôngo enabled the ISA to conclude that the power and effects of witchcraft on the victims are ultimately a subjectively based phenomena; this perception of things can be correlated by the ethnography of the Bukôngo as we will see below.

### The Kôngo concept of evil

To correlate the understanding of witchcraft in the deductive approach of the ISA exposed by the KCA, we will here examine Kôngo concept of evil as evidenced by ethnography; to do this we will study the concept of disease, *bêla*, as perceived by Kôngo people. While Bittremieux [11] seized a distinction between Kôngo words *bêla* (disease), *béla* (to reprimand) and *béla* (to be wrong; to lose a case in a trial), for Besikôngo, Kôngo people, among whom he was undertaking his research, these words are not only homonymous but also synonymous, i.e., “according to Blacks it might be the same word” (p. 270)! To understand this conviction of Besikôngo one has to analyze Kôngo traditional judicial practice.

To the winner of a trial was applied kaolin (*mpêmbe*) on the forehead as a token of conformity to truth, to law, to light, or to established order. The loser received rather the charcoal (*kala*), the token of siding with the devil. One must know that the devil in Kongo language is designated as *nkadi-ampemba*; this expression doesn't refer to an individual, but to a state of mind. *Nkadi* means that which is bitter, that which we dislike; thus *nkadi-ampemba* implies the rejection or denial of truth, law, light or established order.

This means that, in the mind of Besikôngo, to be wrong (*béla*) usually results from a subjective choice, “the rejection or denial of truth, law, light or established order”, i.e., the fact of “siding with *nkadi-ampemba*”; although at the origin there might be a temptation (*m'fula*) from a sorcerer, *nkua n'soki*. Thus, being synonymous, *bêla* (disease) results from *béla* (being wrong), or from *béla* (a reprimand to the one who failed to comply with truth or failed to put himself properly under the protection of the illuminated ancestors). All this means that in the Bukôngo evil is always the result of a subjective attitude as demonstrated by the KCA. An author puts it another

way: “disease was considered to be a form of punishment” [12].

Capitalizing on this perception of evil, the ISA shows that, at the highest articulation of the Bukôngo, i.e., in the divine mystery, witchcraft is defeated through a spiritual approach by the means of a prayer that enables man to yield to the spiritual perception of reality. This victory is won by putting oneself in a proper connection with illuminated ancestors through prayer. In practical terms, this prayer involves a conscious affirmation of divine Truth and a denial of its opposite error.

This approach of prayer is justified by the ethnography of Kôngo culture, because *mpêmbe* means also the holy world of the illuminated ancestors<sup>2</sup>, and the same verb is used in Kikôngo, the Kôngo language, for prayer and pleading in a court of law: *sâmbe*. This means that to pray is not only to plead one's case in a court, but also to side with illuminated ancestors who are in *mpêmbe*; thus the token of kaolin (*mpêmbe*) is set on the forehead of the winner.

### The scientific existence of Spirits

The definition of sorcery furnished by *Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* calls for the existence of spirits; moreover, the highest technology in traditional Africa is the use of “Spirits of nature” [5]. The existence of these “Spirits of nature” is a characteristic of ATR which has been demonstrated by the ISA through the KCA in this way:

- The transcendent Most-high is without contingency and absolutely infinite; thus God is indivisible, because the contrary invites contingency.
- As a manifestation of the individuality of the Father, the indivisible sum total of reality, each Son of God expresses the completeness of the Father, the Verb.
- The Sons are inseparable from the Father who is the sum total of reality.
- Hence, the Father, the Son, and the Verb are inseparable in their substance, activity, and being. This is solar trinity; the Father acts eternally in the Son through the Verb. The Son acts eternally for the Father by the means of the Verb.
- Being All-in-all, the Father is Spirit, the Supreme Principle animating all reality [8].
- The Father always acts through the Sons; thus each Son animates an aspect of reality.
- In conclusion, according to solar trinity, each Son is manifested in the universe of the creator as a Spirit, the animating principle, of an aspect of reality.

<sup>2</sup> In his definitions of *mpêmbe* Karl Laman in his *Dictionnaire Kikôngo-français* alludes to the grave and to holiness.

These “Spirits of nature” control phenomena and beings, they are coeternal and coexistent with the Most-high, their existence is not a superstition, but a provable aspect of AIK. The recourse to these divine Spirits by the ISA relies on the solar science whose bases can be scientifically demonstrated while the basic presupposition of Western science, reality is material, can never be demonstrated.

Thus, as perceived by the ISA, i.e., as the opposite of the highest divine practice, the use of the “Spirits of nature” in order to do good, witchcraft is the use of evil spirits in order to harm, to destroy or to kill. The subjective nature of evil exposed above through the KCA and through the ethnography of the Bukôngo added to the provable existence of the “Spirits of nature” led the ISA to envisage the fight against witchcraft efficiently through the prayer of intercession of illuminated ancestors.

### Perception of witchcraft in the Bukôngo

Many can dispute the distinction the ISA makes between *kindoki* and *n’soki*. Due to colonial missionaries’ false representation of African values as devilish, scholars rather depict *kindoki* as being witchcraft. Fortunately a semantic analysis of the ISA allows us today to re-establish the truth about the *kindoki* and its difference from witchcraft.

*“The initiation included endurance events to which the myste was exhorted to bravely submit; the phase of instruction ended with the increase of spiritual or ethereal faculties. Laman’s dictionary furnishes in the family of kindoki words (that include the root –dok-) which allude to exhortation, submission, instruction, and extension of the senses:*

- *Dokalala* (exhorted); *doka* (persuaded).
- *Dokisa* (to subject); *dokama* (to bend oneself); *doka* (to stoop down), from which one draws *n’ doki* = the one who is subjected.
- *Kindokila* (the slapping of two fingers, figuratively implying the one who asks questions); *dokidika* (to instruct), from which one draws the following:
- *kidokidika* (to learn); *kidokidiki* (synonym of *n’doki* meaning “the learner”). Several pairs of this kind exist in Kikôngo:
  - *kaka*; *kakidika* (to block) and *n’kaki*, *kikakidiki* (the blocker).
  - *Lumba*, *lumbidika* (to throw down) and *n’lumbi*, *kilumbidiki* (the thrower).
  - Hence, *doka*, *kidokidika* (to learn) and *n’doki*, *kidokidiki* (the learner).
- *Doka* (to inculcate), whereby one draws *n’doki* (the teacher).
- *Doka* (to extend); *Makutu ma doka* (sharp sense of hearing).

*“All this shows that kindoki (not from loka [to warn] and not alluding to n’loki) alludes to the myste and to the initiator. Witchcraft (n’soki) is the misuse of any*

*lore and/or power. Usage has changed the pronunciation n’doki to ndoki” [8].*

This perception of the *kindoki* as being knowledge rather than witchcraft is recognized by other Kôngo scholars like Fu-kiau who explains that:

*“Kindoki, nzailu likewise, is one among the equivalent term of science in kikôngo language, and as every knowledge it has its positive side as well as a negative one. Kindoki, Nzailu and Bumpitu are synonymous terms, but the last is more proper in lieu of chemistry than in lieu of science” [13].*

About the meaning of the words *n’soki* and *nkwan’soki*, we have the following entries of two Kikôngo dictionaries:

- *Nsoki a mbwanzi*: a careless, thoughtless action, which involves great loss [14].
- *N’soki*: the evil which reach indirectly someone due to jealousy of another one; badluck; malice; that which harm; iniquity; bad action ; jealousy ; injustice [15].
- *Nkwan’soki* : a wicked person, tortuous, hateful, jealous [15].

It is clear from these definitions that the words *n’soki* and *nkwan’soki* can refer to witchcraft and witch. Never will a Kôngo use these terms in connection to a healer or anyone who puts in practice the knowledge acquired in the Lemba, the Kôngo civil initiatory academy, for the welfare of the population.

### The scientificity of the approach of ISA

From all that has been developed above, we deduce that the abstractive approach of the ISA is not based on induction but on a deductive model of Bukôngo, the KCA, and on an epistemology presupposed on demonstrable truths. The deductive conclusions of the ISA obtained through the KCA are correlated by the ethnography of the Bukôngo.

We can thus conclude that the approach of the ISA in the study of witchcraft in Africa is based on a scientific exposition of Kôngo culture. Therefore the new empirical methodological approach we propose for the study of sorcery in Africa involves a generalization of the approach of ISA, for these simple reasons:

- The KCA is scientific exposition of the solar religion which characterized the religions of ancient Egypt and Sumer which was kept intact in the Bukôngo.
- Solar epistemology is the natural approach of any traditional society in Africa; therefore Africa inherited solar religion that characterized ancient solar civilizations.
- Hence, all the trends of ATR found throughout the continent have been demonstrated to be devolutions of the Bukôngo [8].

Therefore, in the following sections we will discuss the steps that the new empirical methodology involves in its implementation in relation to African culture in general.

## WITCHCRAFT AND THE AFRICAN MYSTERIES

The approach of the ISA has evidenced the necessity and efficiency of basing the study of witchcraft in solar epistemology. By being essentially inductive, contrary to the deductive method of solar epistemology, lunar approach cannot reach the practical efficiency attained by the ISA. This is evidenced by a report written at the Catholic University of Eastern Africa in Kenya:

*"The Catholic Information Service for Africa reports that the University scholars expressed concern that the church continued to dismiss the dark arts as mere superstition thereby unwittingly assisting the devil" [16].*

The report highlighted that due to this simplistic attitude, Christians do not get satisfaction from the church and turn away to other traditional or evangelical means for a solution to the overwhelming scourge of sorcery.

However, the epistemological division of scientific approaches into solar and lunar doesn't solve all the difficulties related to this study. The understanding of witchcraft in Africa is linked to the issue of ATR; this is the case because religion underlies everything in the traditional perception of nature and life. Stressing this reality the Kenyan scholars John Mbiti [17] writes: "Religion so intimately penetrates all the domains of life that it is not easy and sometimes not possible to isolate it" (p. 9).

ATR is an initiatory institution; but when it comes to initiation the constant failure is to not establish its related three trends: the divine, the human and the demonic. In one of its recent studies [8] the ISA evidenced the existence of these three trends in the case of the Kongo initiatory system, i.e., to ATR:

- The divine mystery: it is the highest teaching in Kongo society, as in any solar culture. The power acquired through this initiation can be used only in good ways, because its source is the purification of thought. This mystery school, called Kimpasi among the Bakongo, was essentially sacerdotal. From it came the high priests of the Bukongo [5]. It must be stressed here that the demonic mystery had no formal educational frames in traditional settings.

It was seen as a deviation, and was thus condemned. Bittremieux [11] and Van Wing [10] affirm this fact by showing that initiations were organized as a means for fighting witchcraft.

- Human mystery comprises civil and martial initiations. Contrary to divine mystery, the power acquired through human means of initiation can be used in good or in bad ways.
  - According to Fukiau, the Lemba, Kongo civil initiatory academy, was a "university" including schools of law, trade, medicine, etc [18].
  - As its name indicates, martial initiation, named Kinkimba (from *kimba* to run) in Kongo milieu, was intended for the formation of men of war.

The failure of scholars to seize the distinctions which exist between these approaches to the African highest initiations, leads them to describe the issue of witchcraft as essentially belonging to human mystery, while they intend to establish a link between it and ATR. In reality, as evidenced by the ISA, witchcraft is always the use of demonic mystery, consequently Schmidt emphasizes that: "witches operate through demonic powers" [19].

The approach of the ISA evidenced the link existing between witchcraft and the use of evil spirits; being the opposite of the practice of divine mystery, witchcraft can be understood through the reversal of the nature and means of divine mystery as the table summarizes. Though human mystery, like any human knowledge, implies the possibility of the bad use of the power acquired, it is normally intended for the elevation of society; thus the evil use of its advantages was forbidden.

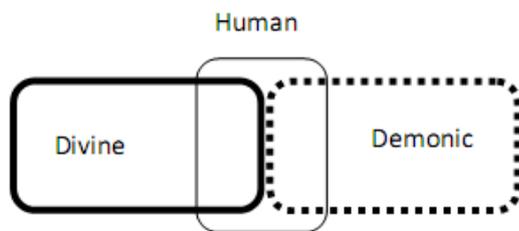
Moreover, the fact that according to the KCA the human is only a limited perspective on the divine reality, human mystery includes the knowledge of the divine, in a limited way, and of the demonic lore. This mixture can be seen in the Lemba where the initiate endeavored to manifest his divine nature (the Kimahungu, the Verb) while he was prepared for the civil protection of society [6].

This should not be astonishing as can be seen in the modern case of the training of the police: how can a sheriff arrest a thief if he doesn't know how this outlaw operates? Thus it is customary to train the police to know the evil craft it has to fight. Therefore, the negative use of human mystery must be seen as a case of implementation of demonic mystery; while the positive use is a lesser manifestation of divine mystery.

**TABLES OF THE METHODS OF INITIATION**

		MODE OF INITIATION	ENERGY IN ACTION	SACRIFICE MADE	DRIVING FORCES	MEANS	TECHNIQUE	
<b>Spiritual methods</b>		By the Holy Spirit	Divine Will	sin carnal self	Divine Verb (the divinity in man)	Divine Consciousness Divine Science Enlightened reason	Contemplation of Spirit Understanding of Truth Argumentation	
		By holy ancestors	Divine will	Sin Carnal self	Faith of holy ancestors	Divine consciousness Purity Divine Science Enlightened reason Faith in celestial spirits Faith	Contemplation of the Verb Spiritualization of thought Understanding of Truth Argumentation Transmigration of Spirit Prayer of faith, ascetic life	
<b>Material methods</b>	<b>Human methods</b>	By personal spirit	Personal will	Divine self	Personal beliefs	Hypnotism Faith	Autosuggestion Corporeal and mental exercise	
		By matter	Human will	Faith in the divine Spirit	Belief in matter	Faith	Alimentation, alchemy Corporeal or mental exercise	
	<b>Demonic methods</b>	<b>Material spiritism</b>	By the personal spirits of ancestors	The will of ancestral spirits	Divine self individuality	Ancestral beliefs	Ritual purity Faith Magnetism, hypnotism, electricity Fear of ancestral customs	Fidelity to sacred laws Invocation, incantation, alchemy, Suggestion, autosuggestion Argumentation
			By demonic spirits	The will of demonic spirits	Divine self Living beings Longevity Parts of body Purity, spirituality Material goods	Demonic verb	Hypnotism, magnetism, electricity Faith Belief in demons Disorder, impurity, sin, dirt Fear of demons, doubt, ignorance	Suggestion Invocation, incantation, alchemy Demonic possession Corruption of thought Benightedness (argumentation, suggestion)

This mixture of divine and demonic elements in human mystery (see the diagram below) explains the necessity felt in the African initiation to never impart knowledge to people who are not morally sane and to stress purity as the infrastructure of higher lore; science without conscience is only the ruin of the soul.



**Fig-1:**

To conclude this section we must say that, as evidenced by the approach of the ISA, witchcraft is never the use of divine mystery, nor is it the use of the human, but always of demonic mystery. Thus those who in Africa use human mystery to alleviate the suffering of their brothers and sisters should never be labeled pejoratively as witchdoctors. The use of the terms witch and witchdoctor “distort[s] the indigenous meaning, roles, and their related ideas and customary practices” [20].

**THE EMPIRICAL STUDY OF WITCHCRAFT IN AFRICA**

We have seen above that the issue of witchcraft is essentially an issue of the use of the power acquired through demonic mystery. The approach of the

ISA clearly depicted witchcraft (the use of evil spirits) as the opposite of the practice of divine mystery (the use of divine Spirits). This implies that the problem of the empirical difficulty in the study of witchcraft in Africa, i.e., the impossibility of making a material observation of witchcraft, can be circumvented through the study of the reverse of the practice of demonic mystery: the practice of divine mystery.

This solution implemented successfully since nine years by the ISA implies that scholars’ impossibility to proceed in their empirical study of witchcraft in Africa is in reality their failure to correctly locate and define the practice of divine mystery of ATR in their research milieu. This explains also the failure of imported churches in Africa, as reported by the Catholic University of Eastern Africa in Kenya, in their fight of witchcraft: the praxis of their religions is not in agreement with the true nature of the efficacious African traditional divine mystery. Europeans missionaries and other colonial agents destroyed in the Black continent; otherwise their actions against witchcraft should always be a great success as the practice of divine mystery was among our ancestors as evidenced by the success of the ISA.

This failure of imported Churches led Abbot Matota to say about the traditional approach of the Catholic Church in the fight against witchcraft among the Besikongo: "We need a change of the shoulder for our rifles to launch positively in the attack against [witchcraft], otherwise *vox clamans in deserto* [voice clamoring in a desert]." (Matota, 1992, p. 97).

The culture of ATR is marked by three trends:

- The preponderance of divine mystery in the initiatory system: this is the normal original nature of solar religion as can be observed in Kôngo traditional society, where the king was enthroned [22] and enlightened by the high-priest or in ancient Egypt where the clergy was “the guardian of tradition and the legitimacy of the kingship” [21].
- The preponderance of the martial initiation: this trend leads to the martial religion. The Vodun offers us a good view of this trend as seen in the existence of Gods of war [23] as well as Gods of witchcraft whose “home is believed to be in Abomey-Calivi” [24]. The existence of these last ones can be explained in so far as the ambivalent knowledge called *aze*, portrayed as witchcraft in Benin, can be used as a human means of war.
- The preponderance of the civil initiation: this trend can be observed in the religion of the Baganda of Uganda, where due to it some attributes of God are rather seen in the traditional king; this is in reality an erosion of the role of the high-priest in favor of the divinized king, Fred Welbourn affirms this fact in this way: “the attitudes which other peoples have directed towards the creator god were reserved by the Baganda for their king” [25].

Failing to seize the distinctions which exist between all these initiatory trends, a scholar may be led to view *aze* and the so-called “witchdoctors” among the Baganda as essentially linked to ATR, while in reality they must be defined in connection to martial and civil initiations and in relation to a society where human initiation is the domineering aspect. This explains also why in sixteen pages devoted to the Vodun in *Encyclopedia of African Religion* the word *aze* appears no where: the editors saw it as directly linked to human aspects rather than to religious ones.

Therefore the Bukôngo and the Vodun offer us two different paradigms in the study of witchcraft in Africa. The last paradigm can't explain the first while the reverse is possible; the ambivalence of *aze*, as a white and black magic cannot help one understand the Bukôngo which distinguishes the *kindoki* (mystery) from *n'soki* (witchcraft).

Thus, as evidenced by the approach of ISA, the Bukôngo is the best paradigm in the study of witchcraft in Africa for several reasons:

- It is a scientifically based approach, thanks to its correlation with the KCA.
- It offers the distinction between divine, human and demonic mysteries; thus it permits an empirical study of witchcraft as the reverse of the practice of divine mystery.
- It semantically explains the difference existing between African mysteries as knowledge and witchcraft as a negative practice. .

- It gives the semantic proof of the difference between *kindoki* (mystery, knowledge) and *n'soki* (witchcraft, evil practice).
- At last, all the trends of ATR can be shown to be the devolutions of the Bukôngo, of solar religion [8].

### THE PROBLEM OF THE SEEMING POSITIVE USE OF WITCHCRAFT

The problem of the seeming positive use of witchcraft is first of all the failure to descry between the different mysteries, but it is also the confusion entertained in the meaning of the notion of *n'kisi*, the Kôngo concept wrongly translated as fetish. Thus to elucidate this issue an exploration of the original meaning of this Kôngo word is necessary.

Holman Bentley is the one who introduced the debate on the issue of *n'kisi*. The Baptist missionary, founder in 1884 of the missionary station of Ngombe-Lutete in Kôngo-Central, DRC, was offended by the idea that the name of God (Nzâmbi Ampûngu Tulêndo) could be linked to the concept of *n'kisi*, a synonym of *mpûngu*, which he considered to be utterly devilish. What upset his feelings was his encounter with a catholic catechism edited in Madera, Portugal, in 1624; it offers the first known use of Kikôngo in a book.

In this catechism the church is designated “*nzo an'kisi*” while the Bible is rendered “*n'kanda an'kisi*”; literally meaning the “house of *n'kisi*” and the “book of *n'kisi*”. Bentley found that it was “a very objectionable use of *n'kisi*” (Bentley, 1885, p. vii); *n'kisi* for him meant nothing but fetish. This naturally led him to refute the equivalence between *mpûngu*, as component of Kôngo name for God, and *n'kisi*.

In the mind of Bentley, *n'kisi* can only be a negative term alluding to evil practice. While the catechism of Madera reveals that *n'kisi* means in reality power; hence it can be divine, human or demonic. Contrary to Bentley, Batshikama writes: “the word *n'kisi* is derived from the verb *kisika*, to make strong, consecrate, sanctify, ordinate, bless” [26]. The Kôngo scholar is not far from the meaning power we attribute to the word *n'kisi*.

We affirmed above that divine power, divine *n'kisi*, can be used only for good purpose, because its origin, as shown on the table of initiation, is the purification of thought. While human *n'kisi* (which in some cases can be called fetish like demonic *n'kisi*) is ambivalent, we have concluded that its evil use should be linked rather to the practice of demonic power, because human lore is intended to serve for the welfare of the society.

The problem of the seeming positive use of the word witchcraft is in reality the result of the wrong assimilation of *n'kisi* to sorcery. Two synonyms are

used to designate the human *n'kisi* in Kongo language: *n'lôngo* and *mpûngu*. Even Bentley would call *n'lôngo* medicine rather than witchcraft as he writes: “*o nlongo una wina e kiolo*, that medicine is excessively bitter” (1885, p. 849).

The conclusion of this section is that the African word, or the word medicine, should be used to designate the power acquired through human mystery, but never the word witchcraft; therefore the practitioner who uses this *n'kisi* should never be called witchdoctor.

#### **WITCHCRAFT AND THE DIFFERENT MYSTERIES**

Considering all that has been said above, when one undertakes the study of witchcraft in relation to an African society, his first step should be to determine what the preponderant mystery in its system is. We have shown that the Vodun implies the original preponderance of the martial initiation; while the Bukongo is characterized by the preponderance of the divine mystery.

Studying an African society marked by the preponderance of the human mystery, which cases are often seen in eastern and western parts of Africa, the scholar must be aware that there is a human power the positive aspect of which should not be equaled to witchcraft. Thus semantic analysis should help him understand the difference made in the local language between the positive use of human power, and the negative use; this last use must rather be seen as the use of demonic power, of witchcraft.

#### **CONCLUSION**

The study of witchcraft in Africa is hampered by methodological problems which are the result of the use of Eurocentric materialistic belittling paradigm. To avoid this pitfall, our paper offered an empirical methodological approach which relies on the following schemes:

- The problem of witchcraft in Africa must be grasped through the solar epistemology; a holistic approach of knowledge where the visible is inseparable from the invisible. The solar epistemology has bases that are more scientific than the Eurocentric ones; thus it eschews any connotation of superstition as far as African values are concerned.
- In the study of witchcraft in Africa, one must keep in mind the distinct existence of divine, human and demonic mysteries. The allusion to witchcraft should be cornered to demonic mystery; thus one should avoid using the term witchdoctor in lieu and place of local appellation.
- Witchcraft can be empirically studied as the reverse of the practice of divine mystery.

In this approach of the study of witchcraft in relation to African religion, we recommended the

Kongo religion as the best paradigm, because it is scientific and it enables the scholar to seize the different aspects of ATR in a unifying theory.

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