SUPERNATURALISM IN AFRICAN LITERATURE: A STUDY OF LAYE’S THE AFRICAN CHILD AND AMADI’S THE CONCUBINE

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Abstract
This article x-rays the existence of the supernatural and their influence on mankind which has become a pre-dominant factor that has gained prominence and importance from time immemorial, and how writers have tried to project this concept in their literary engagements. In an attempt to establish this argument, the researcher explored Elechi Amadi’s The Concubine and Camara Laye’s The African Child. These novels depict and explore the idea of the supernatural in various manifestations and they are rich in supernatural and are rooted in the mythology and traditional African belief of supernaturalism. Supernaturalism is the belief that there are beings, forces, and phenomena such as God, angels or miracles which interact with the physical universe in remarkable and unique ways. The African man had begun to have some conceptions about the spiritual or mysterious essence of some natural phenomena and had begun to interpret his life in tandem with the "unknown". Opponents of these beliefs seem to pose the question: are there forces beyond the natural forces studied by physics and ways of sensing that go beyond our biological senses and instruments? They recognized that there may always be things outside the realm of human understanding as of yet unconfirmed which the African, not been able to research deeply on it, would term “supernatural”. This paper is aimed at re-emphasizing the concept of supernaturalism or the supernatural which has become an inseparable part of most of the works written by Africans, and bring to limelight the relationship it has with the human world and how both have exerted their influence on each other.

Keywords: Mankind, Supernatural, Literary engagements, Mysterious essence and Belief system

Introduction
In the African world view, supernaturalism is one predominant factor that has gained prominence and importance from time immemorial. In other words, from the pre-colonial Africa to the contemporary, an African has always recognized and has also tried to strike a balance between what he knows and what is inexplicable to him; that is, things natural and things mysterious. The African man, even before the advent of external influence, had begun to order his world so that he would find harmony and blessing in it. Man had begun to have some conceptions about the spiritual or mysterious essence of some natural phenomena. He had begun to interpret his world in tandem with the "unknown".

To buttress this point, Kofi Awoonor observes that:

The African established, from time immemorial, a spiritual hierarchy which reveals a cunny understanding of natural phenomena and a clever talent for manipulating them toward good for himself and evil for his enemies (11).

Man had come to know that, “beneath the creator God, is a host of minor deities”, and he manipulates this knowledge for his benefit. Kofi goes further to assert that:

By the light of his own logic, the African assigns to the creator God a certain degree of distance and inapproachability, not because he considers him unconcerned, but rather because he thinks of him in his primal ancestral role as the supreme paterfamilias who
must not be bothered with petty details of the universe. He, himself, appoints lieutenants and assistants who become overseers and guardians of various natural phenomena and faculties. These minor deities are the recipients of sacrifices and messages for the creator God. He receives no sacrifice. He has neither shrines nor priests (18).

From the foregoing, therefore, it can be inferred that Africa had gained a vast knowledge about the two worlds that live in concurrence with each other: the natural world and the paranormal world. It was from this African 'eyes' that the problem envisaged in this study lay claims to what we now term "supernaturalism" or "the supernatural". Supernaturalism comes from the Latin word super, supra, "above" plus nature, "nature". It pertains to entities, events or powers regarded as beyond nature, in that they lack a clear-scientific explanation. Religious miracles are typical of such "supernatural" claim, as are spells and curses, divinations, the belief that there is an afterlife for the dead, and innumerable others. Supernaturalism or supernatural beliefs have existed in virtually all human cultures throughout recorded human history; it should however be noted that although some supernatural phenomena may not be perceived by natural or empirical senses, a great many supernatural events have been witnessed in biblical and modern times. Numerous events in earth's history require a supernaturalistic belief before they can be correctly understood or interpreted. However, it is important to note that the African has always communed with these powers that violate the proper ordering of the universe through praises, prayers, sacrifices, and invocations; and all these were addressed to forces that interfered with his environment. As Onuekwusi observes "most of them (that is, the praises, prayers and invocations) are addressed to gods and some to the living dead, divinities and other beings that serve as intermediaries between man and God".

THE SUPERNATURALISM IN THE CONCUBINE

Elechi Amadi has remained one of such renowned African novelists who have often been referred to as being "supernaturally nostalgic". He hails from Aluu, a village near Port-Harcourt in the present Ikwere local government area of Rivers state, Nigeria. His literary ingenuity has enabled him to create numerous literary artifacts among which are The Concubine (1966), The Slave, (1976), The Great Ponds (1970), and many other literary works. However, in this chapter of the project, attention is paid mainly to his The Concubine.

Born and nurtured in the village and moreover, being very much attached to the elders of the land, he is able to get acquainted with the prevalent supernatural elements of the life of his people and has recreated these in his literary expenditures. In this regard, Elechi Amadi in "An-in law arrives" says:

The compound was quite save for the noise of pounding from his third wife's kitchen. No child came to greet him. His three wives had seven children but all had died. Dibias had done their best but it seemed his ancestral gods had not intervened successfully on his behalf (34).

In order to establish the fact that Elechi Amadi has had a good time with the Ndi-ichie, E.J Alagoa questions rhetorically: where did Elechi Amadi get all those ideas for these stories, so deeply rooted in African tradition and community culture? My informants recalls that young Elechi Amadi has a virtually monopoly of access to a famous Aluu story teller and historian, from whose lips he must have garnered a vast store of oral tradition.

As a result of being closely associated with Amadi, even at school, and moreover, from the same village, Obi Wale gets to know Amadi well and thus, he, the former, has noted, The Concubine and Elechi Amadi says it is his favorite novel, "he introduces the recurrent theme of the dominance of the gods over the everyday life of human beings in Elechi's novels". He further adds:

Elechi Amadi's concept of his relationship is a far more serious one. In the society with which he pre-occupies himself, in his works, there is strictly no demarcating line between the two worlds. Isiburu cannot become the wrestling champion of Ikwere land without the agreement of the gods. Whenever there is doubt about the true intention of the gods, the dibia is there to interpret their wishes.

The issue of unveiling the age-long tussle between man and the gods, and its effects on the human society has remained the preoccupation of Amadi’s major literary explorations, especially, in his The Concubine. As a matter of fact, Amadi himself in "The Novel in Nigeria" notes that:

In The Concubine, my first novel, a man actually struggles with a god for the possession of a beautiful woman and predictably, he loses. This is fiction, but as a
matter of fact, foreign religion forms only a thin veneer of the minds of most Nigerians. When the worst come to the worst, most people resort to their ancestral gods for whom they have unbreakable emotional and psychological ties. Not all the reactions of writers arise from pure resentment over the imposition of foreign gods. Much of the protest arises from the realization that all religion is one and that we have been taken for a ride. Many novelists now realize that no religion is superior or inferior to any other religion.

Furthermore, Amadi’s wit as a literary artist continues to attract criticisms from all quarters. Some have attributed his stand in relation to reality in his imaginary world as a result of his proclivity to rural life. As a result, it conspicuously brings into focus Amadi’s depiction of the mysterious realm of human existence, which highlights man's unequal contest with supernatural forces. In his own view, Chidi Maduka notes that:

Amadi seems to have used his people’s belief system as a raw material for carving out meri-table artistic monuments. In the process, man’s determined futile struggle against the overwhelming power of the inscrutable supernatural forces emerges as the dominating theme of the works.

In addition, O.R. Dathorne writes:

And, as unusual for a West African novelist, Amadi offers close objective observations on the non-human world. Ihuoma watches lizards playing on the walls of her house, a goat withdraws upon seeing the unhappy Ihuoma and a hen feeds her chickens when Ekwueme returns after his disappearance. Although such observations point to the author’s fine eye for detail and contribute to the total effect of the novel, they do nothing to dismiss the feeling of bathos at the end.

However, as Alastair Niven has observed:

Amadi, like Achebe, shows that man’s priority in a rural community is to sustain his masculinity; but the heroes of both novels have feminine characteristics which may be one reason why the gods ultimately destroy Ekwueme and render Olumba a physical wreck. Amadi remains the most likely novelist to offer a version of tragedy for Africa. A modification and support of Niven’s opinion, Niyi Osundare points out that:

Elechi Amadi’s treatment of the supernatural is remarkable but not unique. Nearly all African novelists portray man as existing in mutual co-operation with other men, and in communion with the gods. This communion and co-operation between the human and the divine is important, and indeed, indispensable, for the realization of what Soyinka (1976) describes as "cosmic totality”, in relationship compounded by fellow men and supernatural essences, in relationship that is particularly vital for the African world-view (97).

More so, it should be noted that the traditional pre-occupation of Amadi cannot be said to have been over-emphasized. He has remained such an African writer who has taken his time to explore his pre-colonial African traditional society, especially, with regards to the supernatural.

This is why Eustace Palmer notes:

There seems to be a preference for the novels dealing with the supposedly "grand" themes: the disruption of traditional African society by the imperialists, the clash of culture, the epic struggle to shake off imperialist or racialist yoke, the post-independence malaise and the effort to rediscover values and restructure African society. This is his exclusive territory. He stands unrivalled as the analyst of traditional African society.

To this effect, however, W.O. Wotogbe Weneke has this to say, "However, pondering on some of Elechi Amadi’s work, thus portraying him as a man versed in his people's religions and cultural matters". Indeed, Amadi, as an African writer, is a microcosmic representation of the fact that the main target of his literary exploration visa-a-vis other African colleagues, is to present to the outside world the indigenous belief and practice of his people, in order to buttress this point. G. Offer has notes that:

Authors such as Elechi Amadi, Achebe, Okigbo, Soyinka, etc. Have either inspired or have been inspired by African religious beliefs and ceremonies. In other words, they clearly understood that indigenous religious beliefs permeate every aspect of life. Amadi thus used the novel form to illustrate that authentic ethos of Ikwerre religion and culture (50).

To this end, therefore, having established the philosophical essence in relation to the supernatural of Elechi Amadi in the traditional African cosmology, especially the Igbo, it becomes necessary to explore
deeply the aspect of the supernatural as much emphasis laid on his *The Concubine*. Thus, the following aspect of supernatural are identified: The Supreme Being (the creator), sea-king (water spirit), Amadioha, the cult of the ancestors, and Ala, the earth goddess.

**THE SUPREME BEING (THE CREATOR)**

In relation to the aspect of the supernatural in Amadi’s *The Concubine*, the supernatural being (the creator) is one and most powerfully identified. As a matter of a great importance, and inevitability, almost every religion recognizes and gives a high preference to him. In fact, in the African cosmology, the concept of the Supreme Being remains one golden thread running through the heart of their religion. Thus, as John Mbiti, a great African traditional religious scholar, has succinctly put it:

Without exception, the people have a notion of God as the Supreme Being. As the Supreme Being, he is self sufficient, self supporting, self-containing just as he is self-organizing. There are no images, or physical representation of God. Providence is one of the most fundamental belief about God. God provides for all things he has made that their existence can be maintained and continued (42-45).

In support of this nation, Kofi has noted in relation to the Supreme Being, that:

In classical polytheism, the gods in the pantheon were all independents of one another. One of the gods might be regarded as the chief, but he was never regarded as the creator of the other gods. In African traditional religion, however, the picture is quite different. God, or the Supreme Being, is outside the pantheon of gods. He is the eternal creator of all other gods, and of men and the universe. This makes him absolutely unique, and he is differentiated from the other gods in having a special name (5).

Again, supporting the supremacy and the all-powerful aspect of the supernatural, B.F. Nadel declares that God is:

All powerful; as he is all knowing; there is only one God, no other exists, God was the beginning before the appearance of men and the creation of nature, being himself the creator of all things (50).

Besides, Francis Arinze has taken a note that:

God is the supreme spirit, the creator of everything. No one equals him in power. He knows everything he is altogether merciful and it is from him that each individual derives his personal spirit (3).

Meanwhile, the foregoing critics on the supreme Being have credited the fact that He, the supreme Being, is the creator and controller or chief manipulator of all others known or unknown deities or supernatural forces. However, it is still necessary to explore the modus operandi of this supernatural in the fictive world of Amadi, precisely, *The Concubine*. This is, of course, an indirect manifestation of Amadi’s demonstration on the belief of the Ikwerre in the existence of the Supreme Being. Amadi recognizes the fact that God, the Supreme Being, is always, either consciously or unconsciously acknowledged and even sought his divine unchallenging assistance in situations of need. This explains why Amadi, through the character of Ihuoma, exclaims at the wonders of God’s creation, thus:

Chineke! What a faultless Oduma beater! Ihuoma exclaimed. She hummed the tune of the beat of the Oduma and started dancing. Unknown to her, Emenike who was just coming back, stood at the entrance to the compound watching her (12).

Therefore, from the foregoing, Amadi is able to portray the social significance of the supreme deity.

**THE SEA-KING (WATER SPIRIT)**

This is yet another dreadful aspect of the supernatural as projected by Amadi. This particular divinity is a very jealous deity. It has even been noted that it, in fact, mesmerizes people mercilessly. On the truism of the characteristics of this deity, even as it reflects mostly on the Ikwerre people, Amadi says: “in the cosmology of the Ikwerre, the belief in the reality of the unseen world seriously prevents and this has much influence not only on the minds, but also on their affairs (5).

Besides, there are a lot of intricacies and mysteries in the establishment of facts on this deity by African traditional scholars. As Osundare notes disappointingly:

This final show down with the sea-god, even the dibia, the grand seers with "four eyes” who could have prevented the successive deaths of Omokachi’s youngmen are themselves blinded by the gods (99).
Deducing from Osundare's argument, therefore, it becomes evident that most, if not all, of the tragic events in the novel are master minded by the sea-king. This explains why Amadi in *The Concubine* projects the mysteries behind the deaths of Ihuoma's husbands:

Emenike, Madume and Ekwueme. Firstly, Amadi projects another mysterious death in relation to Madume. The heartlessness of this deity spurs him into "strangling" his victims. In other words, at times, before he kills such a victim, he endeavours to torment him and finally gets him killed. As a matter of fact and with more clarification, Amadi says:

> After three days of Cooleye lotions and peepery eye drops, Madume's eyes were more swollen than ever. They exuded a yellowish matter which helped to glue the eyelids together. Indeed, he had not opened his eye since the day of the incident (71).

However, in order to maximise his (sea-king) heartless plan on Madume, he drags him to committing suicide. To this effect Amadi says:

> It was in Madume's compound that people had gathered. The crowd was thicker near the doorway, which looked broken. Wolu was crying mysteriously and Madume's younger children cried in sympathy with their mother. When at last Adiele succeeded in peering into the room, the bulky body of Madume met his gaze. He drew back in consternation (76).

Finally, on the mesmerization scheme of the sea-king, is the death of Ekwueme. It is noted that this deity first makes Ekwueme destitute of sanity, just as Amadi puts it:

> Wigwe ordered Nkechi to make a hot bath ready for his son. As for food, that had always been in readiness ever since Ekwueme disappeared. Nnadi and Mntem led the way to where Ekwueme was. Wigwe looked up at his son and was speechless for a long time. But Adaku was beside herself (179).

**AMADIOHA**

This deity, Amadioha, has remained one of the deities that have been dreaded in the African cosmology, especially, in the Igbo pantheon. As a matter of fact, it is quite identified in Amadi's *The Concubine*. For the purpose of convenience, and proper establishment of the fact, Josiah I. Dagodo, has noted that:

> For the purpose of convenience, we shall present Amadi's fictional universe as following or encapsulating this pattern. First, at the peak of the hierarchical, pyramidal, mystical and even bureaucratic structure of the society, is the divine world of the gods and ancestors. The Erekwi are polytheistic. Amadioha god of thunder and the skies, like Zeus, bestrides the universe from horizon to the horizon. There are also Ala, the earth goddess, Ahiajoku, the god of yams, Ojukwu the fair god, Ogbunabali, mini Wekwu, and Ofo and Ogu, benign and malevolent gods each have their own department (61).

The recognition of this deity, Amadioha is to establish the fact that the fictive Omokachi community daily depends on him for its effective existence. By a way of extension, the frequent call on its deities at moments of great need shows that the belief in such deities is for the average Ikwerre villager a source of strength and spiritual energy. Thus, people depend on him for their day-to-day existence. For instance, in *The Concubine*, Ihuoma's mother, Okachi, recognizes the avenging attribute of Amadioha and has the confidence in its efficacy and as a result, she consoles her daughter Ihuoma, "they have killed your husband and now they want to laugh at you. Amadioha will kill them one by one".The destructive attribute of Amadioha as the god of thunder and of the skies makes the entire community to be dreadful of it. In other words, it seeks to mean that if it wants to take a man's life, it is uncontroversial. Besides, it is a common belief in Omokachi that in times of distress, Amadioha comes to their rescue and afterwards, the beneficiary shows appreciation to it. In support of this, Amadi says, "as soon as Nwokekoro saw Ekwueme's distressed parents, he drew them aside and had a short talk with them; their faces lit up and Adiku raised her hands in thanksgiving to Amadioha" (179).

**THE CULT OF ANCESTORS**

Undoubtedly, in Amadi’s *The Concubine*, the cult of the ancestors is another aspect of the supernatural that is identified. In the Igbo pantheon, it is acknowledge but not highly dreaded like others. Giving some kind of clarification on this deity, Kofi et al have said:
The ancestors are also believed to have a keen interest in the moral orders. They act as invisible guardians of morality for they had exemplary lives on earth and had trodden the moral path laid down by the first grand ancestors or over-lord of society. They are believed to know more than the living for they have lived in the world and are now also familiar with the spiritual world.

He goes further to solidify his argument by saying:

The ancestors are believed to have the power to punish or reward the living. They punish those who violate the traditionally sanctioned code, and reward those who keep it. The traditionally sanctioned code includes the customs and traditions of the society, which are often described as the "way of the fore fathers" and which constitutes what is acceptable in the community.

Buttressing this point, Oliver A. Onwubiko recognizes that:

Beliefs concerning ancestors are an important element in African religions and are forces to reckon with in the formation of the African religious life and mentality, because they are situated in the family life and springs out of the family structure. The effects of beliefs concerning ancestors are so powerful that some prefer wrongly, to designate the African religion as ancestor worship. What must be affirmed is that the cult of the ancestors is a strong element in African religion, but it is only an element.

However, Amadi is so sparing in the projection of this deity in *The Concubine*. In other words, he does not give them much recognition and attention as he does to some other deities. Meanwhile, WenekaWotogbe also notes that "ancestral beliefs and practices which are essential part of African indigenous religion do not escape Amadi's attention in his fictional worlds". To this effect, Amadi notes through the voice of Anyika:

Gods of the night, take this, gods of the earth, take this, Ojukwu the fair, take this, Amadioha, king of the skies, this is yours; and you ancestors, small and great, guardians of this compound, take this.

**ALA, THE EARTH GODDESS**

In the Igbo pantheon, the deity, Ala, the goddess, is a reputable and dreadful one. This could be as a result of her dominance in the agricultural concerns of the people of the land. Commenting on her great importance, David Carroll says:

Ala, the earth goddess, is usually considered the most powerful (deity); she is the queen of the underworld and owner of man both dead and alive, closely associated with the cult of the ancestors. She is also responsible for Igbo morality and her priest provide a powerful integrating force in society by guiding her laws and punishing offenders (55).

In fact, the great importance of this deity cannot be over emphasized. In another serious attempt to support this fact, Edith Ihekweazu punctuates that "Ala and Amadioha, the gods of the earth and the sky, are beyond doubt guarantors of justice...".

It is noticeable that in the Igbo pantheon, African cosmology, this deity is not properly recognized. Meanwhile, Amadi endeavours to, at least, make a mention of it in a passing way occasion, thus:

She has expected either to overtake or be over taken by some neighbors who would provide company for the journey home. Today she passed the farms without anyone joining her. She did not mind. Her thoughts provided company, perhaps too much company. Also the forest was no longer "unhealthy". The dead chief had long been buried. She walked on, her quaking basket beating out the face. She passed the shrine of Ala, the goddess and later the shrine of Amadioha.

**THE SUPERNATURALISM IN CAMARA LAYE'S *THE AFRICAN CHILD***

Camara Laye was born in Guinea in 1924. His work, *The African Child*, is his autobiographical work that traces the development of his cultural and personal values as a young man coming of age within the Malinke tribe of upper Guinea during the 1930's. After his death, the Guinea writer Camara Laye was rightfully acclaimed by the New York Times Book Review as, "the prominent pre-eminent novelist". He
is the author of several well-known pieces of literature, the most widely read and talked about being The African Child (1954), which was translated into English in 1955.

The supernatural was a very significant part in Camara Laye's life. These supernatural forces make up the entire belief system in the world as Laye as his people lived out their lives in tandem with these forces that exert their influence on the living which enriches the socio-cultural orientation of the people. Laye portrays in The African Child these essential and indispensable role the supernatural plays in his society. This role of the superhuman dimensions is really rooted in the beliefs of the African in their world views. Like most of other writers, like Achebe, Femi Osofisan, etc, Laye explores the richness of the African traditional society and the attendant deities and gods whose influences are felt in the society. To support this fact on the role and the place of the supernatural in the African world view, Kofi Awoonor comments:

It is assumed to be a close association between the creator and his subordinates, an association that is extended to man. Some of these minor deities, like Shango or Ogun of the Yoruba, live in legends as being among man's earliest of ancestors. Others, like gods of the sea or the moon, are deemed to posses special munificent powers, which man must actively court for good in order to ensure survival.

He further asserts that:

Religion and religious practices express the cosmology of the African world.

Man's proper function is to exist according to the natural laws of the universe; if there is disaster, then it means that one or more of these laws has been broken and the harmonic chain is shattered.

The above assertion justifies the treatment Laye gives to the supernatural which constitutes the entirety of their belief system.

It can be noted, however, that nowhere in his autobiography do we see evidence of the primitive, dark, uncivilized culture of Africa as depicted in classic colonial works like Conrad's Heart of Darkness, but instead encounter a quite, solid and emotionally scaffold narrative, in context of sophisticated non-fiction that calmly relays milestone in the author's childhood and young adult experience. Both the supernatural realm and traditional Muslim religion are depicted as minor characters orchestrating Laye's evolution from young boy to "adult male" and provide a rich black story to the narrative.

One of the more poignant descriptions in the book occurs about midway through the biography, with Laye's tale of his initiation into manhood by ensuring the circumcision ritual during his earlier teen (approximately 14-15) years. He participates in a festival consisting of a public and private ceremony for "several days" and later a period of healing and recovery from the circumcision itself, over one month. Laye spends his day of recovery lounging on a mat with the other young men, isolated from his family for the most part, allowed only to be visited by his parents from a distance between the end of the ceremony and he is able to walk home comfortably. Upon his return, he is moved to his own hut, separated from his parents though "still within earshot" of the family hut, as his mother reminds him.

Shortly after moving into his hut, Laye leaves at 15 years of age to attend "Ecole Georges Poiret, now known as the technical college" in Guinea's capital city of Conakry. In the school, in a new city for the first time in his experience, Laye encounters difficulty in language and an unfriendly climate. Colonization is more evident in Conakry than in Koroussa. Laye lives the life of a typical college of boarding school students, studying at the school's campus and returning home to Koroussa during breaks. Several years after leaving Conakry, Laye returns home with his "proficiency certificate" and a "troublesome" offer from the director of his school to continue his studies through scholarship in France, many hours from Koroussa. While his uncles and father encourages him to seize the opportunity, his mother forbiddes him to go. Laye accepts the offer despite his mother's resistance and parts with her and his father, as well as brothers and sisters, during a heartbreaking scene with Laye's mother shouting insults and pushing him away, then falling into a heap of tears, grasping her son and turning her anger instead to those that "are not satisfied" and "who, as soon as they set their eyes on a thing, they want it for themselves". Laye's head master gives him a map of city transportation of the Paris metro in France. The fear, excitement, anxiety and sadness culminate in the last vignette of the work, with Laye crying as he boards the plane for France, as he folds his arms around his breast to "stifle the heaving".

The memory that marks the beginning of the narrative is determined by the knowledge of his father's spiritual powers. Snakes play an important role in this respect. The second paragraph tells about the fascination of the young boy with a snake. As he dangerously and innocently plays with it, he is strongly reprimanded by his mother. This event is symbolic because it tells us more about the snake: his father's guiding spirit is actually a snake. When young Laye warns his father about the presence of a certain black
snake approaching the workshop, he replies, "my son, this one must not be killed, he is not like other snakes" (33).

Through the dialogue between the child and his father, the reader becomes well acquainted with the importance of the snake in their lives. This comes with the father's full explanation of the snake and its role in their lives as he tells his son, "it is to this snake that I owe everything" (25).

There is a strong sense of morality behind this belief. In the narrators own words, "there is a strong sense of morality behind this belief, there were good spirits, and there were evil ones" (23). What could be confined as primitive thinking allows the community to live under certain order. In this respect, Christopher L. Miller states, "in a few paragraphs, the non-Malinke reader has already been thrust into a very specific world, and allowed a degree of understanding of a certain family structure, architecture, and spiritual beliefs system" (134).

Laye marvels over his father's distinction and powers as the village goldsmith, his mother’s supernatural powers and his own passage into manhood, which is marked by animistic beliefs and bloody rituals of primeval origin. These characters, notably his parents exhibit definable characteristic that marks them out as possessing supernatural powers.

Laye's father is the famous and skilled (though he doubts this because he owes it to the snake) blacksmith in the village. He is endowed with the gifts and presence of the supernatural which is physically present in the snake form as the guiding spirit of their race. The presence of the snake has been nothing but good. This means that the one the snake finds worthy of his company is the one he blesses with good things. Laye's father sees this as a privilege. The snake introduces itself to Laye's father in a dream, thus:

Lo, I am the guiding spirit of thy race, and it is even as the guiding of thy race that I make myself known to thee, as to the most worthy. Therefore, forebear to look with fear upon me, and because thou dost not reject me, for behold, I bring thee good fortune.

To further authenticate this action and revelation, Laye's father explains to him, “after that, I received the serpent kindly when he made known to me a second time, I received him without fear, I received him with loving kindness, and he has brought me nothing but good”.

Laye's father sees his being chosen by the snake which is the guiding spirit of their race as entirely a privilege, as he tells Laye further:

You can see for yourself that I am not more gifted than any other man, that I have nothing which other men have also, and even that I have less than others, since I give everything away the last thing I had, the shirt on my back. Nevertheless, I am better known than other men, and my name is on every one's tongue, and it is I who has authority over all the Goldsmiths in the five cantons. If these are so, it is by the virtue of this snake alone, who is the guiding spirit of our race. It is to this snake that I owe everything, and it is he likewise who gives me warning of all that is to happen.

However, he makes known to his son what one must do before one enjoys such privileges. He tells his son Laye that, there is a certain form of behavior to observe, a certain way of acting in order that the guiding spirit of our race may approach you also. I, your father, was observing that form of behavior which persuade our guiding spirit to visit us.

There is almost a religious dimension, and undoubtedly a magical dimension in the making of gold because in the process of making, it is said that the maker is in a divine state. The father of Laye implores voicelessly the help of supernatural forces to assist in such a venture. But here, the gift of goldsmithing by Laye's father can be categorically said to be from the snake. This is illustrated by the physical presence of that exclusively when he is making gold. Laye observes:

I noticed that before embarking on it (gold making) he never failed to stroke stealthily the little snake coiled up under the sheep skin, one can only assume that this was his way of gathering strength for what remained to be done, and which was the most difficult.

Laye to ascertain this fact wonders:

But was it not extra-ordinary; was it not miraculous that on these occasions the little black serpent always coiled up under the sheep skin? He was not always there, he did not visit my father every day, but he was always present when ever there was gold to be worked.

To merit the goodness of the snake and to get help when working on the gold, Laye's father tells him:
The craft-man works with gold must first of all purify himself; that is, he must wash himself all over and, of course, abstain from all sexual relationship during the whole time. Great respecter of ceremony as he was, it would have been impossible for my father to ignore these rules.

It is ascertained further, the goldsmith state of mind that he also comments;

It is presumed, therefore, that the mental state in which the artists creates is sacred and pure. What results is the transfiguration and distillation of the essence of this estate, a conceptual realization or limitation of certain religiously predetermined psyche intent, an ultimate abstraction of the essence. The impulses that go into these creations are both human and spiritual.

From this perspective, one can understand the supernatural dimension of Laye's father's spiritual powers and gifts which are solely, according to him, privileges from the snake which is the guiding spirit of their race.

On another hand, Laye's mother is also a very outstanding character. Laye says, "I realize that my mother's authoritarian attributes may appear surprising, generally the role of African women is thought to be a ridiculously humble one; but Africa is vast, with a diversity equal to its vastness". The highlighting of women's strength was not common among African writers. However, there are more relevant characteristics of these women, at least for the purpose of this paper. Laye's mother has supernatural powers as well, "it was due also to the strange powers she possessed". Among these powers were persuading and commanding animals to obey; and to approach crocodiles without getting harmed. These powers had been endowed to her for being the next child born after twins. Laye ask rhetorically and provides answers, thus:

Where did these powers come from? Well my mother was born immediately after my twin uncles in Tindican. Now they saw that twins brothers are wiser than other children, and are practically magicians: for the child that follows them, and who receives the name "Sayon", that is, the younger brother of the twins, he too, is endowed with the gift of magic, and he is even considered to be more powerful than the twins, in whose lives he plays a very important role, because his birth is even more mysterious than theirs.

Laye says again, "I have given one example of my mother's supernatural power; I could give many others, equally strange, equally mysterious". The narration of these events is accompanied by constant comments such as "they seem to be unbelievable; they are unbelievable. Nevertheless, I can only tell you what I saw with my own eyes". He extends his believability and conviction to the community as he says, "no one ever doubted it". Also, Laye is well acquainted with the symbolic meaning of the crocodiles in his mother's life as he talks about the totem his mother possesses and the power of the totem, he said: The totem is identified with its possessor: this identification is absolute, and such a nature that its possessor has, has the power to take the form of the totem itself.

Laye justifies his mother's immunities, he says:

But the crocodile could not do harm to my mother; and this privileges is quite understandable: the totem is identified with its possessor: the identification is absolute, and such a nature that its possessor, has the power to take the form of the totem itself; it follows quite obviously that the totem cannot devour itself.

Also, another dimension to her power is her ability to see more than the ordinary human mind, eye and instinct can see. This is portrayed in her ability to see the evil perpetrated and the perpetrators.

Laye says of her:

Her voice in the early morning travelled far: it was intended to reach the ears of the witch doctor, for whom the warning had been uttered. He understood that if he did not stop his evil activities, my mother would denounce him in public; and this threat always worked: from then on the witch doctor would remain quite.

Conclusion

In African cosmology, the supernatural has been a very indispensible factor which cannot be ignored because it is really rooted in the belief system of the African man, and this has influenced his orientation so much that he sees it as a futile venture trying to extricate himself from. This is because he believes that his existence and survival depends on his proper understanding, harmonization and its ability to harness these for his betterment. Africans, respect the existence of these entities to the extent that they are afraid of them,
and in this respect/fear, have really created some conducive atmosphere for both the human and the supernatural world. They might be things that do not exist (at least as some people might claim), but it does in the communities they operate. To support this fact, Camara Laye, in *The African Child*, observes that these supernatural beings and manifestations "seem to be unbelievable; they are unbelievable. Nevertheless, I can only tell you what I saw with my own eyes". Not only do these powers appear real, he says, "no one ever doubted it".

In fact, the African sees his world as being congested and peopled with supernatural elements, superstitions, magic, spirit, deities and their influence as they commune and interact with his world, and he believes that the proper counting of these supra-human elements will ensure his ultimate survival.

From the foregoing therefore, it can be said that the African man's orientation about the world outside his has really made him try always to know his environment by changing what is within his power and soliciting for help from the supernatural on what he feels he cannot change. It is against this background that we can conclude that there are things that happen which science or reason might term "ordinary", but they mean different things to the typical traditional African man in his world view: hitting one's right toe against a stone or root is seen as a bad omen or warning from the gods as we see in the case of Emenike in Ihuoma's compound. Anyinka reveals that several spirits were after Madume and have sworn to kill him. It is also believed that an owl hooting at strategic locations means a looming death of a relative; seeing a rabbit in the day-time is a bad omen.

Africa is so stuffed with supernatural orientations that even facing the wall while sleeping means looking at the world of the spirit. Importantly, a critical observation of a man's death from the day of his death to the day of his burial would, one see a typical traditional activities. For example, the "Igbu ewu" for a dead father and so on. Many mysteries and stories surround this particular activity.

In conclusion therefore, it is obvious that the African man has tried through time and space to fashion out a harmonious atmosphere that would be to his benefit; ensuring of a long life, protection, good harvest, fame, and prosperity, the sustenance of his name through the gift of male children. It is important to note that man is believed to have achieved all these by his amalgamation of the natural with the supernatural worlds to his good. It is against this background that African fictions, through the ingenuity of the writers, have succeeded in illustrating how man has tried to strike a balance between the worlds. He has achieved this through his constant touch with the supreme deity through his subordinates-spirits, gods, deities, and all other supernatural entitles like the ancestors, his root. He has maintained this "touch" through prayers, rituals, sacrifices, incantations, libations, songs, music etc. To support the above assertion, Emmanuel Obiechina has this to say:

The traditional (African) imagination can also exhibit a unique versatility, and an acuteness of perception beyond that of people who consist only of modern realities. It is sensitive to the deeper layers of experiences in a way that is no longer common in modern industrial societies. It perceives without difficulty the realities of the worlds of the spirits, gods, and ancestors, and mystical bonds that unite all beings. Whether in folklore or mythology, in their symbolism and figures of languages, in their religious and magical beliefs, they have a total view of the universe soon as a continuum and a perpetual flow of being and experience comprehending the visible and invisible universe, the world of nature and supernatural, and the living and the dead (131).

Again, in *The Concubine*, we see a world created by Elechi Amadi; an African society in its primitiveness where there are no schools, no hospitals, no churches, no roads and everything has an order except when the gods are wronged, and then there will be chaos. And when the gods are wronged the medicine man is sought for, who mediates between the gods and the people for normalcy to return to the land.
References
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