

**The Contributions of Soothsayers and Supernatural Powers for  
Education in Mofolo's *Chaka* and Niane's *Sundiata: an epic of Old  
Mali.***

**By**

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***Abstract***

This article explores the educational contribution brought by soothsayers and the supernatural powers to the medieval Zulu and Mandingo societies of the two epics. In this article soothsayers are painted as persons highly involved in initiating the youth to medicinal plants, prediction tools, incantations, sacrifices, dream interpretation, and magic. The article goes further pointing out breast-feeding as means used to transmit supernatural powers. The paper also examines the influence of supernatural beings in the education of the youth in the medieval Zulu and Mandingo societies of the two epics. Besides, the outcomes of these educational contributions for these societies are also developed through this article.

## Introduction:

This article discusses the educational contributions of soothsayers and the supernatural powers mostly in the medieval Mandingo and Zulu societies of the epics. Apart from their social jobs of hunting, forging, fishing, etc., soothsayers are also educationalists. In fact, soothsayers and supernatural beings are experts in the initiation of children, and their molding into great traditional healers and great supernatural power holders for the society. The supernatural powers itself can teach, since people can draw lessons from some divine actions that occur in a society.

This article further explores the success that the Mandingo and Zulu medieval societies obtained through the educational contributions of soothsayers and supernatural beings. The analysis of this article focuses on three subsections: “The Spiritual and Medical Contributions of Soothsayers for Education in *Chaka* and *Sundiata*”; “The Spiritual and Medical Contributions of Supernatural Powers for Education in *Chaka* and *Sundiata*”; and “The Impacts of the Contributions of soothsayers and Supernatural Powers for Educational Success in *Chaka* and *Sundiata*”.

## **1. The Spiritual and Medical Contributions of Soothsayers for Education in *Chaka and Sundiata***

The most outstanding job that gives soothsayers their names is the use of the supernatural powers to predict the future. Therefore, like any other worker, soothsayers too need to prepare those who are going to help and replace them through education. This education based mostly on initiations contribute to endow the society with new traditional healers and soothsayers. Consequently, the latter initiate the youth to develop their minds and characters in the usage of the supernatural powers in all its forms. The initiates are educated to the secrecy of plants especially medicinal leaves, barks and roots. They are also educated to the use of magic. More than these, the initiates are educated to the different ways to be in contact with supernatural beings like genies and spirits.

In African and especially in Mandingo and Zulu medieval societies of the epics, soothsayers initiate young people to ensure their succession. Without education, training, or initiation no society can ensure its renewal and development. It is for such a reason that MamadiKani, one of Sundiata's ancestors, "[...] gathered [his people] in the bush and taught them the art of hunting [...] [and] the medicinal leaves which heal wounds and cure diseases [...] Sogolon [too] initiated her son [Sundiata] into certain secrets and revealed to him the names of

the medicinal plants which every hunter should know.” (Niane, 1965: 3, 23) There are many things that hunters should be taught to protect themselves or to protect someone who is on the grip of the spirits of the bush. In his *L'etrangedestin de Wangrin*, HampatéBâ remembers how a hunter called Zambila delivered the main character, Wangrin, from the clutches of the spirits one day when they were hunting a leopard in the bush. “Zambila shook him by reciting the incantatory words that every initiated hunter knows by heart to protect himself from the evil spirits of the bush or to deliver those who would be grappling with the spirits”<sup>1</sup>

As far as Mofolo is concerned, he asserts that Zulus “[...] are a people more skilled in medicine than any other group in South Africa, and no wonder, since they live in the proximity of forests where medicinal plants are in abundance.” (1925: 2) The abundance of medicinal plants in the forests would have been of no use for Zulu people if they had not initiated their young people into the secrecy of these plants. If Zulu soothsayers did not initiate the youth, they would not be the more skilled people in South Africa. Even Nandi who is not versed in the art of

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<sup>1</sup>« Zambila le secoua en récitant les paroles incantatoires que tout chasseur initie connaît par cœur pour se garantir des mauvais esprits de la brousse ou délivrer ceux qui seraient aux prises avec les esprits » (Hampaté Bâ, 1973 : 338, 339)

**NB: All translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.**

witchcraft was instructed how to use medicine by an old woman doctor for the protection of her infant, Chaka. For this circumstance the old woman:

[...] gave Nandi a medicine horn and said, ‘Always when the moon is about to die you must bathe this child at the river very early in the morning, before the sun has risen, and then when he has finished bathing he must walk quickly back home, and when the first rays of the sun shine upon the village, you must take some of this medicine with your fingers and anoint his head with it. You must anoint only the center of the head where the child’s head throbs; be sure to anoint also this tuft of hair which is never to be shaved off. You must do these things before he eats anything.

Bathe him in a large river, not a small one. (Mofolo, 1925: 8)

Nandi must know exactly how to use these medicinal plants and the old doctor had taken her time to explain how these medicines should be used. Educating Nandi the right way to use these medicines is very good because most of the time an error can cause a reverse effect that can kill. Some medical plants are poisonous, they are only used to bath with or in anointing. Consequently, if Nandi puts them in her son’s food or drinks the boy can die. Knowing these medicinal plants is very important for initiated persons.

The education on medicinal plants leads to healing wounds and diseases. An illustrative example is the education of a future Sarraounia or Queen amongst the

Mauri ethnic group in Niger where a princess is educated by a sorcerer king named

“Dawa”.

“Dawa” is going to go further in his attitude giving to his step-daughter [Sarraounia] the education that a boy must receive at that time: he teaches her to ride bareback, to fish, to hunt, to swim, to climb hills, to scour savannahs, and to wield hunting arms as well as fighting ones... In addition to the military training she received, Sarraounia was initiated to the secrecy of plants.<sup>2</sup>

After these multiple trainings in cavalry, fishing, hunting, swimming, and weapons manipulation, Dawa, a hunter soothsayer, completed Sarraounia’s initiation with the knowledge of medicinal plants to take care of wounded or sick warriors. She may need to know about the remedies that plants can offer. This initiation to the secrecy of plants constitutes the basic and the most important part of soothsayers’ initiation. For a society can live without predictions but can not live without medicines. I can assert from this quotation that Sarraounia, the sorceress queen that

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<sup>2</sup>«Dawa» va aller plus dans son attitude en donnant à sa filleule [Sarraounia] l’éducation que devait à cette époque recevoir un garçon : il lui apprit à monter à cru, à pêcher, à chasser, à nager, à grimper dans les collines, parcourir les savanes et à manier les armes de chasse comme les armes de combat.... En plus de la formation guerrière, Sarraounia fut initiée aux secrets des plantes. (Pantengouh, 2005: 78)

fought the colonizers in Niger, received from Dawa her first initiation of soothsaying.

The initiation of young people into the secrecy of plant is also risky. In fact, cutting some leaves, barks or roots of some plants may be dangerous. Consequently, initiates should learn the different rituals to perform before cutting a part of any plant. Some plants are efficient only when you cut them at specific days. Some other plants need incantations before you cut them. And some require sacrifices to be effective before they are cut. If these days, times, incantations, or sacrifices are not respected or properly performed the medicine may not work. Worse, neglecting these rituals may cause illness or death.

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

There was a tree in Bokone [...] It was said that before a person could cut it, he had to be strengthened with medicines, and then only could he go to it, because if he cut it without having strengthened himself, he would die at once. It was said that, when a person chopped it, it cried like a goat, and besides, its sap was red like human blood. The person chopping it had to be naked,

totally nude. It was a tree of witchcraft [...] [and] [...] was kept [...] like the medicine for healing fractures. (1925: 43)

Initiating young people to the secrecy of plants is capital because these instructions can prevent them from having occult problems. Chaka's education went beyond the teaching of the mere secrecy of plants. He was taught magic and the ultimate in witchcraft, shedding blood in exchange for blessing, by Isanusi. Mofolo can hear Isanusi stating:

If something should happen, and you need me quickly, when you go to the river on your appointed day, you must anoint yourself with the medicine I gave, and then go into the water, and I shall hear at once that I am needed... In battle, when you are sorely pressed by the enemy, and see that death is at hand, simply strike your forehead, where I have stuffed the medicine, with the base of your spear which also contains the medicine, that is to say that the medicines must strike each other, and then call "Isanusi", and help will come to you in the twinkling of an eye, and your enemies will flee when they hear that name.'... Today, Chaka, we are teaching you witchcraft, how sorcerers kill their own children or their parents in order to ensure that they shall be efficient in their sorcery." (1925: 44, 101)

Chaka was indeed taught the ultimate in the art of witchcraft. The incantation that he was taught to use was very simple to keep, it was in one word, “*Isanusi*” but of a great magical effect as long as it was performed as taught.

In fact, the aim of an incantation is to use a magical formula that is sung or spoken most of the time with occult ceremonies to be in contact with a deity or spirit to produce a magical result. Some incantations are composed with many words. Some are easy to learn but some are not. After Sundiata signed a pact with the jinn that protected Kita and won the war, he went to the pool and invoked them in these words:

‘Oh jinn of the water, Master of the Moghoya-Dji, master of the magic water, I sacrificed to you a hundred bulls, I sacrificed to you a hundred rams, and I sacrificed to you a hundred cocks. You gave me the victory but I have not destroyed Kita. I, the successor to Kita Mansa, come to drink the magic water, the moghoyadji.’ (Niane, 1965: 71)

Sundiata knew the occult procedures to follow in each circumstance because his mother taught him the art of sorcery. He would not drink the water of this pool if he did not ask in advance permission to the divinities that were guarding the magic water.

Mofolo too reports an incantation done by Isanusi during Chaka's strengthening process. Isanusi invokes the spirits of Chaka's ancestors in these words:

'Permitter-of-those-who-are-gone,      permitter-of-those-who-are-taken-unduly, accept him, receive him, bring him all the blessing of those who are gone, that they may lie on him as the dew that lies upon the ground! Upon his tracks may there be mud and marshes of rain that fall in torrents! May all his enemies vanish when he appears, like mist that evaporates when the sun rises! (Mofolo, 1925: 42)

Having finish the strengthening of Chaka, Isanusi called Chaka's ancestors' spirits through incantations so that they can bring him all their blessing. If Isanusi was not initiated to the use of incantations, he would not be able to call the spirits of those who are gone. So, the teaching of incantations is very important in the art of soothsaying; because it allows soothsayers to stay in touch with deities and spirits. Staying in touch with deities and spirits is what helps soothsayers to predict the future.

Certain people inherited soothsaying, but, others learn it from human beings or jinn. Sundiata and his sister Kolonkan inherited it from their mother, Sogolon, the buffalo woman. After Sundiata had conquered the hearts of the nine witches

sent by his step mother to draw upon him the anger of the nocturnal powers by giving them condiments and meat, his sister said:

‘You were really frightened; those nine witches really scared you, eh?’ [...]

‘How do you know,’ retorted Sundiata, astonished.

‘I saw them at night hatching their scheme, but I knew there was no danger for you.’ Kolonkan was well versed in the art of witchcraft and watched over her brother without his suspecting it.

(Niane, 1965: 26)

The above dialog between sister and brother shows that Sundiata did not know if his sister had the gift of soothsaying. Her art of soothsayer was innate, it grew in her through years and she was using it to protect her brother who was also versed in the art.

But, Chaka did not inherit soothsaying from his parents. He learned sorcery from Isanusi and while his brothers were killing him, he predicted their future in these words:

‘You are killing me in the hope that you will be kings when I am dead, whereas you are wrong, that is not the way it will be because *umlungu*, the white man, is coming, and it is he who will rule you, and you will be his servants.’ (Mofolo, 1925: 167)

This prediction of Chaka became a reality because later on white people colonized them, and they suffered a lot under the system of Apartheid. I can thus assert that the above two quotations show that soothsaying occurs through inheritance or learning. Sundiata's sister Kolonkan inherited it from her mother and Chaka learned it from his doctor.

In the life of every man there comes a moment when doubt settles in and the man questions himself on his own destiny, [...] [But] Fear enters the heart of him who does not know his destiny, [...] If it is foretold that your destiny should be fulfilled in such and such a land, men can do nothing against it. (Niane, 1965: 53, 29, 47)

These combined part in one quotation points out the necessity for a human being to know his or her destiny. Soothsaying helps one to see one's destiny. Soothsayers used many means to read the future of people which they teach to initiates. Conrad avers that:

Divination is an important part of the Mande belief system, and specialists have many ways of doing it. One of the most common methods is to throw cowrie shells onto a woven straw mat or tray. The usual number of cowries is 12, but totals of 16, 20, and 40 are also used. The scattered cowries are interpreted according to the patterns in which they land. Small stones can also be thrown and interpreted according to

how many stick in the diviner's hand or are snatched up in a quick follow-through motion. Other diviners drop kola nuts or horsehair into a calabash full of water and interpret their buoyancy or read their patterns. Still others use a leather pouch or "black bag" containing small bones, dried bits of animals such as tails, scraps of paper with symbols drawn on them, and other mysterious objects. In sand divination the diviner smooths a pile of special sand into a flat surface. While saying incantations (magic words), he or she draws and interprets symbols on the sand while guided by a supernatural force. (2005: 95)

In this quotation, Conrad points out some means used to predict the future and how they are used in Mandingo society. Whichever the means used, the soothsayer is helped in his divination by divinities and spirits, hence the necessity of learning incantations to summon them before any soothsaying.

People mostly recommended soothsayers who manipulate the above divinatory means with left hand. Left handed soothsayers are said to be the best. The hunter who predicted Sundiata's birth was a left handed one. Niane remembers that the griot:

GnankourmanDoua discreetly brought to the king's notice that the soothsayer was left handed. The left hand is the hand of evil, but in the divining art it is said that left-handed people are the best. The hunter muttered some incomprehensible words in a low voice while he shuffled and jumbled the twelve cowries into different positions which he mused on at length. (1965: 5)

There are other means of divination that are not pointed out by Conrad that we can find in Niane's *Sundiata: an Epic of Old Mali* and Mofolo' *Chaka*. These means are dreams and eyes. In fact, dreams coming from some soothsayers are mostly real information or warnings. Sundiata's griot comforted him saying, "[...] the soothsayers had seen the end of Soumaoro in a dream." (Niane, 1965: 64) HampatéBâ too reports a shepherdess soothsayer who after having a bad dream went to Wangrin's house to warn him about a potential danger. That shepherdess said to Wangrin, "I awoke almost stupefied by this painful dream. I was so haunted by it that I did not want to wait any longer to come and tell you about my vision [...]"<sup>3</sup> The above two quotations show that dreams are also means of soothsaying for those who can interpret them. We know that that dream of the shepherdess was interpreted to Wangrin by MoulayeHamidou, a Marabout, who also made him a

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<sup>3</sup> « Je m'éveillai presque abruti par ce rêve pénible. J'en fus si hantée que je n'ai pas voulu attendre plus longtemps pour venir te mettre au courant de ma vision [...] » (1973: 200)

divine prescription to avoid the outcome of the dream. If MoulayeHamidouhad not been taught how to interpret dreams he would not have helpedWangrin.

As far as Mofolo is concerned, he points out eyes and veins of an arm as means of divination. Some soothsayers look into the person's eyes to predict his future. When Isanusi and Chaka met for the first time, Isanusi, the diviner told Chaka:

‘You must look straight into my eyes as I talk to you,’ and they looked at each other, ‘The trouble which led to your being in this place arose in the night. You were fighting with a wild beast, and you even killed it. That beast was a hyena...A few days before that you had killed another. Good gracious! I can see that you are rejected by your father, and that he, in return, is afraid of his wives. This time you escaped from a serious danger because you were meant to be killed.’ (Mofolo, 1925: 38)

Eyes express easily feelings: fear, joy, sorrow, sadness, tenderness, and violence that even non-soothsayers can read. So according to me, they are the best means of divination through which soothsayers can read the future of people.

Soothsayers learn also how to read the future using the traits of hands or the veins of an arm. The traits of hands are like ways that soothsayers' eyes follow to dive into the future of a person to predict what will happen in his life. However,

Mofolo mentions the veins of an arm as means of predicting the future. He reports that the old woman doctor “[...] put her hand on a vein in Chaka’s arm and listened, and then said: ‘The events which will take place around the life of this child are of great importance; they are weighty matters.’” (Mofolo, 1925: 14)

Some containers like calabashes or jars are also used in soothsaying. These containers are magic ones in which sometimes water and magic powder are put followed with incantations. In Hayidara’s *La geste de Fanta Maa*, the hero, Fanta Maa, the ancestor of the Bozo hunters, was a great supernatural holder. As MamarKassai, Fanta Maa’s mother was a human being and his father was a jinn. Hayidara’s hero used also jars to read the future. Hayidara remembers the hero’s recommendation to his mother:

When the sun comes up  
up to a quarter of its stroke,  
there are two jars in my hut,  
you will consult them:  
if you find one  
containing a dust storm  
like that of the tornado,  
[it means that] I am suffering.

If you find the other one full of fresh blood,  
if I don't have something [hunting game]  
it means that something [bad] happened to me.  
Then you can come to the rescue.  
[The moment indicated by Fanta Maa arrived]  
His mother then went to consult the jars.  
She found a cloud of dust in [one] of them.  
She sighed: "My child is suffering."  
[She went to his rescue]"<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>« Quand le soleil sera monte  
jusqu'au quart de sa course,  
deux jarres se trouvant dans ma case,  
vous irez les consulter :  
si vous trouver l'une  
contenant une tourmente de poussière  
pareille à celle de la tornade,  
[c'est que] je suis dans la souffrance.  
Si vous trouver l'autre pleine de sang frais,  
si je ne dispose pas de quelque chose  
[c'est que] quelque chose dispose de moi.  
Alors, vous pourrez venir à la rescousse.  
[Le moment indique par Fanta Maa arriva]  
Sa mère alors alla consulter les jarres.  
Elle trouva un nuage de poussière dans [l'] une d'elles.

In addition, the ballet of the region of Dosso, Gaya, in Niger call “*Gossi*”, is about a magic jar used to make a special prediction. This soothsaying is annual and is done by the *Soninkéto* point out fertile future women. The *Soninké* are people who vomit a chain once in trance that will return in their bodies when they are no longer possessed. They are people who do not need means of transportation to attend to their ritual ceremonies; because they fly without wings. During the “*Gossi*” ceremony, whoever is evil-intentioned can not see the place where it is held. At the ceremony, all the young girls are gathered with blindfold eyes. A magic jar full of water, magic powder, and sticks is place at the center of the gathering place. Each young girl according to her turn plunges her hand in the jar and takes as many stick as she can. The number of stick picked by the girl determined the number of children she is going to bear. Even if the jar is full of stick, girls who will not give birth in their lives can not pick anyone. This practice still exist in the *Soninkésociety*. This soothsaying used to be exact at the moment when people had not abandoned their tradition.

Superstitions and forebodings are also sources of soothsaying. However, I call them self-soothsaying and they are known throughout Africa. Among these superstitions Balogun asserts that:

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Elle soupira : « Mon enfant est en train de souffrir ».

[Elle alla à sa rescousse] (Hayidara, 1987: 53, 69)

To open an umbrella in the house will bring bad luck. Clothes worn inside out will bring good luck. An itchy palm means money will come your way. A bird that comes in through your window brings bad luck. It is a bad luck to chase someone with a broom. To drop a spoon means a child will visit you. You must get out of bed on the same side you got in or you will have bad luck. To give someone a purse or wallet without money in it, will bring that person bad luck. We should not cross a pregnant woman's legs lest she will give birth to a child that resembles that person. (2011: 132, 133)

Whenever one of the above superstitions occurs in the life of a person, the latter already knows what is awaiting for him, thus giving them a divination aspect. Savickaite asserts that “[...] human being was superstitious and still is [...] The need to believe in supernatural, feel safe, predict some future events is common to human being.” (2012: 87)

In addition, foreboding is also another type of self-soothsaying. It is a feeling that something bad will happen soon. A foreboding is most of the time expressed by the apparition of goose flesh on the body. It is also expressed by a sudden shaking of the body. When Ndlebe and Malungo, two supernatural beings, were brought by Chaka at his overlord's royal court:

As soon as they appeared Dingiswayo's [,] [the overlord's] body shuddered violently, and he even got up on his feet from fright.

Then after they left he said: ‘Chaka, are you saying that both of them come from your home?’

‘Yes, O King’

‘Have you known them since childhood, or have you met them only recently?’

‘I grew up with them, O King.’

I am asking this because one of them is, without any doubt, a half-wit who is not even fit to carry your blankets. As for the second one, I do not like him at all, he has the eyes of a traitor, and they are full of guile and treachery. You must take him away from here, I’m afraid of him, for he is truly evil. Are you telling me that you have known *him* from your childhood?

‘Yes, O King.’

On this day we find Chaka for the first time telling a lie

[...] (Mofolo, 1925: 61)

It follows from the above that Dingiswayo had already got a self-soothsaying through this foreboding. He warned Chaka about a coming treachery which he understood unfortunately at a moment when it was too late.

After the means of divination and the self-soothsayings (superstitions and forebodings) that every initiate should know, sacrifices should as well be taught to them. In fact, offering something as a gift to divinities or spirits is an occult ceremony that should be taught by soothsayers to their initiates. Some divinations

necessitate sacrifices to ward off a spell or to make a good prediction happening quickly. Sacrifices vary from one circumstance to another. They can go from cereals or fruits to animals' blood or human beings'. The hunter who predicted to King NaréMaghan that Mali was about to emerge from darkness with the arrival of another son that a special woman would bear to him; recommended a sacrifice in this terms: "But, oh king, for destiny to lead this woman to you a sacrifice is necessary; you must offer up a red bull, for the bull is powerful. When its blood soaks into the ground nothing more will hinder the arrival of your wife." (Niane, 1965: 6) This quotation shows indeed that initiates should be taught sacrifices. This hunter received a good training in soothsaying because he can prescribe the right thing to sacrifice: an animal, precisely a bull, and not of any color but red.

While the education received by soothsayers allows them to prescribe some animals' blood, their knowledge also allow them to recommend human' blood or some human parts for the achievement of other great things. Isanusi prescribed to Chaka the worst thing as sacrifice, bloodshed, to become king. Mofolo remembers:

One important matter which I want you to understand well, is that the great king [the enormous snake] who once visited you at the river is a person who loves war; if you do not spill blood, he will not be pleased with you. Also the medicine with which I have vaccinated you is a medicine of blood; if you do not spill much

blood, it will turn against you and kill you instead. Your sole purpose should be to kill without mercy, and thus clear the path that leads to the glory of your kingship... [Then after Chaka became king, Isanusi once again recommended him to sacrifice his beloved for great kingship.] [...] if you want such a kingship, every time you go to meet the enemy, your warriors must eat food mixed with medicines containing the blood of someone you love most dearly, one who is constantly in your thoughts, who is in your heart day and night, whom you love more than all the people in the entire world. It is by means of the blood of such a person that you can obtain the kind of kingship I have just described: I know no other way besides that one. (1925: 45, 100, 101)

Isanusi was the one who taught Chaka's first doctor, the old woman from Bungane the art of witchcraft. When the old woman doctor is going to die, Mofolo remembers that,

[...] she sent someone far away to fetch the doctor who had taught her everything she knew about medicine [...] to complete the work of strengthening Chaka [...] [The messenger comforted Nandi by saying, the man who] taught your doctor about medicine, [...] must have knowledge and understanding of powerful herbs which surpass those of your doctor. Besides, he is not only a doctor, he is

also a diviner who receives revelations through his head. (1925: 25, 26)

If Isanusi taught the old woman doctor, it means that Isanusi too received his knowledge from someone else. Consequently, the way of achieving the great kingship he had described to Chaka was taught to him by his master. And it was the only way he was taught to obtain such a great kingship.

A no less important means of soothsaying that initiates should be taught is animals and their cries. To tell the truth, certain animals represent supernatural beings. Consequently, initiates should know about them. For instance the, “[...] yellow snake found in Bokone[...] was highly respected by the Matebele, the very one through which they said the spirits sent their messages.” (Mofolo, 1925: 8)

The cries of animals are also important in the initiate’s learning process. In the film “*Keita! L’Heritage du griot*” from Dani Kouyaté, it is thanks to their knowledge of animal cries that the two brother hunters locate easily the position of the buffalo. They are resting under a tree when a turtledove comes and perches on a branch. As “[...] initiated hunters [they] know that the turtledove is the messenger of the gods of the bush. Therefore, as soon as it gives its first cry, [...] [they] listen actively.”<sup>5</sup> Through their messenger the turtledove, the gods of the bush have guided the two brother hunters to the buffalo transformed into an old

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<sup>5</sup>« [...] chasseurs initiés [ils] savent que la tourterelle est la messagère des dieux de la brousse. Aussi, dès qu’elle lance son premier cri, [...] [ils] se mettent à l’écoute. » (Hampaté Bâ, 1973: 339)

woman washing her clothes at a river. If these two hunters had not been initiated by their elders to the cries of animals, they would not have benefited from the guidance of the gods of the bush.

Sundiata and Soumaoro, the two great sorcerers, were also taught the language of birds, especially owls. Therefore, at the eve of their fight instead of sending an embassy, Soumaoro:

[...] committed his words to one of his owls. The night bird came and perched on the roof of Djata's tent and spoke. The son of Sogolon in his turn sent his owl to Soumaoro.

Here is the dialogue of the sorcerer kings:

‘Stop, young man. Henceforth I am the king of Mali. If you want peace, return to where you came from,’ said Soumaoro.

‘I am coming back, Soumaoro, to recapture my kingdom. If you want peace you will make amends to my allies and return to Sosso where you are the king.

‘I am king of Mali by force of arms. My rights have been established by conquest.’

‘Then I will take Mali from you by force of arms and chase you from my kingdom.’

‘Know, then, that I am the wild yam of the rocks; nothing will make me leave Mali.’

‘Know, also that I have in my camp seven master smiths who will shatter the rocks. Then, yam, I will eat you.’

‘I am the poisonous mushroom that makes the fearless vomit.’

‘As for me, I am the ravenous cock, the poison does not matter to me.’

‘Behave yourself, little boy, or you will burn your foot, for, for I am the red-hot cinder.’

‘But me, I am the rain that extinguishes the cinder; I am the boisterous torrent that will carry you off.’

‘I am the mighty silk-cotton tree that looks from on high on the top of other trees.’

‘And I, I am the strangling creeper that climbs to the top of the forest giant.’

‘Enough of this argument. You shall not have Mali.’

‘Know that there is not room for two kings on the same skin, Soumaoro; you will let me have your place.’

‘Very well, since you want war I will wage war against you, but I would have you know that I have killed nine kings whose head adorn my room. What a pity, indeed, that your head should take place besides those of your fellow madcaps.’

‘Prepare yourself, Soumaoro, for it will [not] be long before the calamity that is going to crash down upon you and yours comes to an end.’ (1965: 60, 61).

The above conversation between Sumaoro and Sundiata could not have been easy and faster if they had sent embassies. The knowledge of bird language of the two warriors facilitate their communication.

It is also very imperative to note the importance of the maternal milk in the up- bringing and initiation of children. This is the reason why king Senzangakhona gave special attention to Nandi who just gave birth. Mofolo considers that: “Nandi was given enough food so that her breasts should swell with milk for Chaka [...]” (1925:9).

Moreover, the maternal milk can have significant effect on children. As Pantengouh says: “Milk is the carrier of either blemishes, either powers in most of black African stories and legends.”<sup>6</sup> This quotation conveys the idea that women transmit certain imperfections or supernatural powers while giving their breasts to their babies. Sogolon transmitted supernatural powers to her children, Sundiata and Kolonkan, through breast-feeding. However, the power of the maternal milk can affect even babies who receive milk from another woman other than their own mothers. Pantengouh illustrates this statement through the case of the Zarma

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<sup>6</sup>“Le lait...est le vecteur soit des tares, soit des pouvoirs dans la plupart des contes et légendes d’Afrique noire.”(2005 :78)

warrior, IssaKorombé, who received his power through Queen Kassey's milk. She explains:

It's by giving suck to the zarma warrior IssaKorombé that Kassaï, the one breast woman, the hero maker, transmitted to him powers which made of him the master of war («wangougna») who put an end to Touareg and Fulani hegemony over the Zarmas of the region of Boboye.<sup>7</sup>

It follows from the above that IssaKorombé was initiated in the use of the supernatural powers by Kassey, a woman of Wanzarbé whose milk gave the hero a quasi-invincibility. In addition, the legend recalls that the god Faro: “[...] puts a drop of her milk in each of his [BitonCoulibaly's] ear, which allows him to hear any plot that is brewing against him.” (Guillaume HachimMamadou Diallo, News.abamako.com)

The above discussion shows that soothsayers educate young people to the secrecy of plants. They also initiate the young in incantations to be in contact with supernatural beings and the manipulation of the means used in soothsaying.

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<sup>7</sup>C'est en faisant téter le guerrier zarma Issa Korombé que Kassaï, la femme au sein unique, la faiseuse de héro, lui transmet les pouvoirs qui furent de lui le maitre de guerre («Wangougna») qui mit fin à l'hégémonie des Touaregs et des Peuls sur les Zarmas de la région du Boboye. (Pantengouh, 2005: 7)

Moreover, soothsayers teach the different type of sacrifices; because each prediction has the sacrifice which goes with it. The above discussion has also pointed out breast-feeding as means of initiating young people into supernatural powers.

Nevertheless, Chaka who was taught sorcery by Isanusiin turn taught his warriors the art of war. After Dingiswayo's death, his warriors who were under Chaka's command said:

Our eyes are turned towards you so that you may command these armies in the way you commanded them while their owner was still alive; you taught us and we listened and heard. Today we will listen to you not only as our commander, but also as our king.

[...]Chaka also built many military villages. He put [the warriors] through a rigorous training programme; he taught them fighting strategies [...] he taught them how to dance smartly, moving in unison with no one going too fast or too slowly [...] he taught them some beautiful war games which were impressive to watch [...] Above all he taught them obedience [...] He composed many beautiful songs and praises, which made the warriors weep when they heard them, for they roused in them strange emotions. (Mofolo, 1925: 93, 112)

The above quotation shows that soothsayers were also involved in educating young people the strategies of war games, marching, discipline, and beautiful songs to encourage and relax. Even though the above quotation is not talking about education using the supernatural, these education was done by a supernatural holder, Chaka. However, we have to know that the supernatural powers or divine actions can educate as well, usually through soothsayers who can challenge their societies when needed.

In fact, soothsayers can punish an individual or a whole society to teach them some lessons. Hayidara reports that:

[After freeing Nyanu from the torments of the prince of Nyanu transformed into a terrible crocodile, the chief of the village refuses to give Fanta Maa the reward he has promised him and he orders to arrest Fanta Maa.]

His people rushed on Maa.

Maa stood up; he straightened up: he filled the place, to the point that people found themselves stuck against the wall...

Everyone knew then that he was not an ordinary man.

Maa said, "As for this gold I owe you, I don't want it anymore."

He said, "Here is the crocodile's tail."

One half is gold.

The other half is silver.

He grabs the crocodile's tail and curses Nyanu.

He uttered the curse formulas on the crocodile's tail; and hits the ground with it.

And he added: "May the corpse of the crocodile do them such harm that during his lifetime he could not do them."

Half of the crocodile's tail turned into bees.

The latter entered the city.

The other half of the tail turned into cats.

They entered the city.

Maa turned around, and went home.

Calamity befell the city of Nyanu, which nearly wiped out the city.

If one of the bees stung you, you would die.

If it only landed on you, you would die.

Let it come to you, if you chased it, you would die.

The cats entered the city; the city was filled with cats.

They entered the houses, tried to eat from the dishes.

If you flicked one of them, you would die.

Let them touch a dish,

if you ate of this dish, you would die.

[...] The city is under threat of extermination.

The villagers came in groups to beg Maa.

Maa arrived [he refused the gold the king wanted to give him. He chased the bees and cats out of the city by saying:]

“[...] However, you will never get rid of these stigmas”.

So said, so done.

The bees migrated to the woods around the city.

But any legitimate son of Nyanu,

will not die unless he was stung by one of the bees.

If he gets stung by the bee, he would die within a year.

Whatever disease he catches,

it is from a bee sting that he finally dies.

It is still so today,

you will see clinging to the large trees of Nyanu, the famous bees gathered in swarms.

Today they have grown bigger; these are the bees of Nyanu.

The cats also entered the woods; they no longer enter the city.

Any legitimate son of Nyanu, whoever he is,

[and the thing remains true] until today,

He would never die unless he saw one of these cats.

The cats have dug into the bush.

They are [now] the size of a panther.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> « [Après avoir libéré Nyanu du terrible crocodile, le chef du village refuse de donner à Fanta Maa la récompense qu’il lui avait promis et ordonna qu’on arrête.]

ses gens se ruèrent sur Maa.

Maa se leva ; il se redressa : il remplit la place, au point que les gens se trouvèrent coincés contre le mur...

Tout le monde sut alors que ce n’était pas là un homme ordinaire.

Maa dit : « Quant à cet or que je te dois, je n’en veux plus ».

Il dit: « Voici la queue du crocodile ».

Une moitié est or.

L’autre moitié est argent.

Il saisit la queue du crocodile et maudit Nyanu.

Il prononça sur la queue du crocodile les formules de malédiction; il en frappe le sol.

Et il ajouta : « Que le cadavre du crocodile leur fasse un mal tel que de son vivant, il n’a pu leur faire ».

Une moitié de la queue du crocodile se transforma en abeilles.

Celles-ci pénétrèrent dans la ville.

L’autre moitié de la queue se transforma en chats.

Ceux-ci pénétrèrent dans la ville.

Maa s’en retourna, et rentra chez lui.

Une calamite s’abattit sur la ville de Nyanu, qui faillit anéantir la ville.

Si l’une des abeilles vous piquait, vous mourriez.

Qu’elle se pose seulement sur vous, vous mourriez.

Qu’elle vienne vers vous, si vous la chassiez, vous mourriez.

Les chats entrèrent dans la ville ; la ville fut remplie de chats.

Ils pénétraient dans les maisons, essayaient de manger dans les plats.

Que vous donniez une chiquenaude à l’un d’entre eux, vous mourriez.

Even though the events in this long quotation sound like a myth, they show the power, mystic, of soothsayers. The quotation shows that an individual or a community can be punished by the supernatural holders. The person or the community punished for misbehaving will never forget the punishment that will

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Qu'ils touchent à un plat,  
si vous mangiez de ce plat, vous mourriez.  
[...] la ville est menace d'extermination.  
Les villageois vinrent en groupe supplier Maa.  
Maa arriva [il refusa l'or que le roi voulut lui remettre. Il chassa les abeilles et les chats de la ville tout en disant :]  
« [...] Toutefois, jamais vous ne vous débarrasserez de ces stigmates ».  
Ainsi dit, ainsi fait.  
Les abeilles émigrèrent dans les bois qui avoisinent la ville.  
Mais un fils légitime de Nyanu quel qu'il soit,  
ne mourra pas, qu'il n'ait été piqué par l'une des abeilles.  
S'il se fait piquer par l'abeille, il meurt dans l'année.  
Quelque maladie qu'il attrape,  
c'est d'une piqûre d'abeille qu'il mourra finalement.  
Il en est ainsi aujourd'hui encore,  
tu verras accrochées a ses grands arbres, les fameuses abeilles réunies en essaims.  
Aujourd'hui, elles ont grossi ; ce sont là les abeilles de Nyanu.  
Les chats eux aussi sont entrés dans les bois ; ils n'entrent plus dans la ville.  
Tout fils légitime de Nyanu, quel qu'il soit,  
[et la chose reste vraie] jusqu'aujourd'hui,  
ne mourra jamais qu'il ne lui soit apparu l'un de ces chats.  
Les chats se sont enfoncés dans la brousse.  
Ils ont [aujourd'hui] la taille d'une panthère. (Hayidara, 1987: 197, 199, 201)

serve as a lesson for the younger generations; hence the didactic impact of the punishment.

This subsection has examined the contributions of soothsayers for education. It has pointed out the different spiritual and medicinal aspects in which soothsayers have educated the youth. This education based on the knowledge of the supernatural powers initiated the youth to the secrecy of medicinal plants, the knowledge of prediction means, the knowledge of incantations for rituals, the knowledge of sacrifices, the knowledge of dream interpretation, and the knowledge of some animals that are messengers of gods as well as their language. The subsection has also pointed out breast-feeding as means of supernatural powers' transmission and the didactic aspect of soothsayers' punishment.

## **2. The Spiritual and Medical Contributions of Supernatural Powers for Education in *Chaka* and *Sundiata***

This subsection analyzes the educational aspect of the supernatural powers in the medieval Mandingo and Zulu societies. It deals mostly with the education brought about by supernatural beings in these societies and the lessons that people had drawn from supernatural actions coming from divinities or spirits.

To all intents and purposes, supernatural beings such as deities and spirits, contribute also in the social education. They have many ways to educate human beings. These supernatural beings can remain in their original shapes or take the form of human beings or animals. Supernatural beings can also stay invisible while using their voices and possess persons by speaking with the human beings' voices, by using the cries of animals, or through dreams.

The least common way in which supernatural beings can educate is staying in their divine or spiritual shape. In such a case, supernatural beings have to transfer mostly their initiates from the world of human beings to that of the genies. Very often, we hear in African societies the story of great soothsayers or traditional

healers that owed their reputation to a long sojourn with genies. These great soothsayers and traditional healers were mostly kidnapped by genies or jinn since their childhood. They disappeared miraculously from their societies to find themselves in an unknown world where genies taught them many aspects of the supernatural powers; sometimes from their childhood till their adulthood. These lost persons would come back in their societies well impregnated in the art of soothsaying and healing. Even though Niane did not say that MamadiKani was kidnapped and educated by supernatural beings, the latter “[...] communicated with the jinn of the forest and the bush. These spirits had no secrets from him [...].” (Niane, 1965: 3) The word ‘communicated’ and the expression ‘had no secrets’ convey education between MamadiKani and the jinns. In reality they mean that the jinns had educated or initiated the hunter about everything: medicinal plants, incantations, sacrifices, absolutely everything. The jinns had shared all their knowledge with MamadiKani, they did not hide anything from him.

Like MamadiKani, Chaka too was not said to have been kidnapped by supernatural beings but some people said that, “[...] he had been vaccinated by a *tikoloshe* and that explained why he was so skilled in fighting with sticks, and why he never ran away.” (Mofolo, 1925: 26, italic added) and we know that a *tikoloshe* or *Hili* is a dwarf-like water spirit. It is considered as a mischievous and evil spirit that can become invisible by drinking water or swallowing a stone.

(<https://www.wikiwand.com>) If a *tikoloshe* is a dwarf-like water spirit, it means that it is a spirit that takes a human being's shape because dwarfs are human-life creatures having mostly supernatural powers. Consequently, some people thought that Chaka had been given medicinal education by this spirit.

As stated in the previous subsection, milk is also part of education. The maternal milk is not only used to feed, it is also used by supernatural beings to strengthen their initiates. The maternal milk is a kind of magical means through which supernatural beings transfer supernatural powers from their bodies to that of their initiates. For Example, when BitonCoulibaly caught Faro's daughter stealing in his farm, she brought Biton to her mother under the river to be indemnified, "[...] as a thank you, she [Faro's daughter] advises the hero to only accept the deity's milk in his ear [...]"<sup>9</sup> By means of a simple drop of milk, Faro transfers some supernatural powers to Biton, allowing him to hear any conspiracy from his enemies. It follows from the above that supernatural beings can be educated directly keeping their own form like the example of Faro. Hayidara confirms that:

[...] Faro is in the water.

And [that] [...] Faro [is]

Quite simply a jinn.

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<sup>9</sup>« [...] en guise de remerciement, elle conseille au héros de n'accepter que le lait de la divinité dans son oreille [...] » (Kesteloot et Dieng, 2000: 86)

[...] the Bozo, [...] call them the Masters of the Waters.

They are therefore indeed found in the water.”<sup>10</sup>

However, the buffalo of Do, a supernatural being, had taken the shape of an old woman to test the kindness of the two brother hunters before she instructed the one who gave her food about the supernatural procedures he had to follow to kill the buffalo. Niane evokes the different hints that the buffalo woman taught the hunter:

“Here, young man, take this distaff and this egg and go to the plain of Ourantamba where I browse among the king’s crops. Before using your bow you must take aim at me three times with this distaff; then draw your bow and I shall be vulnerable to your arrow. I shall fall but shall get up and pursue you into a dry plain. Then throw the egg behind you and a great mire will come into being where I shall be unable to advance and then you will kill me.” (Niane, 1965: 8)

The above quotations show that the supernatural beings can educate directly people but taking sometimes the shape of human beings.

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<sup>10</sup>[...] Faro se trouve dans l’eau.

Et [...] que Faro [est]

Un djinn tout simplement.

[...] les Bozo [...] les appelons les maitres des Eaux.

Ils se trouvent donc bien dans l’eau. (Hayidara, 1987: 119)

Divinities and spirits may also stay hidden but use their voice to instruct. After the king of the deep pool had strengthened Chaka and disappeared in the river, Chaka heard two different voices giving him these instructions:

“[Chaka heard first a] heavy and stentorious voice [teaching him who the King of the Deep Pool is]

-Mphu-mphu, hail!

Kalamajweng, Kalamajweng!

Mphu-mphu, hail!

Kalamajweng, Kalamajweng!

Mighty monster in the water-r-r

Kalamajweng, Kalamajweng!

It is seen only by the favoured ones

Kalamajweng, Kalamajweng!

Is seen by those who will rule over nations

Kalamajweng, Kalamajweng!

It repeated those words twice and then silence, and at the very moment it stopped, a very soft voice [predicted Chaka a glorious life and educated him the way to follow to achieve it. The voice] spoke and said:

Hail! Hail! This land is yours, child of my compatriot,

You shall rule over nations and their kings

You shall rule over peoples of diverse traditions

You shall even rule over the winds and the sea storms

And pools of large rivers that run deep;  
And all things shall obey you with unquestioning obedience,  
And shall kneel at your feet!  
O yes, oi! oi! Yet you must go by the right path." (1925: 24)

From this quotation, I can assert that the snake, King of the Deep Pool might be accompanied by other supernatural beings at the strengthening of Chaka. ‘*Thestentorious voice*’ and ‘*thevery soft voice*’ might represent each a divinity that Chaka did not see. In contrast to the King of the Deep Pool that appeared to Chaka as a big snake, the two others used only their voices to teach the hero.

Genies can as well teach using dreams and possessions. HampatéBâ (1973) states that a shepherdess soothsayer had a vision while she was sleeping. The latter was instructed through that dream about some problems that would happen in the life of Wangrin. MoulayeHamidou, a marabout soothsayer interpreted to Wangrin the teaching that the shepherdess soothsayer received in dream from the supernatural beings. This divine education helped Wangrin to avoid the trick that his enemies wanted to play on him. (200, 201)

In addition, while Kunene points out the exaggeration used by Mofolo in the explanation of *Bayede*; he also provides us with dreams as part of African beliefs that can be used to educate. Kunene states that Mofolo wants his audience to think that, “Bayede [...] was god inspired, having been revealed to Chaka in a dream, and thus confirming the growing myth that Chaka was chosen by the gods to come

and teach the Zulu people the art of war.” (Mofolo, 1925: xxiii) Mofolo would not have put these words in the mouth of his hero, Chaka, if he had not known that the Zulu believe in dreams as means used by divinities to teach. Chaka himself was warned through painful dreams about his downfall:

He dreamed that he saw himself asleep, and a spear was piercing his heart. He was startled to a painful waking [...] He laid down his head [...] But once more, as soon as sleep came, he saw a Zulu spear piercing his heart [...] he was extremely frightened and trembling as he marveled at this strangeness of his dreams.”  
(Mofolo, 1925:158)

Chaka was afraid about these dreams because like all Zulu, he believed in dreams as ways used by the deities to teach people. Chaka’s fears were well founded because after these terrible dreams, he was murdered by his brothers.

On the other hand, Africans believe in possessions as ways of conveying knowledge by divinities to human beings. We have in Igbo society an oracle, a god, called Agbala which predicted and educated using the voices of his priestesses. Achebe remembers that:

The Oracle was called Agbala, and people came from far and near to consult it [...] Worshippers and those who came to seek knowledge from the god crawled on their belly through the hole and found themselves in a dark, endless space in the presence of Agbala. No one had ever beheld Agbala, except his priestess [...]

[who] stood by the sacred fire which she built in the heart of the cave and proclaimed the will of the god [...] The priestess in those days was a woman called Chika. She was full of the power of her god, and she was greatly feared [...] [The deity's second priestess was called Chielo] Anyone seeing Chielo in ordinary life would hardly believe she was the same person who prophesied when the spirit of Agbala was upon her. (1959: 16, 17, 49)

Using a human being's voice is the most common way used by supernatural beings to educate or predict. Many people would rather listen to a genie teaching or predicting through their fellows' voice than facing the genie itself because of fear.

Other supernatural beings use animals and their cries to transmit a message. "Among wild animals, it should be noted that some are gifted with science."<sup>11</sup> This is for such a reason that initiates are taught the importance of certain animals and their cries in message conveying:

Indeed, all initiated hunters know that the turtledove is the messenger of the gods of the bush. Therefore, as soon as it gives its first cry, the hunter ceases all action to listen actively. At the same time, he tries to see the bird in order to identify it, locate it in space, see what are its size, its livery, the nature of its perch and the trajectory of its flight, to appreciate its color... These things, as

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« Parmi les animaux sauvages, il faut savoir que certains sont doués de science. » (Hayidara, 1987: 157)

well as the number of cries done, must be observed carefully in order to allow an accurate interpretation. [Having observed all the above, Wangrin asked the hunter:]

"How many cries does it shoot?" [...]

"Seven jerky cries," replied Zambila.

-And what does this turtledove's message mean,

Since I see you hear the language of the birds?

-The bird was perched on a dead branch of a kapok tree in leaves and in flowers. This presages that death will enter a vigorous and flourishing life, or else that ruin will dry up an immense fortune.

"The bird cried seven times. This represents the time of fulfillment. It can be seven days, seven weeks, seven months, but in no case more than seven years. "

"The up and down trajectory means an inevitable fall, especially since it landed on the left side of the road. »<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>«En effet, tous les chasseurs inities savent que la tourterelle est la messagère des dieux de la brousse. Aussi, dès qu'elle lance son premier cri, le chasseur cesse-t-il toute action pour se mettre activement à l'écoute. En même temps, il cherche à voir l'oiseau pour l'identifier, le situer dans l'espace, voir quelles sont sa taille, sa livrée, la nature de son perchoir et la trajectoire de son vol, apprécier sa couleur ... Ces choses, ainsi que le nombre de cris poussés, doivent être soigneusement observées afin de permettre une interprétation juste.»

This quotation shows that supernatural beings can indeed use animals and their cries to educate or to convey messages. The genies which taught Wangrin used not only the cries of the turtledove but also its movements to convey messages. The quotation further points out the importance of the education of initiates. If Zambila had not been taught how to interpret animals' cries and movements, he would not have helped Wangrin to understand what the gods of the bush want him to understand.

Even wings beatings of some birds are seen as warnings that educate.

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« Combien de cris a-t-elle poussés ? demanda Wangrin.

-Sept cris, bien saccades, répondit Zambila.

-Et que signifie le message de cette tourterelle,

Puisque je vois que tu entends le langage des oiseaux ?

-Le volatile était perché sur une branche morte d'un kapokier en feuilles et en fleur. Ceci présage que la mort va pénétrer dans une vie vigoureuse et florissante, ou bien que la ruine va dessécher une immense fortune.

« L'oiseau a crié sept fois. Cela représente le temps de l'accomplissement. Il peut s'agir de sept jours, de sept semaines, de sept mois, mais en aucun cas de plus de sept ans. »

« La trajectoire s'étant effectuée de haut en bas signifie une chute immanquable, et ce d'autant plus qu'elle s'est posée sur le côté gauche de la route. » (Hampaté Bâ, 1973: 339, 340)

As Wangrin passed not far from the rotisserie, located a few steps from the slaughterhouse, he found a swarm of vultures perched on the terrace of the butcher's shed. At his approach, the birds of prey flew away, beating their wings heavily. Wangrin, like all Africans of his time, firmly believed in omens drawn from events. Chance or fortuitous event does not exist in his mind. [...] too bad for one who refuses to listen to the warning that the supreme forces, which govern the universe, sometimes give without audible words[...] He heard someone saying, "Give the guinea fowl here, don't be afraid, there will be nothing. Wangrin concluded that he had to give alms of a guinea fowl [...] He sent his most faithful servant to his house, with orders to catch a beautiful guinea fowl from his henhouse and go and give it as alms. Then he waited there until his sacrifice is made.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>"Au moment où Wangrin passait non loin de la rôtisserie, située à quelques pas de l'abattoir, il trouva une nuée de vautours perchés sur la terrasse du hangar de la boucherie. A son approche, les rapaces s'envolèrent en battant lourdement des ailes [...] Wangrin, comme d'ailleurs tous les Africains de son époque, croyait fermement aux présages tirés des événements. Le hasard ou l'événement fortuit n'existait pas dans son esprit. Tant pis pour celui qui refuse de se mettre à l'écoute des avertissements que les forces supérieures, qui gouvernent l'univers, donnent parfois sans paroles audibles... Il entendit quelqu'un dire: « Donne ici la pintade, n'aie pas peur, il n'y aura rien. Wangrin en conclut qu'il lui fallait faire l'aumône d'une pintade [...] Il dépêcha son plus fidèle serviteur chez lui,

It follows from the above that Africans believe in animals' movements as ways of education from supernatural beings. These cries and movements can only be interpreted by initiated persons who often find the appropriate sacrifice that goes with the prediction, as illustrated by the example of Wangrin.

The battle of Krina was also an example; when Sundiate's mystically prepared arrow scratched Soumaoro, he:

“[...] looked up towards the sun. A great black bird flew over above the fray and he understood. It was the bird of misfortune.

‘The bird of Krina,’ he muttered.

The king of Sosso let out a great cry and, turning his horse's head, he took to flight.” (Niane, 1965: 65)

Through that black bird flying over the battle field, the gods instructed the sorcerer king of Sosso about his downfall. And as a well initiated to the messages of birds, Soumaoro understood that his time of vulnerability had come and he ran away.

Similarly, when Chaka was killed:

[...] his corps was carried to a little rise in the open plains so that it should be devoured by the beasts of the veld. On the following day the people went early in the morning to see what

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avec ordre d'attraper dans son poulailler une belle pintade et d'aller la donner en aumône. Puis il attendit sur place que son sacrifice fut fait.» (Hampaté Bâ, 1973: 186, 187)

remained. They found that Chaka's body was still intact [...] They found animal footprints all around Chaka's body, and they were utterly amazed that even an animal like the hyena, which is more greedy than pig, had not eaten it in the night. They went and told Dingana, and he went with them to the corpse. As they came near, a flight of crows flew away from it, and they were sure they would find that they had dug out his eyes. But they found them both intact. A great fear descended upon them all, and they trembled, and Dingana ordered that the body should be buried quickly lest it should, by some unknown chance, rise again. (Mofolo, 1925: 167)

The flight of crows while Dingana and his people were approaching Chaka's corpse is like the flight of birds of prey when Wangrin was approaching the slaughterhouse. Crows, vultures, and hyenas are considered like evil animals used in witchcraft to convey messages.

When a hyena grabbed one of Moshoeshoe's wives, he and all this brave warriors did not dare to help her, "[...] saying that it was [...] a hyena of witchcraft. [Also when Chaka killed the hyena that was running with a girl in the night] she thought that the hyena had now reached the place of the witches who owned it, and that she was now going to be eaten." (Mofolo, 1925: 28, 30)

It follows from the above analysis that vultures, crows, and hyenas can be used by supernatural beings to educate. The footprints of hyenas and the crows

around Chaka's body are significant for Dingana and his people. Consequently, Dingana ordered to burry Chaka's body because he believed that these animals around Chaka's body were sent by the supernatural beings as instructions and warnings.

Muslims also believe that cries of certain animals are significant. For example, the cries of roosters and that of donkeys are oppositely interpreted. While the crows of roosters are interpreted as the presence of angels at a given place, the bawls of donkeys are interpreted as the presence of Satan. Muslims believe that roosters crow often when they see angels and donkeys bawl habitually when they see Satan or other genies. Consequently, when Muslims hear a rooster crowing they recite an invocation to thank God, but when they hear a donkey bawling they seek protection from God against Satan through an invocation as well.

Other animals like snakes are seen as the messengers of deities. Subsequently, these snakes are venerated at the place of the divinities because the latter's spirits inhabited the former's bodies to convey messages. Mofolo asserts that, "[...] a yellow snake found in Bokone [...] was highly respected by the Matebele [...] they said the spirits sent their messages [through that yellow snake]" (1925: 8)

As far as HampatéBâ and Achebe are concerned, they report that the python is respected respectively by the Bambara of Mali and the Igbo of Nigeria. HampatéBâ notices that, “[the python was] both the totem animal of [Wangrin’s] clan and the protective god of the country he was crossing.”<sup>14</sup> And Achebe reports that Igbo people, “[...] address the python as Father.”(1964: 47) The words ‘*totem*’, ‘*protector*’, and ‘*father*’ attributed to the python are all significant in education. The python is the animal representation of one of Wangrin’s ancestors, this is the reason why it is Wangrin’s totem. So, here, the python is like Wangrin’s ancestor. *Ancestors*, *protectors*, and *fathers* are all involved in the educational process of young people in a society, they are all educators.

To conclude, people are taught by supernatural beings through some divine actions done by the latter, either to reward or to punish. At any moment a member of a society is rewarded or punished by a divinity, this serves as a lesson for the other members who will try to do or avoid the same action for which their fellow is rewarded or punished. “[By punishing] the king of Do [her] brother, for depriving [her] of [her] part of the inheritance.” (Niane, 1965: 8) the buffalo woman, a supernatural being, taught the people of Do the importance of inheritance. She believed that nobody should be deprived of his part of inheritance under penalty of divine sanctions.

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<sup>14</sup> « [Le python était] à la fois [...] l'interdit de son clan et le dieu protecteur du pays qu'il traversait. HampatéBâ (1973: 327)

Besides, Niane remembers the words of gratitude of the buffalo woman towards the hunter who gave her meat:

Hunter, may God requite you with the charity you have given me [...] I know [...] that you are going to try your luck against the Buffalo of Do, but you should know that many others before you have met their death through their foolhardiness, for arrows are useless against the buffalo; but, young hunter, your heart is generous and it is you who will be the buffalo's vanquisher. I am the buffalo you are looking for, and your generosity has vanquished me [...] Here, young man, take this distaff and this egg [...] Before using your bow you must take aim at me three times with this distaff; then draw you bow and I shall be vulnerable to your arrow. I shall fall but shall get up and pursue you into a dry plain. Then throw the egg behind you and a great mire will come into being where I shall be unable to advance and then you will kill me. (Niane, 1965: 7, 8)

This divine reward taught the inhabitant of Do that kindness can win over everything; even over the buffalo which used to destroy Do, killing “[...] a hundred and seven hunters and wounded seventy-seven [...]” (Niane, 1965: 8)

Zulu people also drew a lesson from Chaka's downfall. Isanusi and the divinity that he served abandoned Chaka despite the much blood that he shed to them to obtain a great kingship. Zulu people learned that following certain paths of

the supernatural powers may lead to damnation. In serving blindly Isanusi and his apprentices, Ndlebe and Malunga, Chaka sold his soul to the devil they were serving. So, when his brothers were killing him, “[...] Isanusi appeared before Chaka to demand his reward [that is to say his soul].” (Molofa, 1925: 167)

Deities can punish sometimes to restore their authority which is flouted by certain members of a society. These punishments also serve as lessons for those who wish to follow in the footsteps of troublemakers. For example, killing the python willingly or unwillingly is seen as an abomination that can attract the anger of a divinity of which the python is the messenger on the wrongdoer. Achebe reports that when “[...] Okoli killed the sacred python, [...] He had fallen ill on the previous night, before the day was over he was dead. His death showed that the gods were still able to fight their own battles. (Achebe, 1959: 160-161)

Another example that shows that the supernatural can educate by punishing happened after the death of the Zarma warrior IssaKorombé. Dishonoring the corpse of an enemy after killing him was seen as an abomination in Africa. Just as Dingana dishonored Chaka’s body by abandoning it to the night beasts, Bayéro, the leader of Fulani, also committed sacrilege by beheading IssaKorombé and hanging his head at a pole. People pleaded Bayéro to take down the hero’s head and bury it but he refused. That got the gods angry.

One day, a Fulani boy went out for a walk. He stopped near by the head which was hanged at a pole. The Fulani boy took a stick to shake it. A fat sprang from it and fell in his eye. The Fulani boy fell on his back and died. It was since that day that it was accepted that the head be buried.<sup>15</sup>

The quotation shows that even the dead bodies of those who held supernatural powers deserve respect. Chaka's and IssaKorombé's bodies were dishonored by their killers but the gods called them to order by giving divine lessons that forced them to rectify their errors.

Very often, the tombs of great soothsayers were hidden to prevent amulet and organ stealers to profane them. These thieves were mostly supernatural power seekers who profaned the graves of great soothsayers in order to steal their power. This was for such a reason that:

“[...] Son-Jara has buried his mother in a secret place so that her amulets will not be stolen by those who would steal her power.

Son-Jara's own death is a secret that bards of today are not likely to discuss in public but rather keep as a secret. His burial

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<sup>15</sup>Un jour, un Peul se promenant s'arrêta près de la tête suspendue à la perche. Le Peul prit un bâton pour le secouer. De la graisse en jaillit et lui entra dans l'œil. Le petit Peul tomba à la renverse et mourut. C'est alors qu'on accepta d'enterrer la tête.” (Kesteloot and Dieng, 2000: 390, 391)

place, which is reported to be in more than one location, is also kept a secret for the same reason that he kept his mother's grave site a secret: so that greedy power-seeking people would not come there and steal his powerful amulets and fetishes. (Johnson et.al, 1997: 18, 22)

Tomb profaners are most of the time punished by spirits to teach them respect. Consequently, Niane advises, "Do not go and disturb the spirits in their eternal rest. Do not ever go into the dead cities to question the past, for the spirits never forgive." (1965: 84)

This subsection has discussed the educational aspect of the supernatural powers in the medieval Mandingo and Zulu societies. It has analyzed the education brought about by supernatural beings in these societies, and also the lessons that people had drawn from supernatural actions. This subsection has pointed out the different ways used by supernatural beings to educate people in African societies in general and in Zulu and Mandingo societies of the two epics in particular.

### **3. The Impacts of the Contributions of soothsayers and Supernatural Powers for Educational Success in *Chaka* and *Sundiata***

This Subsection discusses the success brought by the educational contribution of soothsayers and the supernatural beings in Zulu and Mandingo societies. Realistically, the subsection explores the educational outcome in spiritual and medicinal practices of soothsayers and supernatural beings. By spiritual and medicinal practices outcomes, I mean the results brought by the usage of medicinal plants and magic in the education of young people by both soothsayers and supernatural beings.

To begin with, the upbringing and the education of young people on the basis of medicinal plants and spiritual practices has provided African societies with traditional healers who have multiple choices to cure sick peoples and fearless warriors:

A *sohanci*[a religious leader, soothsayer, and traditional healer from Songhai] is knowledgeable about different kinds of poisons and the medicinal properties of healing herbs, so he can select from a wide variety of remedies according to the nature of the problem. He might prescribe an herbal cure or, depending on the seriousness of the problem, he might indicate the necessity of sacrificing kola nuts, a chicken, or a goat. If he perceives an enemy as the source of the problem, the *sohanci* might resort to sorcery that will sicken or even kill the person responsible. (Conrad, 200: 101)

The above quotation points out important outcomes from educating spiritual and medicinal plants practices. This education allows to cure diseases using herbs. If the illness is not natural, a spiritual healing is recommended where sacrifices are made. Besides, if the sickness is caused by a human being, the healer can use magic that can cure the sick person and sicken the person who caused the disease.

It is also important to know that throughout Africa these medicinal plants and herbs can still be found in the upbringing of children. During all their childhood children are crammed with decoctions of plants or herbs. This decoction called “*djitti*” in Zarma and “*baouri*” in Hausa allow babies to become strong and healthy persons contrary to those who did not receive it in their upbringing. These

decoctions have also mystical effect, they can protect children from evil persons and spirits.

Therefore, by initiating young people, soothsayers have not only ensured their succession, they have also contributed to the development of their societies. The succession allows to refresh de societies with young spiritual and traditional healers. In initiating his son, Farakourou, to the work of the forge and that of soothsaying, the old Nounfaïri bestowed on the medieval Mandingo society of the epic a new master of fire who can forge needed materials for the society, and a new soothsayer who can predict and heal his people. Niane remembers:

The master of the forge, Farakourou, was the son of the old Nounfaïri, and he was a soothsayer like his father. In his workshops there was an enormous iron bar wrought by his father Nounfaïri. Everybody wondered what this bar was destined to be used for. Farakourou called six of his apprentices and told them to carry the iron bar to Sogolon's house. (1965: 20)

It follows from the above that the old soothsayer did not only taught forging and soothsaying to his son, he also gave him instructions concerning the future. In fact, the iron bar mentioned in the above quotation was made by the old Nounfaïri for a magical purpose, meant only for Sundiata. Before the old soothsayer died he had instructed his son about the usefulness of the iron bar. He told his son that one day the son of Sogolon, Sundiata, who is also a soothsayer, will send someone for this

iron bar that he will use to cure his infirmity. So, “When BallaFasséké came to order the iron rod, Farakourou said to him, ‘The great day has arrived then’” (Niane, 1965: 20)

Every education ends up by a result that is enjoyed in three stages. First, an educator is always proud when his lessons are understood by his student or initiate. Second, the student or the initiate is also happy because he knows that from his success depends the chain of succession and his own success. And third, the society also enjoys the result of education because its development depends on this result. Nounfaïri died, happy to leave behind him his son that he educated to replace him and to help his society. The old soothsayer, Nounfaïri’s education brought its most important fruits to the medieval Mandingo society the day his son Farakourou sent some of his:

[...] smiths [to] put the gigantic iron bar down in front of the hut [of] Sogolon [...] Mari Djata [...] crept on all-fours and came to the iron bar. Supporting himself on his knees and one hand, with the other hand he picked up the iron bar without any effort and stood it up vertically. Now he was resting on nothing but his knees and held the bar with both his hands. A deathly silence had gripped all those present. SogolonDjata closed his eyes, held tight, the muscles in his arms tensed. With a violent jerk he threw his weight on to it and his knees left the ground. SogolonKedjou

was all eyes and watched her son's legs which were trembling as though from an electric shock. Djata was sweating and the sweat ran from his brow. In a great effort he straightened up and was on his feet at one go-but the great bar of iron was twisted and had taken the form of a bow!

Standing in the position of a soldier at ease, SogolonDjata, supported by his enormous rod, was sweating great beads of sweat [...] His first steps were those of a giant. (Niane, 1965: 20, 21)

Outcomes coming from education based on spiritual and medicinal plants practices can also be seen in Mofolo's *Chaka*. The woman doctor feeling her imminent death, and fearing for the achievement of her education, charged a messenger with the below words for Nandi:

Your doctor said I should tell you that you should not worry because, when the sickness gripped her and she began to feel that she would not live, she sent someone far away to fetch the doctor who [...] [will] complete the work of strengthening Chaka with the help of her medicines, since she had been prevented by death. (1925: 25)

The above quotation shows that individual and societal development depend on education. If the old woman doctor had been the only one in her society, Chaka's strengthening would not have been completed; and Chaka would not have built and developed the kingdom of his ancestors.

So, after the old woman doctor had strengthened him with medical plants:

Chaka had an uncontrollable desire to fight, and it had to be a serious fight in which heavy sticks and spears were used. He dreamt about it at night when he was sleeping; he dreamt about it during the day, with his eyes open; and whenever he saw a man carrying a stick or a spear his whole body would at once begin to itch, and he would wish to engage that man in a fight. He would dream that he saw hordes and hordes of enemy warriors come to attack him, and he would see himself putting them to flight all by himself, without being helped by any of his people. He began to love only those conversations that spoke of war. Even before that Chaka was a very brave person, but he had never been the one to provoke a fight, and he was not quarrelsome, but now these medicine spurred him on [...]

The moment he arrived in the pastures the other boys would rush at him all at once, but he would give them terrible gaping wounds with his blows, till they fled. (Mofolo, 1925: 14, 15)

All the upbringing of Chaka was based on the use of the supernatural powers. He received great magical strengthening since his tender ages. The latter led to a thirst for fight that allowed him to free himself from the domination of herdboys who used to beat him and become their leader.

The strengthening of that old woman doctor also allowed Chaka to kill a lion that was eating his people's cattle and a hyena which had grabbed a young girl and ran off with her. Mofolo recalls that:

Chaka waited for it [the lion] without fear. It came, it jumped [...] before it reached the ground, just as it came close to him, he plunged his black-and-white spear into a vital spot just under its shoulder blade, and when it fell on the ground, it fell for good. [As for the hyena, Chaka followed it in the darkness because it was carrying a poor girl] He stabbed it under the forearm with a mighty stroke and the spear went in and came out on the other side and pierced the ground, nailing it down. (1925: 17, 29)

In addition, Chaka's education based on spiritual and medicinal plants practices produced many fruits to himself and the Zulu society. After he met the soothsayer that the old woman doctor had recommended to him, Chaka got his people rid of many other social ills. First, he killed:

[...] a madman [...] who despoiled the people's property by seizing their goats and cattle. He was like someone possessed by the evil spirits [...] When the people ran after him to recapture their stock, he would play havoc with them, killing those he could [...] people in Bokone are generally very afraid of madmen, and even brave men run away without any hesitation when they see them.

On the day following Chaka's arrival, that madman did a lot of damage among [Chaka's overlord's] Dingiswayo's cattle [...] He also killed an ox of a beautiful colour, one which drew much admiration in times of festivities, the very one Dingiswayo had doctored in order to strengthen his cattle fold [...] Dingiswayo was greatly saddened, because a few days before that, that madman had caught and eaten an ox of his with beautiful downward-pointing horns, which was the pride of his herd. He was truly at a loss how to kill that madman, besides, among his regiments and his warriors, there was none brave enough to go and face him.

Chaka was present when the herdboys reported to the king, [...] he told himself that if he killed that madman, that would be good since that act would create peace for [...] his village [...]

When [Chaka] came to the forest where the madman lived [...] Chaka dealt him a mortal wound, killing him on the spot. (Mofolo, 1925: 50, 51)

It follows from the above that the great exploits achieved by Chaka were due to the great education he received from his soothsayers. These achievements brought him freedom as stated earlier and fame. Since:

The young girls whose age-mate had been taken by the hyena immediately came out of their houses to go and see their peer who had just returned from the dead, and also to see her worthy warrior

[...] they went also to sing songs which praise Chaka [...] [And when Chaka killed the madman] all the people were amazed at Chaka's bravery, and they wondered just how he had managed to kill the madman for even his eyes were frightening and were like flames of fire: and all the people began to realize that all the things that had been said about Chaka concerning the lion and the hyena of witchcraft, fitted him perfectly. Even as he first arrived, the son of Senzangakhona, he made a name for himself by killing that madman, and all the people respected him." (Mofolo, 1925: 31, 51)

Chaka acquired respect and fame due to his spiritual and medicinal plants practices education, at a moment when many African people linked success to the use of the supernatural powers only.

Sundiata too received an education based on spiritual and medicinal plants practices and acquired respect and fame. Sundiata began to go on war with King Moussa Tounkara of Mema. Niane reports that:

When Sundiata was fifteen the king took him with him on campaign. Sundiata astonished the whole army with his strength and with his dash in the charge. In the course of a skirmish against the mountaineers he hurled himself on the enemy with such vehemence that the king feared for his life, but Mansa Tounkara admired bravery too much to stop the son of Sogolon [...] he saw with rapture how the youth sowed panic among the enemy. He had

remarkable presence of mind, struck right and left and open up for himself a glorious path.

They [soldiers] spoke about nothing but him in the camp. Men were even more surprised by the lucidity of his mind. In the camp he had an answer to everything and the most puzzling situations resolved themselves in his presence.

After three year the king appointed Sundiata Kan-Koro-Sigui, his viceroy, and in the king's absence it was he who governed.

The king's choice was approved of both by the army and the people; the people love all who assert themselves over them. The soothsayers of Mema revealed the extraordinary destiny of Djata. It was said that he was the successor of Alexander the great and that he would be even greater [...] Sundiata inspired confidence in the sofas by his example, for the sofa loves to see his chief share the hardship of battle. (1965: 36, 37)

If Sundiata achieved such a great attainment, it was thanks to his knowledge of the supernatural powers and the witchcraft that he held by inheritance. Like Chaka, Sundiata too acquired respect and fame.

The education of young people using the supernatural powers reinforces also the society and it values. Thanks to soothsaying, lost objects and persons are

found. By initiating the youth, the society can take great benefit of the supernatural powers. Mofolo reports how:

Dingiswayo [...] was [...] busy calling together doctors and diviners to find out where Chaka was [...] one of the diviners affirmed with an oath, swearing by Dingiswayo himself, that Chaka was alive wherever he was, and that he would indeed come of his own accord to his king one day. (Mofolo, 1925: 47, 48)

This prediction soothes the heart of Chaka's overlord, Dingiswayo, who got ready for the hero's return.

The Mandingo society also had to be saved by Sundiata who was in exile,

But where could he be found? No one knew where Sogolon and her children lived. For seven years nobody had had any news of them. According to the clues of soothsayers they had to search towards the riverine lands, that is, towards the East. (Niane, 1965: 42, 43)

This was a good soothsaying which paid off, because the searchers found Sundiata who later saved Mali from the invasion of Soumaoro. It follows from the above that individual freedom and that of a whole nation can occur from an education of the youth based on the spiritual and medicinal plants practices. While Chaka freed himself from a group of herdboys, Sundiata freed himself from infirmity; then both

heroes went back to reconquer and develop their kingdoms after they had been expelled by step mothers.

As I have stated it earlier, the education of the young using the supernatural powers reinforces also the societal values. Since:

The most important roles of the village magical specialists were healing, fortune-telling, finding lost objects or animals, exposing thieves, "seeing" buried treasure or money, and communicating messages from the dead... beyond their manipulation of supernatural powers as magicians, these village specialists were also mediators who contacted the other world through the technique of trance (Pocs, 1999: 5)

In certain regions of Niger like Dosso (Doutchi), Tillaberi, and Zinder, for example, if an object is lost or stolen, the people of these regions use their ancestral beliefs to find these objects. In Zinder, people use a curse, "*A KanLaya*", the latter is an ancestral belief that consists in brandishing the Qur'an against whoever steals or finds a lost object without returning it back. The curse will strike not only the author of the crime but also the coauthor, the accomplice, and even the witness of the deed.

As for people from Doutchi, they believe in "*Toungouma*", a famous sacred stone from Lougou. This magical stone is used to unmask wrongdoers like thieves.

The stone which is suspended at a cord is held by two persons on their shoulders by the means of a solid stick on which the cord is attached. The sacred stone then guides the two persons to the house or the place where the wrongdoer is.

In Tillaberi, people use “*Dongo*” a dangerous divinity which is invoked through incantations most of the time to punish directly wrongdoers by striking them to death. However, some pagan Hausawa or Hausa people also swear by “*Aradu*” or “*Tarnassa*” which also behaves or acts like “*Dongo*”. So, when “*Dongo*” is invoked, persons who are said to be the divinity’s “*horses*” enter in trance and “*Dongo*” warns everybody through the voice of one of his “*horses*”. If nobody confesses, even if it is not in rainy season, people will observe almost the same signs that appeared at the birth of Sundiata and Chaka. In fact, when Sogolon is in parturition:

Suddenly the sky darkened and great clouds coming from the east hid the sun, although it was the dry season. Thunder began to rumble swift lightening rent the clouds; a few large drops of rain began to fall while a strong wind blew up. A flash of lightening accompanied by a dull rattle of thunder burst out of the east and lit up the whole sky [...] (Niane, 1964: 13)

The same phenomenon is seen in the film directed by William C. Faure written by Joshua Sinclair during the birth of Chaka: darkness, thunder, lightning, and rain.

So, when these signs appear, most wrongdoers confess and the chief priest stops the divine punishment process through incantations. The conservation of these traditional beliefs through the education to the youth allows a harmonious social life in these regions in particular and in Africa in general.

I am tempted to say after the above analysis that Sundiata and Chaka are born under the signs of the most fearful divinity, “*dongo*”, the god of thunder and lightning. During their time, they scatter their enemies like the thunder crushes homes and trees or like the lightning tears the sky. All this is due to the contribution of soothsayers and the supernatural powers education that the heroes received.

These ancestral beliefs’ teaching continues to solve some social problems because some:

Diviners function as problem solvers and healers. Someone who is having trouble conceiving children will go to a diviner for help, as will a person with illness in the family or a run of bad luck. The diviner interprets the signs to identify the source of the client’s problem, perhaps finding that the client has a human enemy somewhere, or has inadvertently offended a malevolent spirit. The diviner will then prescribe a solution that often involves making a sacrifice, the nature of which depends on the seriousness of the

problem. It could range from a few kola nuts or a chicken upwards in value to a goat or a cow. (Conrad, 2005: 95)

I am in complete agreement with Conrad's statement, because thanks to divination, Senzangakhona and NaréMaghan succeeded in leaving the right heir respectively for the Zulu and Mandingo thrones. Chaka's and Sundiata's births have been predicted by soothsayers who prescribed what is necessary for their achievement: taking a new wife for both kings. King NaréMaghan was even told to sacrifice a red bull as stated earlier.

Similarly, concerning their strengthening, while the old woman doctor recommended Isanusi to complete Chaka's strengthening, Nounfaïri, the blacksmith seer, entrusted a magic iron bare to his son for Sundiata to cure his disability when the moment comes. All these are spiritual outcomes that the medieval Zulu and Mandingo societies of the epics received from educating their young people to the art of the supernatural powers.

Another important outcome that can result from educating on the base of the spiritual and medicinal plants practices is that certain soothsayers can make rains. Conrad asserts that, "Other occult practices dominated by blacksmiths include rainmaking [...]" (2005: 94) Rain is very important for the survival of human beings, animals, and the plants. Soothsayers are often involve in rainmaking because without rain there will not have plants and herbs. Without plants and herbs

illnesses and wounds can not be healed. Besides, without plants and herbs, animals used for sacrifices will not survive. Soothsayers and their people too will not survive without rain.

In the film *Toulaou le génie des eaux* Directed by Moustapha Alassane and Anna Soehring, written by Boubou Hama, a soothsayer succeeded to make rains. After a disastrous drought caused by the anger of one of the ancestral gods of the village of “Yalambouli” who was living in a pond, the soothsayer prescribed a human sacrifice to calm down the divinity. At the sacrificial ceremony held at the place where the pond of the village disappeared because of lack of rain, Toula, the niece of King Baharga Béri, had been given into sacrifice to the genie. A torrential rain was falling while women were dancing under drum beatings. The genie of the pond of “Yalambouli” appeared in a python shape and swallowed Toula. The nature has taken its rights, ponds and wells were filled of water, the vegetation has covered the ground, human beings and animals lived in abundance. This film, *Toulaou le génie des eaux* is a true story from Téra, in Niger. The Soothsayer had seen the solution to the drought; a human sacrifice which had paid off. However, the mother of Toula, the sister of the king, went to the pond and told her daughter to spare any person from her descendants who enters in the waters of the pond and kill any descendant of her bother who sets foot in the waters.

An important point to know is that the anger of the ancestral god was caused by the abandon of ancestral rituals done on behalf of the divinity. In Niger, for instance where the survival of people depends on good rainy seasons an annual soothsaying is done in Dogondoutchi, in the region of Dosso to see how the rainy season will be like. In parallel, some rituals call “*yenandi*” in Zarma are held in many part of the country where genies in charge of the rain and abundance like “*Dongo*” and “*Tchiray*” are summoned for help. Soothsayers used to do a good job at a moment when the only recourse was the supernatural powers. These practices still exist in some African countries, even Islam and Christianity are involved in getting good rainy seasons. Sometimes, prayers are organized separately by Muslims and Christians to invoke their common God for good rainy seasons synonymous with abundance.

Hayidara too points out the impact of the contribution of soothsayers and the supernatural powers in the Bozo community. As bush and water hunters, the Bozo owe their supernatural powers to their ancestor Fanta Maa, the initiator of all hunter. Hayidara affirms that:

“[...] today, and forthwith,

may a fish bone get stuck across your throat,

if you pronounce his name

it will come down!

Yes!

He is the [initiator] ancestor of all Bozo.”<sup>16</sup>

This aspect of the supernatural powers is still in practice in African countries like Niger and Mali by the Sorko. Up to now burns and fractures are heal from magic and incantations by soothsayers mostly blacksmiths, hunters and fishermen.

Initiated fishermen in general and Bozo ones in particular are still using the motto of the hippopotamus while they want to kill it and another incantation which drives any harpooned animal to the place desired by the fisher-hunter. The motto and the incantation are said to have been taught by Fanta Maa. Hayidara reports the taught motto and incantation in this long quotation:

“Anyone who wants to kill a hippopotamus says this:

"Donkey of the waters, who blew in the great trunk!"

Let him blink his eyes: we cry bad luck!

Let him wave his ears: we cry bad luck!

May the evil mouth catch: oh woe!

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<sup>16</sup> « [...] aujourd’hui même, et séance tenante,  
qu’une arête de poisson te prenne [à la gorge],  
si tu prononces son nom,  
elle descendra !

Oui!

C’est l’ancêtre [initiateur] de tous les Bozo. (Hayidara, 1987: 91)

Let the evil tail waggle: oh woe!

The front leg digs the grave;

The hind leg closes the grave.

Two axes cock its mouth;

two sickles arm its mouth.

Donkey of the waters!

Kill the heart!

Kill the heart, O Cripple-Djinn!

Heart Slicer! Liver puller!

Death pangs! Sudden-death-giver!

Ta npilaaniJatanpila!

Mastodon of God!

Beef without driver!

Current of the great backwater, carry me!

Stream of the great river, carry me away!

Island in the middle of rivers,

big island in the middle of the backwaters!

An eye like the setting sun,

the other eye is like the rising sun!

Donkey of the waters, which blows in the great trunk! ”.

Yes ! This is the motto of the hippopotamus.”

Even today, and forthwith, that a somono [, harpoon hunter,] come

to kill a hippopotamus,

or hit it with his harpoon,

he stands up and talks, talks as much as he can,

summoning Fanta Maa.

And he recites the hero's invocations.

He said, "If this hippo ever has to die at my hand,

let the hippopotamus go and lay down in such a place

and let him die there ".

The hippopotamus [in question] will not die in the water under any circumstances.

It will go to lie down in the designated place and die there.

[Fanta Maa, himself, when he had harpooned the prince of Nyanu transformed into a crocodile to punish the villagers, had used the same bozo incantations]

He said, "If this crocodile ever has to die the death I gave,

if ever it must die because of "*Inextinguishable fire*" [name given to one of his harpoons],

[if ever] it must die because of "*Rather-grill-than-cook*" [name given to one of his harpoons];

[if ever] it must die as a result of "*Quick-to-boil*" [name given to one of his harpoons];

let the crocodile rest its head on the threshold of our hut ... and die there<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Quiconque veut abattre un hippopotame dit ceci:

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« Ane des eaux, qui soufflé dans la grande trompe!  
Qu'il cligne les yeux : on crie malheur !  
Qu'il agite les oreilles: on crie malheur!  
Que la gueule maléfique happe : ô malheur !  
Que la queue maléfique frétille: ô malheur !  
La patte de devant creuse la tombe ;  
La patte de derrière referme la tombe.  
Deux haches arment sa gueule ;  
deux faucilles arment sa gueule.  
Ane des eaux !  
Tue-le-cœur!  
Tue-le-cœur, ô Djinn-Perclus!  
Tranche-cœur! Arrache-foie!  
Affres-de-la-mort! Donneur-de-mort soudaine!  
*Ta npilaaniJatanpila!*  
Mastodonte de Dieu!  
Bœuf sans conducteur!  
Courant du grand marigot, emporte-moi!  
Courant du grand fleuve, emporte-moi!  
Ilot au milieu des fleuves,  
grand île au milieu des marigots !  
Un œil semblable au soleil couchant,  
l'autre œil est semblable au soleil levant !  
Ane des eaux, qui souffle dans la grande trompe!».  
Oui ! C'est là la devise de l'hippopotame.  
Aujourd'hui encore et séance tenante, qu'un somono [, chasseurs au harpon,] vienne à tuer un hippopotame,  
ou qu'il l'ait atteint de son harpon,  
il se dresse et parle, parle tant qu'il peut,  
invoquant Fanta Maa.  
Et il récite les invocations du héros.  
Il dit: « Si jamais cet hippopotame doit mourir de ma main,

The motto of the hippopotamus and the incantation used to release someone who has a fish bone stuck across the throat as well as the incantation used to bring a harpooned water animal to a desired place are still used by the Sorko. These are examples of great impacts brought by the contributions of soothsayers and the supernatural powers.

The above subsection is an analysis of the impacts of the contributions of soothsayers and supernatural powers for educational success in the two epics of *Chaka* and *Sundiata*. This analysis has shown that the usage of medicinal plants and magic in the education of young people by both soothsayers and supernatural beings can contribute to the development of a nation.

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que l'hippopotame aille s'étendre à tel endroit  
et qu'il meure là ».

L'hippopotame [dont il s'agit] ne mourra en aucun cas dans l'eau.

Il ira se coucher à l'endroit désigné et mourra là.

[Fanta Maa, lui-même, quand il avait harponné le prince de Nyanu transformé en crocodile pour punir les villageois, avait utilisé les mêmes incantations bozo]

Il dit : « Si jamais ce crocodile doit mourir de la mort que j'ai donné,

si jamais il doit mourir du fait du « Feu inextinguible [nom donne a un de ses harpons] »,

[si jamais] il doit mourir du fait de « Plutôt-griller-que-cuire [nom donne a un de ses harpons] » ;

[si jamais] il doit mourir du fait de « Prompt-à-faire-bouillir [nom donne a un de ses harpons] » ;

que le crocodile aille reposer sa tête sur le seuil de notre hutte... et qu'il meure là ». (Hayidara, 1987: 109, 111, 139, 189, 191)

**Conclusion:**

The analysis in this article shows the educational contribution of soothsayers and the supernatural powers to African societies, mostly of the medieval Zulu and Mandingo epics. The chapter has first painted soothsayers as persons highly involved in educating the youth medicinal plants, prediction means, incantations, sacrifices, dream interpretation, and magic. The article has gone further in its analysis pointing out breast-feeding as means used to transmit supernatural powers. Then it has analyzed the education brought about by supernatural beings; the different ways used by them to educate as well as supernatural actions that they

have used in their teaching process. Finally, the article has brought to light the impacts of the contributions of soothsayers and supernatural powers for educational success through the initiation of the youth to medicinal plants and magic. In initiating children like Chaka and Sundiata in various spiritual and medicinal ways, soothsayers and supernatural beings have molded them into great nations or kingdoms builders whose impacts are seen on the domains of health, agriculture, and politics.

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