

**REVITALIZING AFRICAN MAGICAL TRADITIONS: A CATALYST FOR
INDIGENOUS SCIENTIFIC INNOVATION AND INDUSTRIALISATION**

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Abstract

African magical traditions have long been an integral part of the continent's cultural and spiritual identity, serving as a source of knowledge and practical solutions to societal challenges. These traditions, once widely accepted, were later stigmatized due to the influence of Western civilization and foreign religions, particularly Christianity, which dismissed them as primitive and incompatible with empirical science. Despite this historical marginalization, these practices persist, often discreetly, as many Africans continue to recognize their effectiveness, particularly in areas such as healing and protection. This research work explores the role of African magical traditions as an indigenous form of science, emphasizing their potential to contribute to contemporary innovation and industrialization. It argues that these traditions, rather than being mere superstitions, embody a wealth of knowledge that, if properly studied and integrated, could complement modern scientific advancements. The research highlights the need for interdisciplinary inquiry, cultural education, and policy reforms to facilitate the revitalization of these traditions in a way that respects their historical significance while adapting them to contemporary contexts. By challenging misconceptions and fostering academic and cultural engagement. The paper however, advocates for the recognition of African magical traditions as a legitimate and valuable component of indigenous knowledge systems.

Key Words: African, Magical Traditions, Indigenous Knowledge, Culture, and Revitalization

1. Introduction.

Africa, like the biblical Nazareth, has often been underestimated, perceived by the world as incapable of producing anything of significant value. However, beyond its abundant natural and human resources lies a vast reservoir of supernatural abilities that, if properly harnessed, could serve as a catalyst for industrialization not only across the continent but globally. Many of the magical practices demonstrated by African spiritualists possess practical applications that align with various fields, including security, agriculture, medicine, engineering, and economic development (Ndasauka, 2024; Wanzala & Minyoso, 2024; Oke, 2025). Despite their immense

potential, these indigenous abilities have been misunderstood and dismissed by Western scholars and early Christian missionaries, who mischaracterized them in negative terms (Haddis, 2022).

The revitalisation of African magical traditions as a stimulus for indigenous scientific innovation and industrialisation involves a number of complicated issues. The main issue is a fundamental epistemological prejudice against non-Western knowledge systems, which continues to dismiss African magical traditions as unscientific and superstitious (Hountondji, 1997). This prejudice is exacerbated by colonial and missionary legacies that stigmatised indigenous practices, causing social reluctance to include them in formal research or policy frameworks. Furthermore, there is a significant lack of documentation, systematic investigation, and academic engagement with these traditions, making it impossible to validate and adapt them to modern scientific paradigms (Dei, 2014). The prevalence of Western scientific paradigms in African educational institutions marginalises indigenous knowledge and prevents its incorporation into the national development agenda. Furthermore, ethical concerns about the spiritual and clandestine character of magical activities create methodological impediments to open research and implementation.

This study is supported by the urgent need to decolonise knowledge systems and develop inclusive scientific paradigms that appreciate indigenous epistemologies. When exposed to rigorous multidisciplinary research, African magical traditions have the potential to drive innovation in fields such as health, agriculture, and materials science (Agrawal, 1995). Recognising these traditions promotes cultural sovereignty and advances Africa's overall development goals. The implications of this study are significant, as it pushes for legislative reform, academic inclusion, and cultural education that affirm African epistemology. Such revitalisation might boost local innovation, economic prosperity, and a new African scientific identity based on indigenous knowledge. Consequently, what could have been a foundation for scientific and technological advancements was relegated to obscurity. The study seeks to rekindle awareness, particularly among Africans, about the economic and developmental opportunities inherent in their traditional supernatural practices. To achieve this, it explores the conceptual and theoretical foundations of African magical traditions, examines their historical and cultural significance, and proposes strategies for revitalizing these practices to foster innovation and progress. Additionally, it addresses the challenges associated with integrating African mystical knowledge into modern science and technology while highlighting its potential benefits.

2. Conceptual and Empirical Review

The term "magic" has its roots in the Greek "magike," Latin "magicus" or "magica," and Old French "magique," as documented in the Oxford Language Dictionary. As a noun, it signifies the ability to influence events through supernatural or mysterious forces. This concept encompasses sorcery, witchcraft, wizardry, necromancy, enchantment, and the execution of seemingly impossible feats, such as making objects disappear and reappear. The word itself is

derived from the Proto-Indo-European root "magh," meaning "to help, to be able, to be powerful," which also contributes to the formation of "almighty." Historically, magic has been present since early literate societies, where individuals relied on charms, divination, and spells to interpret and manipulate natural forces. Stein et al (2024) view magic through a mystical lens, describing it as possessing spiritual powers that defy conventional explanation. Lembani (2021) supports this perspective, asserting that magic, unlike scientific methods based on empirical data and evaluation, operates within the realm of the unseen and inexplicable, particularly in African cosmology.

Nnoruga (2024) observes that Africans perceive the universe as imbued with mystical power, which influences daily life in both traditional and modern contexts. Lembani (2021) defines magic as humanity's effort to harness and control supernatural forces for personal benefit. This perspective implies that magic functions on the awareness of accessible supernatural powers, which can be invoked and manipulated through specific rituals. The longstanding debate regarding the relationship between magic and religion is well-documented. However, scholars like Hemminger and Hemminger (2021) refute this dichotomy, asserting that magic and religion are intertwined due to their shared elements of belief, trust, and moral application.

Consequently, individuals of all social and religious backgrounds consult magicians when necessary. Jasen et al. (2021) attribute this misunderstanding to the rapid efficacy of African traditional medicine, which often leads outsiders to perceive it as supernatural rather than scientific. Omorogbe (2012) underscores African indigenous beliefs in mystical forces that can be utilized for both benevolent and malevolent purposes. Biblical accounts also document the existence of magical practices among the Egyptians (Exodus 7:8-13), Babylonians (Daniel 2:1-3), and Romans (Acts), illustrating historical instances of magic used to manipulate nature and predict future events. While Irvike (2022) contends that magic is a universal phenomenon, Oguh (2021) questions why African magical traditions have been marginalized and labelled as fetishist or pagan. Durodolu and Chisita (2024) attribute this stigmatization to European colonization, which introduced Western education, healthcare, and religion, leading to the erosion of African cultural values, including its magical traditions. This cultural displacement is famously depicted in Chinua Achebe's "Things Fall Apart". Fisher and Leonardi (2021) consider mystical power a fundamental aspect of the natural order, offering a sense of security and predictability in African societies. This power underpins traditional medicine, witchcraft, and sorcery, enabling practitioners to perform extraordinary feats such as rainmaking, divination, and identifying criminals. According to Pham et al. (2025), magical effectiveness is derived from supernatural forces, often known as psychic power, rather than only rituals.

For centuries, Africans have harnessed supernatural forces for personal and communal advancement. These magical traditions, often referred to as "dynamic science" or "Afrisci," serve various purposes, including security, economic growth, health, and technological development. African magical traditions include protective practices designed to safeguard individuals and

communities. For instance, "Usoto" is a protective charm made from herbs and roots, often infused into the body or walls of homes to shield against harm. This practice parallels modern bulletproof technology. "Omie" enables individuals to foresee impending misfortune, functioning similarly to contemporary surveillance systems. Other protective charms, such as "Odje," shield possessions from envy, while "Ewieh" grants the ability to vanish and reappear, historically aiding warriors in battle. "Otishe" and "Igedu" enhance physical strength, ensuring dominance in combat. Magical traditions have also played a role in economic sustainability. Rainmakers, for example, utilize supernatural means to influence weather patterns, ensuring agricultural success. Farmers employ pest-repelling charms, while fishermen and hunters use magical infusions to increase their yield. Additionally, traders invoke supernatural forces to attract customers and enhance business prospects.

Beyond herbal medicine, African healing traditions incorporate rituals and divination to address illnesses that defy conventional treatments. Practitioners identify spiritual causes of ailments and employ counter-magical interventions to neutralize malevolent forces such as witchcraft, which is believed to manifest through animal transformation, spiritual attacks, or the theft of human vitality. Other applications of magic include love spells, persuasive charms that influence decision-making, and offensive spells such as "Itagba," a supernatural missile believed to afflict victims with illness or misfortune. These practices, though controversial, reflect a broader African worldview in which supernatural forces actively shape human affairs. Revitalizing African magical traditions involves acknowledging their historical significance while integrating them into modern scientific and technological advancements. Magic, viewed as an art of harnessing supernatural power, has the potential to inspire innovation and industrialization. Recognizing these traditions not as primitive superstitions but as forms of indigenous knowledge could facilitate their adaptation to contemporary frameworks, fostering growth in various sectors, including medicine, security, and agriculture.

3. Materials and Methods

The study uses a qualitative research design based on ethnographic and interpretivist paradigms to investigate the role of African magical traditions as catalysts for indigenous scientific innovation and industrialisation. The qualitative method is appropriate for capturing the intricate cultural, spiritual, and epistemological aspects of magical traditions, which are frequently rooted in symbolic rituals, oral traditions, and community-based knowledge systems. The study was undertaken in three senatorial districts of Delta State, namely Delta North, Delta Central, and Delta South, because of their extensive historical relationship with varied magical practices and enduring indigenous knowledge systems.

Primary data were gathered through in-depth interviews, oral history sessions, and participant observation with traditional practitioners, herbalists, spiritual leaders, blacksmiths, and cultural historians. A purposive sample strategy was used to locate important informants with deep experience and knowledge of magical activities, with an emphasis on those whose

skill interacts with healing, metallurgy, agriculture, and ritual performance. Semi-structured interview guidelines were created to extract information about the scientific principles underpinning certain practices, their perceived efficacy, transmission channels, and community significance. Oral history interviews were conducted to trace the evolution, repression, and persistence of magical traditions in the face of colonial epistemologies and religious marginalisation.

To increase the empirical depth, participant observation was carried out during chosen ritual rites, healing sessions, and apprenticeship training to capture praxis and symbolic logic in context. To ensure authenticity and reliability, triangulation was used by combining numerous data sources and views. To authenticate interpretations and minimise ethnocentric distortions, member checks were undertaken with selected informants. The host communities' Institutional Review Board granted ethical approval, and all participants provided informed consent to ensure confidentiality and cultural sensitivity. This methodological framework, which emphasises African epistemologies, not only questions the binary between magic and science but also offers a culturally grounded path for reconceptualising African magical traditions as knowledge systems with transformative potential for local innovation, technological adaptation, and sustainable industrial development.

4. Discussions

Since ancient times, Africans have recognized and harnessed supernatural forces, a reality even acknowledged by Apostle Paul in his epistle to the Ephesians. These supernatural energies were integrated into communal life, often transformed into forms of magic aimed at promoting societal well-being. The perception of magic as either beneficial or harmful depends on individual perspectives and cultural interpretations, underscoring its relative nature. The advent of Western civilization and the spread of foreign religions, particularly Christianity, significantly disrupted African spiritual practices. Early Christian missionaries, lacking an understanding of African cosmology, condemned most indigenous traditions, including the application of spiritual power. What Africans viewed as divine gifts was labelled "black magic" by missionaries simply because it did not conform to empirical validation. Ironically, similar supernatural occurrences within Christianity were classified as miracles despite being equally beyond scientific scrutiny.

The use of magical powers is not unique to Africa but is a global phenomenon. However, when associated with Africa, it is often mischaracterized with pejorative terms such as "black magic," fetishism, or diabolism. Historically, Africans relied on their indigenous magical traditions to address socio-economic and security challenges, viewing these practices as divine blessings. Before the dominance of Christianity, such spiritual applications were widely accepted as legitimate and integral aspects of African life. However, due to prejudice and a lack of cultural appreciation, colonial-era missionaries dismissed them as idolatrous and primitive. Despite the stigmatization of African spiritual traditions, many Africans continue to engage with these practices, albeit discreetly. In contemporary society, individuals, particularly African Christians

who acknowledge the efficacy of these supernatural forces, often turn to them in times of crisis, especially for healing and protection. The reality of these practices persists, demonstrating their deep-seated role in African spirituality. Magical powers, rather than being an anomaly, constitute a fundamental aspect of divine provision for human needs. Since divine intervention does not manifest physically, such supernatural abilities serve as a means through which people navigate challenges. In essence, Africa's magical traditions can be considered an indigenous science; one whose authenticity and effectiveness remain undeniable.

5. African Magical Traditions and their Applications

For centuries, Africans have harnessed supernatural forces for personal and communal advancement. These magical traditions, often referred to as "dynamic science" or "Afrisci," serve various purposes, including security, economic growth, health, and technological development.

* Security Magic (SecMag Dynamic Science): African magical traditions include protective practices designed to safeguard individuals and communities. For instance, "Usoto" is a protective charm made from herbs and roots, often infused into the body or walls of homes to shield against harm. This practice parallels modern bulletproof technology. "Omie" enables individuals to foresee impending misfortune, functioning similarly to contemporary surveillance systems. Other protective charms, such as "Odje," shield possessions from envy, while "Ewieh" grants the ability to vanish and reappear, historically aiding warriors in battle. "Otishe" and "Igedu" enhance physical strength, ensuring dominance in combat.

* Economic Magic (EcoMeg Dynamic Science): Magical traditions have also played a role in economic sustainability. Rainmakers, for example, utilize supernatural means to influence weather patterns, ensuring agricultural success. Farmers employ pest-repelling charms, while fishermen and hunters use magical infusions to increase their yield. Additionally, traders invoke supernatural forces to attract customers and enhance business prospects.

* Health Magic (HealthMeg Dynamic Science): Beyond herbal medicine, African healing traditions incorporate rituals and divination to address illnesses that defy conventional treatments. Practitioners identify spiritual causes of ailments and employ counter-magical interventions to neutralize malevolent forces such as witchcraft, which is believed to manifest through animal transformation, spiritual attacks, or the theft of human vitality.

* Miscellaneous Magic (MisMeg Dynamic Science): Other applications of magic include love spells, persuasive charms that influence decision-making, and offensive spells such as "Itagba," a supernatural missile believed to afflict victims with illness or misfortune. These practices, though controversial, reflect a broader African worldview in which supernatural forces actively shape human affairs.

6. Conclusion.

African magical traditions, deeply embedded in the continent's cultural and spiritual fabric, represent a significant yet overlooked reservoir of indigenous knowledge. Historically, these practices served essential societal functions, offering solutions to health, security, and economic challenges. However, colonial influences and the imposition of foreign religious ideologies led to their marginalization, often misrepresenting them as primitive or superstitious. Despite these misconceptions, African communities have continued to engage with these traditions, recognizing their efficacy and relevance in contemporary society. Revitalizing these traditions presents an opportunity to integrate indigenous knowledge into modern scientific and technological advancements. By fostering interdisciplinary research, promoting community education, and ensuring the preservation of oral histories, African magical traditions can be redefined as valuable cultural assets rather than relics of the past. Encouraging collaboration between scholars, practitioners, and policymakers can facilitate a nuanced understanding of these traditions and their potential contributions to innovation and industrialization. Addressing prevailing misconceptions and fostering cultural appreciation will not only restore the dignity of African spiritual heritage but also pave the way for a more inclusive and holistic approach to scientific and industrial progress.

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