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By The Students



Picture taken at Ekhaya KweNdaba (*House of Wisdom*, at Credo Mutwa Village in South Africa)

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**Dedicated to Wade Nobles, PhD, Theophile Obenga, PhD,
and Oba T'Shaka, PhD**

We thank each of them for the contributions that they have made and no doubt will continue to make to the discipline of Africana Studies and toward the liberation of people of African descent in this life and the next.

*We would like to express our thanks and appreciation to
Madame Chair Dr. Dorothy Tsuruta for her leadership and guidance,
as well as the IRA for their support of this publication.*

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HEALING TRADITIONS

The Students

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This is a picture of Zulu traditional healers (Sangomas and Inyangas) and their trainees. Behind them are an Inyanga's medicines; tree roots, barks, seeds, leaves, stems and other remedies that empowered and used to solve different kinds of illnesses.

African Conceptualizations of Wellness and Illness

In the African cultural context, the conception of wellness is holistic. While Africans understand the human person to be made up of different components, of a physical and spiritual nature, those components are deeply connected, and what affects one affects the other. Thus, what may appear to be a physical ailment, because of physical symptoms and illness, often turns out to be a spiritual illness. The cure will then have to address the spiritual imbalance, in order to restore physical and spiritual well-being. Being healthy, in the end, means enjoying balance in the physical, mental, psychological, material, and emotional realms. Most African societies have people who specialize in helping others remain healthy: these are the diviners, the healers, the herbalists, the priestesses, to whom afflicted people turn in time of need. They play a crucial role in their communities, enjoying much respect and consideration. It is often after years of arduous training that they start fulfilling their healing mission, which all over Africa, is understood as a most sacred mission. In this volume of the Imhotep Journal, the student contributors have explained how this process manifests in African healing traditions.

Ama Mazama, PhD
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Editorial

Tyra M. Singleton

In accordance with the Africana Studies tradition, it gives me great pleasure to present our Seventh Edition of the Imhotep Journal, focusing on *African Healing Traditions*. Before venturing into these articles on traditional healing, it is essential to acknowledge and honor those that have not only contributed to this journal, but also to those who are continuing to support the African survival thrust by liberating and educating their students to preserve the Africana Studies tradition. First, we want to thank Dr. Ama Mazama for her contribution to this journal entitled, *African Conceptualizations of Wellness and Illness*, explaining the necessity of a holistic approach to treating the health, wellness, or illness of people of African descent. Additionally, this journal would like to thank Dr. Wade Nobles for his insight into *The Function of Traditional Healing*, by arguing that African traditional healing and the adoption of African well being are necessary in the healing of African humanity. As I approach the end of my undergraduate career, I personally would like to thank Dr. Serie McDougal, III for his support, encouragement, and motivation of me, throughout my years at San Francisco State University. It has been a great privilege to have him share his knowledge with me over the years and I am humbled to have him as my advisor/mentor.

This journal is composed of eight articles written by students in Dr. McDougal's Black Cultures and Personality course (AFRS 111), from the 2008-2009 school year. The articles have been placed in order according to their region. First, our journey begins in the southern region of Africa, with the traditional healing of the Zulu and the Shona by Curissa Watts and Caitlin Johnson, respectively. They provide us with explanations and descriptions of the rituals, purpose, and function of healing practices among these groups. Representing Central Africa, Erica Rivas

explores conceptualizations of health and healing in BaKongo culture. Representing West Africa, MacKenna Lynn, Indeah Farquhar-Watson, and Joshua Jalil provide us with distinct conceptualizations of African health, illness, spirituality, and medicine through the Yoruba, Dogon, and Akan cultures. From East Africa, I have written an article on the Maasai of Tanzania, whose preservation of indigenous living; have maintained a strong commitment to traditional healing. Last, we travel to the continent of South America, where Kelsey Saunders provides the healing practices of the Winti in Suriname. This article serves as an example that African traditions continue to not only survive but thrive and are preserved by people of African descent throughout the Diaspora.

These pieces aspire to provide a deeper and accurate understanding of the vast conceptions of healing, illness, and medicine throughout African ethnic groups. While bestowing knowledge on African traditional healing, these pieces additionally highlight the problematic relationship between Western medicine and traditional African healing methods. They illuminate the need for a holistic approach to healing, not found in Western medicine. This challenging relationship between traditional and Western medicine is even more important when put against the backdrop of the current health care debate in the United States. Reforms to health care access would be inadequate if the larger issue of Western medicine as the only respectable means of health care is not addressed. As mentioned in Dr. McDougal's introduction, it is culture—the values and norms, spirituality and philosophy that must be taken in consideration for a more integrative and effective health care system. We hope that this journal is the impetus for more change to occur in the ways Western medicine thinks about health and illness, based on the respect of traditional African principles and healing.

Introduction

Serie McDougal III, PhD

Karenga (2002) explains that according to the Kawaiida paradigm, culture must be used as a resource for meeting present challenges and not as a mere reference of dates and events. In each issue of the Imhotep Journal, the student authors consult African culture to seek answers and solutions to present questions and problems that face people of African descent. The present issue of the Imhotep Journal is dedicated to exploring and explaining the different African healing traditions and methodologies for maintaining collective well-being. The objective is to identify diversity among African healing approaches and unity amidst diversity. Cultural unity is a prerequisite for all other forms of sustained political movement for a people; it is a source of power. Protruding from the seabed of humanity, beneath the tips of its iceberg like structure, it represents the mostly invisible force that stabilizes, unites and guides the thought and behavior of a people. Even African peoples' experience with slavery and other forms of colonization have taught the painfully acquired lesson that attacks on culture represent the most longlasting and sustained forms of attack. After the visible wounds of abuse have healed, the physical pains have subsided, and the metal chains of bondage have been broken; it is cultural imperialism that remains invisibly to affect the thinking and behaviors of generations to come. The continuous effect of the holocaust of the enslavement and colonization of African people is not unlike the radioactive substance that remains after the detonation of a nuclear bomb, poisoning portions of the earth and all living organisms to which it is exposed for generations after its terrible inception. Afrocentric thought is the most important *cultural imperial nonproliferation treaty* of this generation for the discipline of Africana Studies. For all of its signatories it functions as the sail that the vessel of Africana Studies has erected to guide it to its destination despite

the heavy winds, waters and currents of ethnocentric and anti-African thought. It allows African people to frame their present intellectual endeavors within the larger continuum of African history and culture from which it must emerge.

Power is a greater modifier of behavior than law or public policy; and culture is the center-point of African people's power. For African people, there is great power in the ability to draw upon the mosaic of African cultural solutions to solve its problems and achieve its goals. Afrocentric scholars must be equipped with the ability to harness and combine African traditions and techniques and arrange them into a strategy best suited for the task of addressing contemporary situations. The pressure of assimilation and cultural monism threaten to rob the African World of the greatest gift it has to offer to the global portrait of human diversity; its unique cultural character. At the opposite end of cultural imperialism lies the anestisizing allure of generic humanitarianism that embraces a misguided version of humanism seeking to forge reconciliation without retribution, multiculturalism without affirming cultural specificity, and a humanist politically neutral agenda at the expense of Pan African Nationalism. Without understanding African traditions, African people will not have the capacity to access the full range of instruments at their disposal for achieving well being and African development on African terms. Africa's cultural substance cannot be undermined by the inability or unwillingness of African people to decouple modernity and westernity (Asante, 2006). Africa's cultural substance represents the oracle that must be consulted by anyone interested in contributing to its continuous progress. The students in this volume of the Imhotep Journal have set out to provide some of the knowledge and understanding necessary for solving the problems that threaten the health of people of African descent and opening the way of progress.

Serie McDougal, III, PhD

Faculty Advisor for the Imhotep Journal

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African Well-being and the Healing of Humanity

Wade W. Nobles Ph.D.

“When the human spirit is well whole and healthy, the human being is characterized by confidence, competence and a sense of full possibility and unlimited potentiality¹”

The real function of African traditional healing is found in both the critical examination of its practice and an understanding of the implication this corpus has for helping to heal all of humanity. The articles in this volume represent an impressive contribution to the critical examination. In understanding the question of well-being, it is necessary to grasp the African meaning of being human and the enduring, nourishing power and significance African healing traditions have for humanity.

Our beginnings are humanity’s origins in the Rift Valley of Mother Africa. We come from great people—visionaries, peacemakers, artisans, healers, warriors, scientists and dignified people. The African presence is documented on every continent. Our divine walk from the East (KMT and Nubia), to the South (Great Zimbabwe) and West Africa (the last classical African civilizations of Ghana, Mali, Songhay) through to the diaspora laid the foundation for the knowledge and skills that made the New World. Our heritage is a debt that the “ancient,” “modern” and “post-modern” worlds owe to Africa. For example, Greece’s stolen legacy from Egypt, the Moor’s contribution to Spain for seven centuries, the African roots in the Xia, Shang & Zhou dynasties of ancient China, Africans making of the new world’s agricultural, industrial and informational revolutions.

Ngubane (1979) argues that the African understanding of the person is a “protein” evaluation of the human being which flowed into Nile Valley high culture

¹ Nobles, Wade W., 2009 *The African Sense of Being: Rescuing and Reclaiming Humanity for Us All*, Unpublished Manuscript

of the Ancient Kemites and subsequently created clusters of similar conceptions all over Africa. What, in fact, is recognized as African culture and civilization is the combined social conventions and inventions emerging from a common African meaning of the person and well-being, which I believe to be best represented by Bantu-Kongo thought.

The Bantu-Kongo believe that diverse forces and waves of energy that govern life surround humans. The Bantu-Kongo believe that the heated force of Kalunga blew up and down as a huge storm of projectiles, *Kimbwandende*, producing a huge mass in fusion. In the process of cooling, the mass in fusion, solidification occurs giving birth to the Earth. In effect, the Bantu believe that all of reality (Kalunga) is fundamentally a process of perpetual and mutual sending and receiving of spirit (energy) in the form of waves and radiations. Kalunga or reality is the totality, the completeness of all life. It is an ocean of energy, a force in motion. Kalunga is everything, sharing life and becoming life continually after life itself. As the totality or the complete living, Kalunga is comprised of both a visible realm (Ku Nseke) and an invisible realm (Ku Mpemba). The visible physical world has spirit (energy) as its most important element. Referred to as Nkisi (medicine) the spirit element of the physical (visible) world has the power to care, cure, heal and guide. The invisible (spiritual) world (Ku Mpemba) is comprised of human experience, ancestor experience and the soul-mind experience. The Ku Mpemba has spirit (energy) as its most important element (Fukiau, 1991). In effect, if reality (visible and invisible) is, it is spirit.

A human being is, in fact, a divine spirit housed in a physical body having a human experience. The human being is a three-fold unfolding experience of yet-to-live, living and after-living spirit. Being human is to be a living sun, possessing a “knowing and knowable” spirit (energy or power) through which one has an enduring relationship with the total perceptible and ponderable universe. It is to be inseparable from and live and move within an ocean of waves/radiations of spirit (energy or power). Consistent with this notion of being human as vibrating radiating energy, the fundamental core or essence of all African traditional healing systems is righting the disequilibrium (chaotic and arrhythmic vibrations) generated by spiritual, natural,

psychological and socio-political factors which are expressed as human discord and disease (cf. Adogame, 2009)

Well-being in traditional African thought is being love-filled, happy, healthy, joyful, prosperous and efficacious. African traditional thought teaches us that “well-being” is achieved when spirit (human) beings (spirit) affirm their own humanity by recognizing the humanity of others and on that basis establish humane relations with them. A human being is “spirit” whose unfolding is a constant and continual inquiry into its own being, experience, knowledge and truth. To be human is to be a spirit in motion (unfolding). Being human is to be a phenomenon of perpetual, constant and continual unfolding (vibration- sharing and exchanging) of life spirit. Humans are containers and instruments of Divine spirit and relationships. This alone has profound implications for healing all of humanity.

African traditional healing should not be seen or treated as exotica or some long lost and irrelevant primitive set of practices of interest to only a select few. This, for the most part unexamined and disrespected, aspect of human genius has real value for all of humanity. Consider for instance, that the tri-fold (yet-to-live, living and after-living) unfolding vibrating radiating spirits (humans) can be thought of as the “essentiality-of-being” and that well-being is at the level of the whole or collective. The “essentiality-of-being” for all of humanity would, therefore, include beings yet-to-live, the living, and those dwelling in the after life. What kinds of choices would people make about how they live, relate to each other, what they eat, and how they treat sacred Mother Earth, if those choices were rooted in a sense of well-being that required the recognition of the inextricable link between all living beings on this planet? When confronted with personal illness, impending social disaster or international conflict, the world’s peoples, driven by an intrinsic traditional African sense of well-being, would meet these challenges in humane ways because their own sense of humanity depended on that reflection. How better would humanity be if, without selfishness, hatred, envy, jealousy, or fear, each one of us, from individuals to nation states, saw it as our nature and/or vested interest to support and recognize the full possibility and unlimited potentiality of everyone else. The healing of humanity

may very well be found in understanding African Traditional healing and adopting the African sense of well-being.

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Zulu Traditional Healing

By Curissa Watts

Traditional healing is one of the most significant aspects of a culture because it encompasses how people react to everyday obstacles as well as unexpected events. It is a structure people use to respond to a range of acute to severe health-affecting circumstances. For cultures in under-developed locations where infectious diseases spread rampantly, traditional healing is even more crucial to the welfare of a people. With over 10 million descendants, the Zulu are the largest South African Ethnic group with the majority in KwaZulu-Natal, the dedicated homeland of the Zulu. AIDS/HIV, water-borne diseases, drought, and malnutrition are just some of the threats the Zulu encounter. Being the largest in population, traditional healing can be viewed as the most influential for of treatment in South Africa. This analysis explains the core aspects of Zulu traditional healing and how they function in communities. The role of a Zulu healer will be introduced and the process by which one becomes a Zulu healer will be described. This paper will describe the various types of healers among the Zulu and it will go on to distinguish between the Zulu conceptualizations of health and illness. Finally, this paper will explain the conflict that arises between Zulu traditional healing and Western medicine.

Zulu Conceptualization of Healing

One critical aspect of Zulu traditional healing is that there is no distinction between physical treatment and psychiatric treatment (Du Toit, 1971). Healing of the body and mind are inseparable because all things are spiritual in essence thus interconnected. Therefore, the Zulu *Izangoma* (plural form of the singular *isangoma*), Zulu traditional healers, are recognized by their communities for supplying truth, advice, suggestion, predictions, and remedies for any disharmony that may occur. An

isangoma can be consulted for matters ranging from treatment of an individual illness, such as stomach sickness or body aches, to communal illnesses, such as the division between the members of the community and the ancestral spirits (Adams, 1999). However, in understanding Zulu traditional healing it is imperative to recognize the izangoma him or herself do not actually *provide* the solutions to problem on their own. The ancestral spirits they have access to, provide them with guidance while the true role of an isangoma is to communicate the message from the ancestral spirit to the client (Adams, 1999).

Becoming a Healer

Becoming an isangoma is not a choice, it is something the individual often has little control over. If one is selected by the ancestral spirits the process begins by the individual experiencing *thwasa*, which is illness caused by the spirits (Moodley, 2005). The individual, however, is not aware of this at the time. Moodley (2005) explains that the common symptoms of *thwasa* are excessive dreaming, body pains, severe headache, discoordination of bodily functions, and sometimes unexplained misfortunes such as sudden loss of job, destruction of properties, or an unexplainable accident. The signals are recognized and confirmed by an experienced isangoma during divination with the chosen individual. The experiences that isangomas encounter during training are intense and often life-threatening, therefore it is common for isangomas to deny the calling at first. However, if the individual does not respond to the calling the result could be continuous illness and misfortune, insanity or even death (Peek, 1991). In the end accepting and committing to selection by the spirits is not only beneficial to the individual but more importantly the community because the knowledge and messages that are passed on from the ancestral spirits are crucial to the collective harmony. Those who accept the call go on to be trained under an experienced master isangoma to receive special coaching in divination. The period of training, which can vary from several months to several years, consist of special exercises that are aimed at developing skills in “divination, diagnosis, and treatment” (Moodley, 2005, p.65). The trainees study plants to become familiar with their different functions. They also study different methods or practices of

connecting and communicating with the spiritual world in which the ancestors dwell. This union with the spiritual world is established by altering states of consciousness. For example, the Zulu trainees are taught to use dreams, song, and dance as “avenues for establishing a link with the ancestors” (Moodley, 2005, p.66). During training, the future isangomas have to develop sensitivity to messages and signals from the spirits by developing a keen sense to the invisible\ancestral realm.

Strict discipline is another significant portion of the training of a healer. Some of the requirements include withdrawing from society or leaving the village for long periods. Trainees must also practice restraint from sex, smoking, alcohol, community rituals and certain foods. Restriction from these activities is a means of preventing the tarnishing of the trainee (Moodley, 2005). For example, during training Izangoma are forbidden to eat mutton because it “makes the spirit dumb” (Sundkler, 2004, p.315). The conservation of the trainee is critical given that the role of the isangoma is of great influence on the welfare of the village. Once the master isangoma is certain the trainee is prepared to apply his new knowledge, the training ends with a special initiation ceremony to signify graduation.

Types of Healers

There are various types of Zulu diviners and they are characterized by their different methods of identifying and/or treating the problem. The Izinyanga Zesitupa or thumb diviner treats the problem with the cooperation of the client. As the thumb diviner identifies the conflict, the client responds by striking rods on the ground or saying “nigiyavuma” to express agreement or the fact the isangoma is correct in diagnosis (Walter, 2004). Amabukulinti or stick diviner uses the movement of several foot-long sticks to identify which path should be taken to solve the problem or show which part of client’s body is diseased (Peek, 1991). Amathambo or bone diviners are the most common in Kwazulu-natal and they employ 30 to 40 animal bones that all have specific symbolic meaning. The bones are thrown and the position in which they fall, which is controlled by the ancestral spirits, is read and interpreted by the diviner to uncover a truth or develop advice (Walter, 2004). The most powerful traditional healer is the Abalozi or whistling diviner. Individuals are referred to the

Abalozi in the occurrence of intense misfortune or traumatic situations. The spirits sometimes speak to the client in the form of a whistling voice that enters the roof of the hut and the diviner interprets what the client does not understand (Walter, 2004). More commonly, the spirit possesses the Abalozi's body and speaks directly to the client. When the spirit enters the body the isangoma's voice changes as they become the channel through which the ancestral spirit speaks. In each type of divination, the isangoma communicates a message from the spirits and provides advice about what should be done to resolve the conflict or disharmony that has taken place. In the event of a certain kind of illness, the isangoma will send the individual to an herbalist, but more commonly the isangoma is trained in such remedies and will directly prescribe the herbs or medicines (Moodley, 2005). In the event of ill health or imbalance that affects the whole community, the isangoma often suggest a specific ritual ceremony to be held. Rituals primarily consist of eating, dancing, and rejoicing together and the elements are said to unite or reconnect the people and the universe or spirits. Community rituals uplift the African worldview aspect of interdependence because the togetherness and unity that occurs during the ceremonies is what essentially promotes good health.

Sources of Health and Illness

The traditional Zulu perception of good health is directly connected to a harmonious relationship with the individual and nature, with emphasis on interpersonal relationships. So health is a result of human-nature unity, collective responsibility, and respect for the essence of spirit in all things (Moodley, 20005). Conversely, ill health or disease is a result of disharmony or imbalance in these same elements. In many cases, disharmony between an individual and nature/spirit or an individual and another individual of a family or community results in feelings of anxiety, frustration, confusion, isolation, or tenseness which in turn causes physical pain or sickness (Moodley, 2005). As stated above, the Zulu people make no separation between mental and physical treatment because in the state of ideal health body and spirit are one. It must be noted, some diseases such as "measles, influenza, chicken pox, diarrhea, [and] fever" are seen as normal (Moodley, 2005, p.64); nevertheless,

all diseases are related to spiritual influences. For example, many of the conflicts that take place within a community are attributed to neglecting an ancestor or God (Adams, 1999). When the spirits feel they have been forgotten or Zulu traditions have not been upheld, they will turn their back on the people. Although they inflict no harm or evil, by turning their back on people the protection that was once provided by the particular spirit or deity is annulled. Consequently, the community becomes subject to many social or environmental misfortunes, such as violence, drought, or decreasing health (Adams, 1999). This belief is demonstrated in the following excerpt from a journal in which a similar situation occurs with the Zulu Goddess Nomkhubulwane and the people in Impendle, located in south KwaZulu-Natal:

There is a widespread oral and printed agreement with the idea that Nomkhubulwane turned away from her people when they adopted Christianity and abandoned their rituals to her. In the 1960's an anthropologist, Axel-Ivar Berglund, found an old woman at Ceza who claimed that the cause of the droughts was the fact that people had stopped honoring Nomkhubulwane. She told Berglund, "I say to you, when also those who honour her today no longer do this, then we shall all die because of drought."... On the day in December 1995 when I visited Ngoese's home village to help her begin the research on how to (re)create the rituals to Nomkhubulwane, a neighboring home had been burn the night before in political violence and was still smoking. A young man looking over at the damage observed to me, "The violence goes on because we as Africans have lost our identity and the respect for our ancestors and Nomkhbulwane, and they have left us" (Adams, 1999, p.96).

The excerpt above not only shows how misfortune is directly connected to spirits and happiness of the ancestors but it also significantly demonstrates how conflict can develop between Zulu tradition and Western influences or ideas. Among some people there is the belief that with the adoption of Christianity, the people had forgotten and abandoned Nomkhubulwane and in turn this brought hardship upon the people. However, Western religion is not the only practice that causes conflict or imposes an idea upon the Zulu. Advocators of Western medicine often assume the superiority of their medical ability and promote the notion that it will be beneficiary to places like

KwaZulu-Natal in establishing biomedical health. However, there are some advocates that recognize Zulu traditional healing as a *different* way of thought rather than an inferior one. For example, the book, The Sociology of Health and Healing explains John Cassel's efforts to integrate the new concepts of healing with the traditional methods rather than imposing new concepts on the Zulu people (Stacey, 1988). The situation still causes conflict because of contrasting explanations for illness. For example, some Zulu people refused treatment for tuberculosis because the idea of germs did not agree with their understanding that the illnesses were caused by the maneuverings of an ill-wisher (Stacey, 1988). In another case a woman contracted tuberculosis in her home, refused treatment, and returned to her parental home. In the following years, eight members of the household became infected and four died. When Cassel tried explaining to the father that his daughter had brought home the disease from her marital home, the man was offended and refused treatment for all of his family. Later Cassel discovers the father was offended because in the essence of Zulu cosmology or structure of reality, Cassel was accusing his daughter of "having the power to spread disease" which is a power that only sorcerers have (Stacey, 1988). This situation shows how the differences between beliefs and guidelines of reality of two groups of people can cause conflict, especially in matters of healing.

Conclusion

Zulu traditional healing is based on the idea that health is connected to spiritual balance with nature and the community. Isangoma accept the role of restoring this balance when disharmony or illness strikes. The training and initiation of an Isangoma takes significant training in listening to the spirits and being able to serve as a channel for communication between ancestral spirits and clients. Zulu healers have to navigate conflicts that arise between western and traditional conceptualizations of health and healing. From a Zulu perspective attaining health must be done through preservation and practice of traditional Zulu rituals and constant connection with the spirits. Considering this, it is critical to be sure that the integration of any western healing practices does not bring about consequences that outweigh their benefits.

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The Shona People and Their Health Practices

By Caitlin Johnson

The Shona people are a large ethnic group subdivided into different lineages and geographical spheres. They are primarily concentrated in Zimbabwe. Families perform many ceremonies for spirits to keep their lives balanced. Despite influence of westernization and colonization, the Shona have held on to these ceremonies and many still practice and perform them to this day. Spirits are the basis for all elements in the Shona universe. Therefore, the spirits need a person who can understand them and talk with them. The Shona are deeply spiritual, and despite the influence of westernization many people hold on to these values and traditions.

Emphasis on Spirits

As in many African cultures and ethnic groups there is an important emphasis on ancestral spirits, or *vadzimus*, however a paternal or maternal spirit is referred to as a *mudzimu*. Along with ancestral spirits there are tribal spirits within the group known as *mhondoro*. The only way a person can become a *mudzimu* is to have children, or relatives who can perform the proper rituals and involve them in the living community, thus children do not become a *mudzimu* because they have not left a lineage to carry on their name (Zvarevashe, 1970). When a person dies they have two shadows; *mweya*, the white shadow, considered the soul, and the *nyama yake*, the black shadow, which is the flesh. The *mweya* takes the form of an animal, usually a worm, and it is after this sighting that the spirit can be taken in by the family and join the ancestral spirits (Zvarevashe, 1970). There are also spirits known as *shavi*, which are stranger spirits that can endow someone, a *mutorwa*, with special prowess. Either witches or diviner-healers can bestow shavis to other people, either for good or bad. There are many forms of shavis, whether they are the spirit of a dead child, or the

marombo or *zvitsinha* shavi, which is either the spirit or a dead man or woman who was unmarried (Zvarevashe, 1970). Spirits are an integral part of Shona religion, and their spiritual system is “an attempt to answer various problems of this life and the life beyond the grave. The *vadzimu* and *mashavi* are an integral part of Shona religion” (Zvarevashe, 1970, p.47). There is a hierarchy of spirits for the Shona, and it goes as such 1.) *mhondro*, *vadzimu*, *ngozi* (vengeful *mudzimu*), 2.) *shavi*, healing spirits, *kurapa* and *kushopera* (healing with medicine—divining), and 3.) *muroyi* (spirit of evil) (Gelfand, 1973).

Spirit possession can also be an explanation for illness, erratic behavior, mood swings, etc. “It has long been recognized that unsolicited possession by malevolent, capricious spirits may serve as an explanation of illness and affliction in much the same fashion as witchcraft and sorcery” (Bucher, 1980, p. 106). However, the use of spiritual energy for negative purposes is forbidden and involves a totally different realm of spirits. The Shona, like many other ethnic groups are deeply interested in and involved in the spirit world, because the spirit world is the essence of the universe. Spiritual energy constitutes everything in the universe, thus everything in the world must be accorded the same respect because of the common essence they share.

Diviners/Healers

A diviner-healer is often a male, and is referred to as an *n'anga* or *nganga*. A professional *nganga* needs a ‘special divining or healing spirit’ to assist them (Bucher, 1980). *Nganga* are usually possessed by their own *shavi* which endow them with their connection to the spirit world. *Ngangas'* two main divining methods involve consulting their *hakata*, divining dice. Often they only take in clients while they are currently possessed by their spirit. One's future as a healer or *nganga* is usually revealed to them through their dreams, in which spirits want to enter their bodies (Bucher, 1980). After this, that person usually performs an apprenticeship under a diviner-healer to be taught the craft. There are several different kinds or *ngangas*, whether they be herbalists, who use herbs for good or bad; a feared *nganga* hired to harm others, but only effective if said person really deserves the harm; then

protective/harmful use of spiritual energy, which if one believes another is trying to harm them, they can use it to protect themselves, and possibly harm the offender; and one who casts bones, which are usually pieces of wood used to tell someone about the unknown (Napata, 1970). “Because the tensions and uncertainties of modern life readily provoke suspicions of invisible forces, especially of witchcraft, and few Shona can resist going to a diviner when things are going badly” (Bucher, 1980, p. 113). There are also those who use spiritual energy for negative purposes in the culture, which they refer to as *muroyi*. Muroyi are seen more as evil spirit workers, usually using their knowledge for evil and not good and the *n’anga* is called in to fix the mess left by the *muroyi*. The *muroyi*’s craft is only effective if she knows the person’s *dzinza*, family, and *mutupo*, their clan name. One can only become a *muroyi* through inheritance through the mother’s side of the family. There is also a type of diviner who uses spiritual energy for negative purposes called, *uroyi hweshavi*. *Uroyi hweshavi* is the spirit of a person who died without any children or relatives and needs a body/medium (*svikiro*) for her spirit to manifest and turn the *svikiro* into a *muroyi* (Zvarevashe, 1970).

Western Medicine & Traditional Healing

Many Shona people acknowledge the effectiveness of western medicine and its proficiency in treating certain types of illnesses, but many also believe that western medicine falls short because of its inability to cure the ultimate causes of those illnesses (Bucher, 1980, p. 120). An *nganga* uses his powers to seek the cause of a person’s illness and appease the spirits causing the person harm. When missionaries and Europeans began filtering into Shonaland (Zimbabwe), they were welcomed by the Shona in part because of the medicines they brought with them. As Butcher (1980) states, “Knowing that the missionaries were ministers of religion, the Africans believed that they were endowed with healing properties in the same way they believed their own *nganga* were” (p. 121).

Westernization & Ceremonies

Despite the influence of westernization on the Shona people, they continue

many traditions and ceremonies specifically for spirits and healing. They have accepted western medicine as a cure for certain illnesses, however they still go to their nganga to find the source of their illnesses. They may have switched their traditional homes for houses, their handmade garbs for mass produced, manufactured clothes, but despite all these materialistic changes they still keep sacred ceremonies alive. To this day they still perform the *kutamba guva* and the *kubata maoko* ceremony, which is a vital part of the bereavement and burial process of a beloved deceased family member (Mandaza, 1970). There are other ceremonies such as the *kugadza nhaka* ceremony, in which the wife/wives of the deceased have the option to marry one of the deceased's brothers. These and many other ceremonies have been kept, despite westernization, because they are still vital in the Shona culture.

Conclusion

For the Shona people the sprits are a vital source of health and balance. They do not make use of a material oriented approach, but a spiritual approach because for the Shona, spirit is what makes up everyone and everything. Their tradition does acknowledge that everyone is made of organs and have blood, but spirits animate everyone and spirits are central to all aspects of life, whether it be health, illness, wealth, good crops, drought, etc. Spirits are integral to Shona society, as in many African ethnic groups, and they rely on ngangas to help them with medicinal needs or spiritual needs so that they can restore balance and harmony within the community.

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Traditional Healing in the BaKongo Culture

By Erika Rivas

The Bakongo people are primarily concentrated in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The Bakongo consider traditional healing to be central in reaching harmony and balance among the people and the universe. It is also essential for healing diseases or problems that have a supernatural cause. The Bakongo people have found unique ways of combining traditional healing with western medicine. This paper will concentrate on the individual Bakongo who seek both traditional and western medicine. The first topic that will be explored consists of explaining the role of the banganga (native doctors), ngunzu (prophets), and the kinsmen in traditional, as well as western healing. Secondly, this paper will address how banganga and kinsmen become the advisors amongst their people. Next, this paper will address how traditional healers carry out their practices depending on the type of healing required. The way Bakongo set standards for health and well being will also be discussed. Last, the relationship between western and traditional medicine will be explained as well as how traditional healing impacts the community and personality of the Bakongo people.

The Healing Specialist's

Amongst the Bakongo there are three types of traditional healers: kinsmen, ngunzu, and baganga. The kinsmen are family members who have a say on what an ill person is going through and what type of healing they can get. Kinsmen consist of all close maternal and paternal family members, although close friends of the ill may also be included. As Janzen (1978) explains, everything starts with a consolation of the kinsmen, who are largely responsible for the selection of therapy (Janzen, 1978). Kinsmen are like a medium between spiritual healers and western medical

doctors. Kinsmen inform the healers of what possible illnesses the patient may have, as well as how stable the community is and whether or not the family or community has any unresolved issues between them. According to Janzen (1978), long before a case ever comes before a specialist, the relegation of a sickness is an essential task of the therapy managing group (Kinsmen) (Janzen, 1978). This is a key factor in determining whether or not the patient who is ill will seek help from western doctors, a traditional spiritual healer, or both. Although they are not official healers, recognition of this group is vital to the healing process of the individual or group.

The Banganga are traditional healers who are also known as Nganga. Political leaders traditionally made exceptions for these healers because of their success in healing people and the critical advice they provided to officials. Janzen (1978) explains that an nganga may be anyone who has technical skill and ritual paraphernalia (Janzen, 1978). The Bakongo people most frequently go to these traditional healers because they are so widely accepted and trusted for their long record of success at treating illness and yielding results. The banganga have some healing methods that are similar to the methods of western doctors. They prescribe medicine and deal with complaints of the patient. While the medicine they use may differ because it comes with ritual or consists of more natural substances, the method by which it is administered is similar. They first listen to a patient's description of their illness and subsequently make a diagnosis, in part based on that consultation and their medical wisdom.

The ngunza (prophets) have the ability to connect with spirits and are therefore considered *divine healers*. As Hersak (2001) explains, the nganza have personal relations with communal lineage spirits and with territorial spirits (Hersak, 2001). These personal relations are essentially what distinguish nguza from western trained doctors. Most of the Bakongo go to these traditional healers to treat their illnesses, especially when they are sure that western medicine cannot help them. Spirits are an important aspect of the Bakongo tradition because a healer has a personal connection with the ancestral spirits, which affords them more trust and validity in the eyes of the patient and his or her kinsmen.

Steps to Advising

Kinsmen receive the ability to advise people in medical matters by being a family member or close friend with a personal connection to the patient. Even though they are the most important part of healing in the bakongo, the criteria for them is not very stringent. Although the elderly and maternal side of the family usually has the final decision, everyone is included in advising about what is wrong with the patient. For example, there is a case in which a woman became ill and her maternal and paternal families were in conflict over what type of therapy she should be administered. Janzen (1978) explains that her brothers, maternal uncles, and mother (her therapy managers), maintained several diagnoses about the cause of the patient's illness. The kinsmen take several steps in advising, discussing what is wrong and knowing the history of that person and what conflicts or recent incidents have occurred in their lives.

The nganga and ngunzu become qualified to advise people by several means. For instance, they first sought to be recognized by law, so they could be more widely accepted. It is very important that traditional healers have recognition publicly and lawfully so they can benefit from state allocated resources. This gives more autonomy to the Bakongo people to choose what type of healing they want without the hassle of seeking treatment in secret.

According to Hersak (2001), many self-appointed diviners/healers (*banganga bakisi basi*) profess to be *bitomi*, thus attributing their power to the natural, diurnal and divinely inspired sphere (Herask, 2001). These types of healers decide on their own to be healers and do not go through a community to be accepted. Nevertheless, since they understand healing by spirits and nature, they gain the name of a spiritual healer. That does not mean that any person can be a traditional healer if they choose, because it is important that they are credible and have a record of helping and giving effective therapy to the Bakongo people. The Bakongo believe traditional healers and medical healers must be held to the same standards of credibility.

Healing Practices

There are many types of healing practices, ones that include therapy, and others that include resolving conflicts, as well as herbal medicines and western medicine. These healing methods are not randomly selected; they are selected based on the nature of the patient's illness. For instance, among the Bakongo there are illnesses that are caused by God and illnesses caused by man. As Janzen (1978) explain, Bakongo make a fundamental distinction between an illness that is natural in cause, which they call illness of God (kimbevo kia Nzambi), and one that entails human causes, which is an illness of man (kimbevo kia mantu) (Janzen, 1978). The illnesses that fall under man made or God made are discussed by the kinsmen, so they can decide whether to send their patient to a spiritual healer or a western doctor. Illnesses caused by God are usually milder, like the death of an old person or anything that does not conflict with the society as a whole. Diseases of man require more attention because they often cause conflict in society as a whole.

Understanding Spiritual Health

Health and well being are very important for the Bakongo. They believe that sickness can come from anger, incest, conflicts within family, or even the use of spiritual energy for negative purposes. The Bakongo have to be in harmony with their society to be completely healthy. Janzen (1978) explains that tension, anger, and anxiety are known by the Bakongo to cause illness (Janzen, 1978). The Bakongo look at these factors to determine how to cure a person. For instance, if a person gets sick they first have to determine whether or not they have any social conflicts. If they do, they are recommended to go to an nganga who will provide them with therapy to help them resolve the conflict within the person and their community. After some sessions of therapy and conflict resolution, the nganga tells the patient how they will get better.

Union of Western and Traditional Healing

Sometimes the Bakongo make use of western medicine. Janzen (1978) asserts that therapy managers and divination counselors know how to make use

of traditional and western healing wisdom. The therapy managers (kinsmen) use both western and traditional methods to pinpoint what is wrong with their family member. If their family member is referred to a western doctor, the Kinsmen have to be consulted first, before the patient. Also, the kinsmen are constantly around the patient, this is something western doctors have to come to terms with. Kinsmen use their knowledge of western medicine and of traditional healing to assist their family members.

In conclusion, amongst the Bakongo, traditional healing is very important. In some cases Bakongo healers have successfully merged traditional medicine with western medicine. Bakongo wellness is preserved by maintaining a healthy community. Healing brings people together, not only because illnesses are believed to affect the entire community, but also because the process of healing requires the assistance of the whole community.

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Yoruba Traditional Healing

By MacKenna Lynn

Traditional healing is any practice of holistic medicine in the tradition of a specific culture or ethnic group. In the African context, the goal of traditional healing is to restore order, harmony and balance among individuals and in an entire community. Traditional medicine is a combination of knowledge and practices used to diagnose, prevent, treat and eliminate physical, mental, spiritual or social imbalances (Offiong, 1999). Traditional healing methods are drawn from practical experience and observations handed down from generation to generation (Adekson, 2003). The Yoruba people make up one of many ethnic groups in Africa who actively practice traditional healing. Yoruba people are generally from the South West region of Nigeria, but they are also located in Benin and Northern Togo and throughout the region. At the turn of the 21st century Yoruba people numbered over 20 million, making the Yoruba one of the three largest ethnic groups in Nigeria (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2009). Recognizing the structure and processes of Yoruba traditional medicine is essential in understanding its significance to Yoruba culture as a whole. This analysis will identify and describe Yoruba traditional healing, its significance to Yoruba culture and its relation to the study of the African personality.

The Role of the Traditional Healer in Yoruba Culture

Traditional healers are individuals who specialize in establishing psychological, social, emotional, spiritual and overall holistic health (Adekson, 2003). Traditional healers play an important role in Yoruba culture by providing a socially and historically conscious approach to maintaining order and harmony among their people. The presence of traditional healers is also very significant to the Yoruba people because they are the most highly accessed source of health care for 80- 90% of

the population (Offiong, 1999). Traditional healers are important in maintaining the identity of Yoruba people because the healer is aware and respectful of their culture and environment during treatment. Traditional healers serve the Yoruba community in a variety of different roles including; medical practitioner, psychiatrist, pharmacist, counselor, mediator, justice of the peace and interventionist (Ng, 2003). Traditional healers' ability to fulfill such a variety of needs in the population makes them a vital contributor to the preservation and development of the Yoruba culture as a whole.

Knowledge of *Ifa* System of Divination Essential to Practice of Yoruba Traditional Healers

The traditional healers have specific knowledge and understanding of the Yoruba culture and the healing practices crucial to maintaining order and harmony among their people. The practice of traditional healing begins with the *Babalawo*. The *Babalawo* is a priest of *Ifa*, the Yoruba deity of divination (Adekson, 2003). Divination is the attempt to gain insight into a question or situation by way of a systematic, spiritual procedure, or ritual (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2009). Yoruba divination is a communication with the Deities or *Orisas*, which are each unique manifestations of God, *Olodumare* (Adekson, 2003). *Orunmila* is the *Orisa* of wisdom, prophecy and ethics that reflect the word of *Oludumare*. *Orunmila* is especially concerned with the maintenance of culture, health and the well being of the people and is particularly important in the process of traditional healing. *Esu* is the *Orisa* that serves *Orunmila* and is responsible for interpreting and conveying messages of a spiritual realm to humans. Some of the other *Orisas* important to Yoruba culture are *Ogun*, *Shango*, *Yemaja* and *Obatala* (Rinne, 2001). The role of the *Babalawo* is essentially interpreting the sacred wisdom and characteristics of *Ifa*, and communicating with the *Orisa* in order to determine current and future challenges along with their solutions.

The process of communication between the *Babalawo* and the *Deities*, called *Ifa* divination, is important in identifying illnesses and their treatments. The performing of *Ifa* divination is called *Dida Owo* and can only be carried out by the *Babalawo*. The physical divination system may include a divination tray made of

wood and carved into designs. The tray is used to communicate the insights of the deities to the *Babalawo* and symbolizes the desire for balance in the Yoruba culture (Bascom, 1969). The tray is used in for the *Ikin*, also known as the 16 palm nuts. The *Babalawo* takes the *Ikin*, shakes them in his hands and then tosses them onto the board. If more than two nuts fall, the process must be repeated. If one nut falls, he makes two marks on one quadrant on the board but if two nuts fall he makes a single mark on the board. After eight throws the ending arrangement of these nuts and the marks made allows the *Babalawo* to identify the exact *Odu* that corresponds. The *Odu* is an oral and written Yoruba corpus of wisdom teachings from the orisa *Ifa*, which the *Babalawo* must understand in order to interpret the given illness, cause and treatment in each unique case. These interpretations help the *Babalawo* direct each individual to actively participate in their recovery as well (Zeitlyn, 2001). The process of *Ifa* divination is crucial in maintaining balance and harmony in the Yoruba culture through traditional healing by first identifying the current issues and their possible solutions.

Yoruba Traditional Healing Process in Response to *Ifa* Divination

Once the *Ifa* divination process is completed, the *Babalawo* is able to identify the issue, cause and possible remedies. The *Babalawo* establishes a course of action based upon the individuals needs in relation to the wisdom of *Ifa*. The *Babalawo* takes his knowledge of *Odu* and determines a treatment based on the specific circumstances of the individual. The process of traditional healing in the Yoruba culture is carried out in a typically holistic manner (Ng, 2003). Holistic health is described as the treatment of the whole person, taking into consideration mental, spiritual and social factors rather than just the physical symptoms of the disease (Crotte 2008). The practice of Yoruba traditional healing has been referred to as a form of alternative medicine by some because it is often not accepted by western Orthodox medical science, because traditional healing practices rarely involve western style clinical trials. Classifications of alternative medicine include homeopathy, Osteopathy, Chiropraxis, acupuncture and herbal medicine (Adekson, 2003). Yoruba traditional

healers make use of exclusively natural resources to produce healing remedies.

Herbal medicine is the most common approach to healing in the Yoruba tradition. Herbalists are experts in the use of herbal remedies for healing and are referred to as *Onisegun* in Yoruba traditional language (Rinne, 2001). Herbalists are extremely respected in the Yoruba culture for their extensive knowledge of a plethora of illnesses and diseases and the unique combinations of herbs that can serve as remedies (Adekson, 2003). Some examples of herbal remedies include bitter kola for respiratory disease and even cocoa for hypertension and diabetes (Sawandi, 2008). *Onisegun* and their use of nature, herbal remedies are significant characteristics of traditional Yoruba healing.

Processes of traditional Yoruba healing can also come in the form of psychological remedies. Many of the illnesses in the Yoruba culture require psychological attention alone and also in correlation to physical remedies as described above. Some Psychological treatments practices in Yoruba traditional healing include dances, spiritual baths, symbolic sacrifice, songs and prayers (Crotte, 2008). The Yoruba people ultimately believe the only absolute and complete remedy derives from a change in “consciousness,” in which the individual can recognize the root of their problem and fix it (Offiong, 1999).

Conceptualization of Health and Illness in the Yoruba Culture

The overall health and well being of the Yoruba people is crucial in maintaining order, balance and harmony of the entire function of Yoruba Culture. In Yoruba culture, diseases and illnesses are seen as a disruption of the connection between the people and the earth. Ill health is sometimes believed to be the consequence of the misalignment between a person’s thoughts and behaviors and their destiny. Disease and illness are thought to cast a negative reflection on the sufferer’s family and overall participation in the community (Adekson, 2003). The goal of Yoruba traditional healing is to prevent and treat illness to maintain harmony between the people, the earth and the Supreme Being.

Conceptualization of Health and Illness in the Yoruba Culture

Yoruba medicine and western medical practitioners take different approaches in the healing of people and are often critical of one another's practices. Yoruba healers don't agree with the western medicine approach of masking the symptoms of problems with unnatural drugs, rather than addressing the treatment of the body as a whole, in relation to the earth and the cosmos. According to the healers of the Yoruba people, if we listen to our bodies they will provide us with the preparation and appropriate knowledge we need to regain our balance with the Earth. Western medicine is equally as critical of traditional Yoruba medicine consistently and inaccurately describing it as witchcraft and sorcery (Offiong, 1999). As of now there are very few compromises between Yoruba traditional forms of healing and western medicine.

Yoruba Traditional Healing in Relation to the African Worldview: Cosmology and Axiology

Yoruba traditional healing relates in many ways to the African worldview particularly African cosmology and axiology. African cosmology is based on the assumption that everything in the world is interconnected. In the Yoruba culture it is believed that everything, the people, the earth and God are all connected and in order to thrive individually, harmony and balance must be achieved with the universe. Yoruba traditional healing is essential in preventing disturbances in this balance through treating illnesses and diseases. African axiology is a value system that emphasizes cooperation and communalism. The Yoruba traditional healing practices performed are a direct reflection of communalism and the attempt to maintain harmony among all people in order to continuously work together for the greater good of the entire group.

The Traditional healing practices of the Yoruba people are extremely unique. Traditional healers are crucial to the overall survival of the Yoruba culture and play a significant role in maintaining harmony, balance and order within the Yoruba culture. The practices of Yoruba traditional healing relate directly to the African Worldview particularly African cosmology and axiology. The distinct processes and practices of Yoruba traditional healing are exclusive to the Yoruba tribe, but are valuable to the

entire African community and the world as a whole.

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Traditional Healing of the Dogon People

By Indeah Farquhar-Watson

Traditional healing is the most ancient form of all practiced and organized medicine, and this is what makes it an important topic to explore, for it is from these traditional practices of medicine that modern practices have emerged. In western medicine, certain practices, such as the integration of spirituality and healing have commonly been left behind, while the treatment of illness with drugs has grown. Traditional healing is holistic, for it is not only focused on curing the symptoms of an illness, but also identifying and alleviating the cause of an illness. In traditional healing it is vital to take the mind, body, and soul into consideration.

The Dogon are an African ethnic group situated in Mali's Bandiagara Cliffs (Roberts, 1990). According to Roberts (1990), it is here that they have been able to preserve their traditions, and live in ways that are consistent with the legacy of their ancestors. The Dogon people, despite tourism, remain quite isolated, and so there are many differing interpretations of their mythology and belief systems. The Dogon's spirituality is commonly referred to as animism, which is the belief that all aspects of the earth (animals, plants, rocks, ocean etc.) have a soul. Traditional healing is vital to the Dogon, for it explicates and solves illness in a spiritual way that is consistent with their worldview (Beneduce, 1996). In Dogon traditional healing, diviners play a key role, and work closely with healers or herbalists when treating the sick (Beneduce, 1996, p. 193). When treating a patient, Dogon healers consult and utilize nature, the ancestors, and other spiritual forces. The purpose of this paper is to explore from an Afrocentric perspective, the practice of Dogon traditional healing, by explaining how diviners and healers, conceptualize and treat illness. This report will also investigate the ways in which traditional and western medical practices have been syncretized. This paper will also show how this practice is harmonious with aspects of the *African*

Worldview, which is the united philosophical assumptions that determine the way in which African people perceive, think, feel, and experience the world.

The Roles of Diviners & Healers The Roles of Diviners & Healers

Diviners are crucial to traditional healing, and are active participants in all steps of the healing process (Beneduce, 1996). According to Beneduce (1996), they are responsible for diagnosis, identification of causes, choosing of healers for treatment, and prescribing initial sacrifices that should be completed. There are several different types of diviners, who have different ways of interpretation. Among the Dogon, the most common name for diviners is *almaga kanne*. Others include the *nummo gendun*, who read palms, and *yanga yeru vèlè*, who interpret dreams (Beneduce, 1996). Roberts (1990) elaborates on the most well known form of Dogon divination, in which the *yurugu kundune* construct grids and symbols in the sand representing the concerns of the villagers. Yurugu kundune then leaves strategically placed (food) offerings in the sand to attract the mythical pale fox (Yurugu), which the Dogon believe to be an oracle. The diviner then returns to interpret the pattern of paw prints that the fox leaves behind. The *yurugu kundune's* use of the fox as a means of revelation exemplifies both the Dogon's animist beliefs, and African Cosmology. African cosmology involves the belief that everything in the natural world is of the same spiritual essence, therefore everything is interconnected and interdependent. The *Hogon*, or spiritual leader of subgroups of Dogon, is also a diviner, and has ultimate power in the divination of the fox (Harvey, 2007). Griaule (1965) notes, that there is a significant difference between those diviners who simply extract knowledge, and those who use techniques that require some other means, or support, to extract knowledge. Those diviners, who interact with the supernatural world, require much more training, and their job is considered dangerous and risky.

Healers, or herbalists, are called *djon-djongonon*, which translates as *he who gives remedies, he who treats* (Beneduce, 1996). The *djon-djongonon* frequently seeks out the help of diviners, particularly if the case is difficult, or if directions for sacrifice are needed (Beneduce, 1996). Sometimes they will even seek personal help

from diviners, to find out what the future holds for them, and to find out if the patient will pay his fees. Healers, or herbalists, treat their patients with medicinal herbs, or other remedies, sometimes even prescribing patients plants containing psychotropic substances (Beneduce, 1996).

Acquiring Healing Knowledge

Healers acquire knowledge of medicinal plants, and remedies, through their family, fellow healers, or through “revelation.” The process of acquiring knowledge through “revelation,” or possession, is called *Binu* (Beneduce, 1996). Many people are wary of healers who experience *Binu*, because they also interact with negative energies (Beneduce, 1996). As Griaule (1965) asserts, the science of remedies also deals with the science of poisons. African epistemology is centered on affective cognition as a way of knowing, and the healers’ process of acquiring knowledge through the spiritual realm reflects this sentiment. The healers have to rely on spiritual guidance to direct their use of physical remedies.

In Griaule’s (1965) explanation of the Dogon creation mythology, the pale fox or jackal, which is the deluded and deceitful son of *Amma*, God, obtained the gift of speech through an incestuous act with his sister. Because he gained this speech he was able to uncover and reveal to diviners the divine design of God (*Amma*). The jackal or fox is incomplete because of his transgressions and it constantly is in search of completeness and wholeness. Consequently, the fox reveals to diviners the order of the universe, and gives them knowledge of the supernatural world.

Method of Treatment

It is unclear who usually comes first in treatment, diviners or healers. It seems that in traditional healing practiced today, patients will often skip from one healer, to another, until results are favorable (Beneduce, 1996). According to Beneduce (1996), diviners are key to the treatment process, for they collect information from the patients kin about the patients symptoms, and then use this knowledge to come to a conclusion about what the possible malady could be, using the Dogon’s specific disorder ideology. The diviner will follow this, by creating prescriptions, such as

sacrifices, that will control or quiet the threatening dimension of the illness (Beneduce, 1996). The healer, will work with the patient, and try to treat the patient with herbal remedies. The fact that the diviner conferences with not only the patient, but the patients family (living and dead), is very reflective of African axiology. African axiology is the belief that because everything is interconnected and interdependent, cooperation and communalism is imperative to human development. Beneduce (1996) found, that sometimes conceptions of ones mental illness by a community, has to do with someone not being part of the community, or not relating to elders in a proper fashion. This lack of cultural alignment with the communal cooperative ideology of the society is often the source of illness.

The Dogon's Conception of Illness

According to Beierle (1996), illnesses are accredited to the weathering of a patient's *nyama*, the vital life force. Illnesses can also be the result of other spiritual forces such as *jinn*s, demons, sorcery, or negative energy (Beneduce, 1996). Ailments are separated into 12 categories, each with their own prescribed treatments (Beierle, 1996). For example, *Kéké* is the word for mental illness, and it is categorized into hot or cold, depending on the accompanying behavior. *Djede*, or wind, is the term used to describe many common ailments, such as smallpox, measles, and meningitis. Illnesses are often described with words of opposition, such as feminine or masculine, cold or hot, and wet or dry (Beneduce, 1996). When it is thought that some supernatural force has caused an illness, a diviner will be appointed to determine what that force is, through divination, and then prescribes treatments, such as sacrifices or incantations, to rid the person of that force (Beierle, 1996). The Dogon conception of illness, although commonly focused on supernatural forces, also focuses on how one is participating in ones community, and how they are living their life.

Syncretism of the Dogon's Traditional Healing, Muslim Healing, and Western Medicine

The Dogon people have somewhat syncretised some aspects of Muslim

culture; one of the most commonly practiced *religions* in the Dogon region. In some cases the Dogon people will turn to Muslim healers, traditionally named *marabout*; specifically if their ailments are not considered to be, sent from God (Beneduce, 1996). Beneduce (1996) states that the *marabout* usually deals with cases of sterility, impotence, repeated miscarriages, epilepsy, and insanity. The treatments that they use display absolute syncretism with the Dogon's method of treatment; they employ the use of prescribed sacrifices, vegetable remedies, fumigation, and holy water (Beneduce, 1996). Beneduce (1996) also reports use of stethoscopes and conventional drugs by some Dogon traditional healers, in the attempt to 'adapt' local interpretations of the illnesses and symptoms to biomedical diagnostic criteria. This syncretism, between Dogon, Muslim, and western medicine is important to the treatment of the Dogon people today. Rather than purely implementing western medicine, or Muslim beliefs, upon the Dogon, attempts have been made to apply modern medicine, to their already structured healing system, so that treatment is harmonious, and comprehensive, with the Dogon Worldview. Additionally, an Association of Traditional Therapists was founded in Bandiagara in 1991 (Beneduce, 1996). This gives the Dogon people, an accessible and accredited institution in which they can obtain traditional healing.

Conclusion

The traditional healing practices of the Dogon involve the participation of diviners, who interact with the spiritual/supernatural world, and healers, who treat ailments through prescriptions of herbal remedies. Treatment often includes participation of families, and illnesses are often attributed to weakening of ones spiritual life force. Much syncretism of traditional, Muslim, and Western medicine has occurred, which has allowed the Dogon people to receive biomedical treatment, while still incorporating spirituality in the healing process. Dogon traditional healing emphasizes the alignment, and health, of the mind, body, and soul. Dogon healing is also deeply reflective of many components of the African Worldview, such as African cosmology, axiology, and epistemology.

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Traditional Healing of the Akan People

By Joshua Jalil

Modern medicine, as it is known today, has emerged as the primary form of healing and treatment for ailments of the body and mind. Prior to all of the Western world's inventions with regard to medicine, different civilizations and cultures devised and practiced their own healing methods based on their own worldviews. The Akan people of Western Africa are no exception. For years they have practiced their own methods of treatment, which, among other things, utilize plants and natural substances. Primarily located in Ghana, the Akan people are "considered to be one of the most traditionally well-cultured, indigenous inhabitants of Africa with an established social system" (Abel & Busia, 2005, p. 113). Akan cosmology, which is a particular people's understanding of the order of the universe, does not make a strong distinction between the physical world and the metaphysical world. This interpretation of the nature of the world around them influences many aspects of their society and culture, including their healing practices. In the Akan belief system, personal health is contingent on many spiritual or "intangible" conditions. The remedies for illnesses concern not only patients' bodies, but facets of their minds and spirits as well. The many dimensions of the spirit and its well-being influence each other and are codependent, so the study of the healing practices of the Akan are relevant not only to their medicinal treatments, but to the study of their beliefs as well. Their traditional healing practices incorporate spiritual and material techniques.

Akan Worldview

According to Akan ontology, or a particular people's understanding of the essential nature of beingness, the human being is made up of many components, the center-most component is the okra, or soul. Another element is the sunsum, which is the

personality spirit representing an individual's character. There is also the *ntoro*, representing the spiritual essence from the father, which consists of inherited personal characteristics. In Akan ontology, all that exists is endowed with spiritual substance (Minkus, 1980). Congruous with these beliefs, Akan medicine may aim to cure and harmonize these aspects of the spirit when they are adversely affected. Akan "Health" is not only thought of as the condition of the physical body, but also as health of the mind and spirit. It is an all-encompassing balance that incorporates the physical, spiritual, social, and natural (Abel & Busia, 2005). It calls for living in harmony with one's neighbors, with the environment, and with oneself. Consequently, illness is conceived as a deviation from this natural balance. The Akan word for illness is *yadee*, where "ya" means pain and "adee" means painful thing (Abel & Busia, 2005). Harm can be physical, psychological, emotional, spiritual, social, or environmental. Natural occurrences and supernatural forces can cause harm. These beliefs guide the Akan through their lives, and shape many aspects of their lifestyle.

Traditional Healers

The World Health Organization defines a traditional medical practitioner as a person who is recognized by the community where he or she lives as someone competent to provide health care by using plant, animal and mineral substances and other methods based on social, cultural and religious practices. (WHO, 1995) There are many different accounts of the training and origins of different traditional healers in Ghana. Emmanuel Evans-Anfom, a doctor in Ghana, observed that these traditional medicine practitioners acquired their knowledge through instruction, dreams and visions, and a voice heard in the bush (Abel & Busia, 2005). Dr. Oku Ampofo, states that herbalists undergo a period of being under the eye of an experienced herbalist for up to 10 years, and that these trainees are chosen because they have an interest in healing (Abel & Busia, 2005). According to Dr. Twumasi of Ghana, a traditional Akan healer takes three years to fully train. They first realize their professional destiny through spiritual possession or the hearing of voices. Men and women are trained separately, and live in the house of their respective trainer (Abel & Busia,

2005). In their training, they are taught to communicate with deities and spirits, and gain comprehensive knowledge of the uses of plants for medicinal purposes (Abel & Busia, 2005). Also, many men and women learn to be herbalists through instruction handed out to them by their parents or close relatives.

Although many traditional healers take a strictly spiritual approach, there are healers that work with plants and animals. The spiritually based healers include diviners, shrine devotees, and faith healers. The less spiritually based healers include herbalists, bonesetters, and traditional birth attendants (Abel & Busia, 2005). In a study conducted in 1985 in an urban environment to determine the types of healers present, seventy-three percent were herbalists, and twenty-five percent were faith-healers (Anyinam, 1987). The practices that healers engage in aim to cure both physical ailments and spiritual or psychological ailments. The ways in which both types of illnesses are treated differ, but any type of traditional healing among the Akan emerges from their culture and belief system.

Faith Healing and Herbalist Healing

Many Akan know of herbal remedies they can prepare and administer in their own homes. If someone goes to consult an herbalist about a particular bodily ailment instead, the herbalist will attempt to prescribe whichever treatment they see fit to cure the affliction. In attempting to provide care, “[the herbalist] may strengthen the patient’s spiritual resistance by applying protective medicines to guard against attacks by witches and ghosts and other evil spirits, and will purify him from any spiritual ‘dirt’ with which he may have had contact” (Minkus, 1980, pg. 190). If it is determined that it is not an issue that can be cured using tangible remedies, someone could then possibly consult a priest, or faith healer, as “all medical attempts to cure the illness will prove futile if the precipitating spiritual cause is not first dealt with and the patient released from the misfortune that is threatening” (Minkus, 1980, pg. 191). He will do what is necessary to cure the malady that plagues the person’s self and spirit, which is to mend the appropriate aspects of the spirit, depending on the prognosis. Regardless of the method of treatment, there is always a connection

to a deity or spiritual force. Even herbalists, prior to attempting to diagnose and administer treatment, will pour libation, or an offering, asking that deities bless his efforts (Minkus, 1980).

The spiritual healing withstanding, many traditional healers utilize plants, leaves, stems, roots, barks, seeds etc. to treat more concrete diseases definable in a Western sense, such as hypertension or diabetes. Many treatments can be additions to regular diet. For example, “the fruit of *Tetrapleura tetraplera* was put into soup (a thick sauce with meat/fish and fufu), or the fruit pulp was scraped and ground into a powder. The powder would be left to stand in boiling water for about 30 minutes, and then the extract could be used” (Abel & Busia, 2005, pg. 119). This dietary supplement helps to cure hypertension. Some herbal treatments contain plants of European origin, such as mistletoe, garlic, hawthorne, and dandelion (Abel & Busia, 2005). The use of these plants and herbal remedies does not go without modern scientific validation. Tests have been conducted on various fruits and plants, revealing them to have positive effects on the target areas that the traditional healers prescribe them for.

In Conjunction with Western Medicine

Approximately 73% of the population of Ghana today has depended on traditional medicine at one time or another for their primary health care needs (Abel & Busia, 2005). The amount of money charged for this type of healing is not insubstantial, which would then counter the viewpoint that this medicine is utilized as a cheaper alternative to more modern forms of medicine. This instead asserts that these practices are upheld because of tradition and the support of the culture. Many of these people still believe in the power of traditional healing, and continue the tradition of using these methods because of their beliefs. Their beliefs are connected to the method of healing body, mind and spirit and maintaining harmony and balance amongst the three. Other studies have shown that the amount of herbalists has been steadily decreasing as a result of the failure to pass down necessary information and knowledge from older to newer generations. Because of the wide-ranging influence on older societies by Western civilization, being an herbalist generally does not

provide a solid amount of income to support a typical lifestyle in this newly changing world. These practices are slowly dying out because of the pressures on potential new recruits to change and adapt to Western society (Anyinam, 1987). Overall, modern influences and the injection of individualism into this preexisting culture have, one could argue, affected it adversely.

Conclusion

In modern times, traditional Akan healing practices are still prevalent in Ghana. The rich origins and strong spiritual beliefs of this ethnic group have sustained these practices into the 21st century, conflicting with a new world of sometimes differing medicinal truths. The use of plants and animals to treat disease may be incorrectly regarded as primitive, but these methods yield results and prove to be powerful within the Akan community. Their ideology and worldview help to define their way of life and contribute to their traditional healing practices, which are essential to a diverse and tolerant world. There are different worldviews across the globe, and they are all legitimate in their own respects.

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Traditional Healing Among the Maasai in Tanzania

By Tyra M. Singleton

There was a legend long ago that *Engai* (God) had three children to whom he gave three gifts. The first received an arrow to make his living by hunting. The second, received a hoe to dig the land and grow crops, and the third received a stick to use in herding cattle. The third son, whose name was Natero Kop, was the father of the Maasai people (Saitoti & Beckwith, 1980, p. 17). Adorned in elaborate beadwork and dressed in toga style garments, armed with javelins, iron implements, swords and shields, the Maasai are a vibrant, dynamic group of people who still to this day hold true to their values, culture, and indigenous lifestyle, continuing to be the proud keepers of cattle. What is significant about the Maasai is that they represent a situation within Kenya and Tanzania where they are faced with pressures to become more apart of the modern world, while still holding true to their traditional culture. Specifically, among the Maasai and many other ethnic groups of the Kenyan-Tanzanian region, the issue of the traditional versus the modern world can be best exemplified through the role and use of traditional medicine within these regions. Therefore, this paper aims to explore traditional healing among the Massai people, specifically within the context of Tanzania, focusing on: 1) the Maasai spiritual system and their conceptions of health and illness; 2) the role of traditional healing; and 3) conflicts between traditional and Western medicine and how it relates African personality development.

The Maasai are pastoral people living in Kenya and Tanzania, in the Great Rift Valley Region of East Africa. First European visits to the region, describe the Maasai as, “Physically... among the handsomest of mankind, with slender bones, narrow hips and shoulders and most beautifully rounded muscles and limbs” (Saitoti & Beckwith, 1980, p. 17). The origins and history of the Maasai is embedded in both

mystery and myth. Their race is considered a hybrid of the Nilotes of the Nile Valley, and the Hamites, originating from North Africa. It is believed that in the fifteenth century, the Maasai migrated from North Africa, along the Nile River down to East Africa, arriving in present day Kenya, near Lake Turkana (Saitoti & Beckwith, 1980). The Tanzanian Maasai are different from their Kenyan kinfolk, primarily because of them having less contact with the West (Saitoti & Beckwith, 1980). Therefore, the Tanzanian Maasai will be examined in this paper for their more traditional lifestyle. Many ethnic groups, still practicing traditional, indigenous lifestyles face criticism for not modernizing themselves. Opposing this approach to studying the Maasai, this paper aims to give a general, yet accurate account of traditional healing within this ethnic group, by studying the Maasai through an African centered methodological framework. This is essential in studying the people of African descent, as it places their culture, belief system, and worldview at the center of analysis. Before, traditional healing is explored through the Tanzanian Maasai, knowledge of the general Maasai spirituality and concepts of health and illness must be first engaged.

The Maasai People: Spirituality, Health and Illness

The Maasai believe in one God, *Engai*, and their harmony with nature is closely intertwined with their admiration for God (Saitoti & Beckwith, 1980). *Engai* is the Supreme God, dwelling on earth, and in heaven. There are two aspects of *Engai*: the first, *Engai Narok*, the God of which is Black, is the good and benevolent God; and the second, *Engai Na-nyokie*, the red or avenging God, represents God's holy anger (Saitoti & Beckwith, 1980, p. 26). Maasai conceptions of health and illness can be best explained through their understandings on the expression of anger. Among the Maasai, anger is associated with ideals of warrior hood. They are expected to show their fighting spirit in appropriate contexts, and to develop the ability to control it in others (Spencer, 1988, p. 120). Additionally, the term "to be angry," or *a-goro*, is the reflexive form of "to suffocate." The Maasai believe that breathlessness associates with the heart, and when the "heart is transformed" (*e-ibelekenya*) it becomes black. Anger enters the heart and rises, causing a feeling of suffocation. They see the heart

as the direct link between any emotional state and difficulty breathing (Spencer, 1988).

By associating breath and breathing, a detrimental function of life, to the emotional state of a human beings, recognizes that living a healthy life is directly associated with healthy emotions. Living in a state of emotional turmoil can be harmful to one's health. The Maasai acknowledge that anger is a natural emotion, but should be expressed in different ways, depending upon one's age. Good mental health is seen as having the ability to not let anger engulf one's heart, to be able to control one's anger and emotion. However, if anger is not controlled and the heart is changed for the worse, this person can be considered unhealthy. This idea that healthy emotions, means a healthy mental state will be explored further in regard to western medicine.

The Role of Traditional Medicine: The People and Healers

Traditional healers provide health care to a large part of the Tanzanian population. In rural areas, traditional medicine is sometimes the only available source of health care within a reasonable distance (Gessler et al., 1995, p. 146). A study undertaken in 1993 on public health services in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, showed that 21% of interviewed patients reported that they had consulted a traditional healer before coming to the western health care facility (Ostermayer et al., 1993). Additionally, another study conducted by Katz and Kimani (1982) examined the reasons why patients sought traditional medical treatment after already attending a dispensary or hospital. Some of the reasons include: long waits in line, brief encounters with hospital doctors or staff, feelings of confusion and being alone in an unaccustomed environment, no opportunity to express one's own concerns, and being given medicine without any explanation as to the cause of the illness and without proper prescription of the drug (Katz & Kimani, 1982). Through this data, conducted in the Kenyan and Tanzanian region, one can argue that people seek out traditional healing because of they are in search of having a meaningful and personal relationship with their doctor, that is sometimes hard to find within western

medicine. Lacking this relationship and feeling that their general health interests are often ignored, people of this region tend to use traditional healing as an alternative or second opinion to western medicine.

Mshiu and Chhabra (1982) argue that there are four types of traditional healers in Tanzania: herbalists, herbalists-ritualists, ritualist-herbalist, and spiritualists. The majority of these healers are general practitioners using herbs for treatment. There are also specialists employed, like bonesetters or traditional birth attendants. Most healers in Tanzania practice a dual classification of illness, distinguishing illness and conditions, which have a supernatural cause, like witchcraft or angered ancestral spirits, and those that have a natural cause (Gessler et al., 1995, p. 146). Specifically, Maasai healers, called ritual leaders (*olotuno*), are chosen to lead ritual and healing ceremonies. The Maasai believe that the destiny of the ritual leader is inversely linked to that of his age group. He is expected to prosper while being dogged by misfortune, whether its poverty, childlessness, or death. Underneath him is the *oloboruentkeene*, his deputy (Spencer, 1988). In choosing a new ritual leader, a short list is prepared by Maasai spokesmen, containing ideal candidates who are unflappable, unblemished, and with pure Maasai ancestry. This list is given to the Prophet and he is expected to question the candidates with scrutiny and once a person is chosen, the Prophet consults his oracle in secrecy. The Prophet's choice is additionally shared with the senior spokesman and two other members of the delegation, who must maintain discreet silence. This silence is necessary to prevent news from spreading to the victims who can run away beforehand. The two men chosen are then seized and installed by force (Spencer, 1988).

The ritual leaders of the Maasai perform a variety of functions within the group. Aside from dealing with individual health issues among the group, he is also necessary to rituals involving the use of medicine. Circumcision marks the initiation of adolescent boys and girls into adulthood and serves as a kind of proof that they are prepared to endure the challenges of life with courage and dignity (Saitoti & Beckwith, 1980, p. 84). The *alamoratani*, a traditional circumcision specialist, is used to help the boy in his journey into manhood. This healing specialist is necessary

as circumcision is both a physical and mental process, and the specialist is also used to help facilitate boy's mental maturity (Saitoti & Beckwith, 1980). Girls have a similar female specialist that assists them in their circumcision as well. The number of people within the Tanzanian population that engage in traditional healing is a far more significant number than those of other African regions. Tanzania is known for their resilience to westernization, with most of its population opting for a calmer and customary way of living (Saitoti & Beckwith, 1980). However, in an ever-changing, modernized world, many Tanzanians find it hard to keep their healing traditions met with demands for them to conform to Western medicine.

Vanishing Traditions: The Threat of Westernized Medicine on the African Personality

Traditional and Western medicine differ in many ways, primarily in their conception of the causes of illness and disease and the healing methods they use (Gessler et al., 1995). From a Western point of view, in which there is no spiritual explanation, only scientific, for the causes of certain illnesses, and in which relief from illness is seen in the form of prescribed medicine, inherently puts the African continent in a difficult position. In most African societies, the cause of an illness or discomfort is sometimes ascribed to supernatural forces arising from angered ancestral spirits, evil spirits, or the effect of witchcraft (Gessler et al., 1995, p. 146). Specifically, the Maasai concept of anger can show this disconnect. Anger, as mentioned previously, is a natural emotion; however, anger can enter one's heart through supernatural means (Spencer, 1988). The Maasi, understanding that anger has spiritual aspects to it, will be more beneficial in treating the root, spiritual, and deep seated cause of anger, as opposed to Western medicine that prescribe anger management courses. According to Gessler et al., (1995):

Many people refuse to believe in the scientific explanation of a disease. They include the illness in their traditional cultural belief system, which combines religion, sorcery, health and interpersonal conflict into a single form of belief and practice. An imbalance of personal 'well being' cannot just be treated by a pill. All the factors of the social environment, which influence the single individual, have to be considered (p. 146).

Additionally, African notions of disease and health are not determined by germs, but by tensions and aggressions within social interrelations as well as by the malevolence of supernatural forces (Okwu, 1979, p. 21). Therefore, good health can only be preserved by the observance of social norms and taboos, the maintenance of a harmonious relationship with the members of the supernatural world, and the resolution of interpersonal and intra-group strains and tensions (Okwu, 1979, p. 21).

Western medicine can seem inadequate or inefficient to those people believing in the African or the Maasai worldview. Western medicine's inability to understand these worldviews can prove to do more harm than good to the Maasai individual. If western medicine does not take into account, the culture, worldview, and spirituality of African people, then they are condemning their patients to inadequate health care. If a person has social disorders, instead of seeking remedy within the comforts of a group, like most African societies, western medicine would prescribe a drug, not solving the deep seated problem. As more and more African people take a step in the direction of Western medicine, it compromises not only their culture and traditions, but distances them from their ethnic group, a sign of unhealthiness.

The vibrant, beautiful, and spiritual people of the Tanzanian Maasai are different from other ethnic groups by still holding true their traditional lifestyle. Tanzanian traditional medicine is sought as an alternative to western medicine, primarily because western medicine lacks personal and meaningful relationships between doctor and patient. Additionally, there are different types of traditional healers; however, among the Maasai, ritual leaders act as healers for their people and embody characteristics of a level headedness and purity. Traditional and western medicine clash, primarily because of disconnects with culture, spirituality, and worldview. Western medicine must consider the culture of their patients, in order to give them the best health care possible. However, there are still some issues that western medicine cannot adequately treat. These are issues of emotion and supernaturalism. It should be understood that western medicine could exist and work along side with traditional healers; however, coordinating the work of traditional and

western medicine is still in its infancy in most African countries (Gessler et al., 1995, p. 146).

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Winti Traditional Healing

By Kelsey Saunders

Traditional healing is an important aspect of the study of modern medicine. In order to recognize the sources of ailments many people rely upon methods of medicine not usually practiced in western medicine. The practitioners of *Winti* utilize spiritual power and herbal remedies to treat both physical and spiritual ailments.

Winti is a spiritual system that is practiced by descendents of those brought to Suriname from Africa's West Coast during the holocaust of the slave trade period from 1650-1830. (Wooding, 1979). They came from various ethnic groups: the Fante-Akan from Ghana; the Ewe-Fon from Togo and Benin; the Bantu from Congo, Zaire, and Angola; and the Mandingo from Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Liberia. They later divided into two groups: the Creoles and the "Bushnegroes" as some called them, which then further divided into self-governing groups (Wooding, 1979). Wooding (1979) defines *Winti* as "an Afroamerican religion which centres round the belief in personified supernatural beings, who take possession of a human being, eliminate his consciousness, after which they unfold the past, the present and the future, and are able to cause and cure diseases of a supernatural origin" (Wooding, 1979, p.35).

The Traditional Healer

In order to become a *Winti* traditional healer or *bonuman*, one must meet some very extensive requirements. The first and most important requirement is to have a thorough knowledge of the healing tradition, and have experience participating in rituals as well as being actively involved in the ethnic group's community (Van Wetering, 1997). Having personal contact with relatives who have been healers is also required, and is said to be a guard against malpractice (Van Wetering, 1997). Priority for the role of traditional healer is often given to those who face

disadvantages or hardships, like those who are unable to get a job and/or an education in Western society. Women are said to have a special role as healers. Women act as “the guardians of traditional culture” because of their “mediating role in family, kin group and society” (Van Wetering, 1997, p.248). The maternal instinct makes women more ideal for the role of healer (Van Wetering, 1997).

Recognizing Ailments

There are several methods used in *Winti* healing to identify and treat illness. One method is dreaming. Because followers of *Winti* believe that dreams represent real situations in the past, present, and future, dreams are taken very seriously. When one has an illness, a ghost or a deity may visit him or her during sleep and tell them why they are sick and what actions they must take to prevent anything from happening to them. This announcement may also come before the person actually falls ill (Wooding, 1979). Another method of diagnosing a disease is possession. The *bonuman* is possessed by *obia*, meaning “seer” or “healer god” or deity. The *obia* is a servant and a messenger of the higher deities (Wooding, 1979). Sometimes, more than one deity possesses the healer – one being the diagnostician of the disease and one being the healer. There are several methods to invoke the deities for possession. One way is to sprinkle water from a gourd (pour libations) and talk to the deity. Another method is to don an arm ring called a *boei* and wait for the deity to come. The deity’s arrival is recognized by hiccupping noises made by the *bonuman*, and when the *bonuman* is completely possessed, he or she trembles and releases a deep breath. A third method is to sing songs to the deity and wait for its arrival (Wooding, 1981).

Once the healer is possessed, he or she uses various objects to decipher the cause of the disease. The *boei* can be used as an oracle. The *bonuman* ties the *boei* to a string and uses it as a pendulum. The *bonuman* then asks the deity questions, and if the answer is affirmative, the pendulum spins clockwise, while if it is negative, it spins counter-clockwise (Wooding, 1979). A *bonuman* may also use a small white bundle of grave dust and herbs tied to a string as a pendulum in the same fashion

(Wooding, 1979).

The Power of Herbs

Plants are said to have varying amounts of the divine spiritual power or *srama*, which is dealt to it before life. Humans, plants, and animals alike possess *srama* (Wooding, 1979). Plants derive their medicinal energy from *srama*, and some plants have such high *srama* that they must be “paid” or made offerings to, before being taken for use. One who wishes to pick a plant must first talk to it and tell it why he or she needs it, then pay it with seven copper coins, then take the plant. The person must continue to talk to the plant as the medicine is prepared and beg it to let its energy cure the patient (Wooding, 1979). One plant that is particularly powerful is *prati-lobi*, which means “divided love.”

Rational Illness

Wooding (1979) divides illnesses into three categories: rational, magical, and ethereal. Rational illnesses are physical ailments that lack a spiritual cause. Some examples are ringworm, which is cured with an herb called *srabriki-wiwiri*. The leaves are pounded into a sap, then mixed with salt and put on the ringworm several times a day until it dies (Wooding, 1979). Another ailment, sore-eye, is an infection of the eyes. It is cured by putting the sap of *posren*, an herb that grows on decaying wood, into the eyes (Wooding, 1979). An herbal abortion is also practiced in some cases. A bitter brew is made with aloes, *krapa* tree oil, and pineapple boiled with *luangu-tetei*, a kind of garlic. The concoction is then taken within the first three months of conception (Wooding, 1979).

Spiritual Illness

What Wooding (1979) calls magical illnesses are truly spiritual illnesses. Eurocentric scholars often use the term “magical,” which connotes trickery and fraudulence. But these spiritual illnesses occur when social norms are violated or taboos are broken. One spiritual disease is *ogri-ai*, or the evil-eye, which happens to the souls of babies and children when an adult looks upon him or her enviously.

Symptoms include loss of appetite, weakness, and vomiting, eventually leading to death. The ailment is cured by washing the child with an herb bath with sesame seeds, corns of Guinea-pepper, seven pieces of chalk, seven pieces of unrefined salt, the plant *sneki-wiwiri* (meaning snake plant), indigo, and either one, three, or seven copper coins. The numbers one, three, and seven are said to have spiritual powers (Wooding, 1979). The *bonuman* uses branches of a plant called *sisibi-wiwiri* as a brush, and bathes the child with the concoction while saying prayers. If the deities accept the prayer, the child begins to recover shortly after the bath.

Ethereal Diseases

One kind of ethereal disease is *winti-bere*, or phantom pregnancy. When a man uses spiritual energy for his benefit and breaks a taboo, he is punished with many diseases. When he dies, his descendents inherit the supernatural beings that he has brought upon himself, one of which being a dwarf that claims the deceased's wife as his own. The dwarf then "impregnates" the woman, and her belly grows (Wooding, 1979). In order to rid the woman of the phantom pregnancy, she must go through many complicated rites that include repeated herb baths. After a while, the woman bleeds, which is said to be the "phantom baby," and her belly returns to normal and she is cured of the ailment (Wooding, 1979).

Traditional vs. Western Medicine

Winti both harmonizes and conflicts with Western medicine in certain areas. Western doctors in Suriname have learned to acknowledge that some ailments that they encounter are curable by western methods of treatment. If a Western doctor is unable to treat an ailment, sometimes he or she advises the patient to see a traditional healer (Wooding 1979). In this regard, they accept *Winti* medicine as a legitimate practice because it does, indeed, heal its patients. However, the reasoning behind the healing differs between Western and *Winti* medicine.

Winti practitioners believe that they are healed because the ailments are often caused by a spiritual entity, and that plants and herbs carry spiritual healing powers that must be invoked in order to cure. On the other hand, Some Western doctors

also believe that describing an illness as caused by “possession” is epistemologically irrational (Wooding 1979).

Traditional Healing and the African Personality

The African worldview is very community oriented, and emphasizes ties to family, ancestors, and the community. *Winti* healing has a more community-oriented approach than Western medicine. A major assumption of *Winti* philosophy is that all living things share the spiritual and religious force *srama*, and that all elements of the universe are united by this force (Wooding 1979). The traditional healer takes this into account when healing patients. Rather than treating the patient as an individual person, he links the patient to his or her ancestors, family, or the entire societal structure (Wooding 1979). This emphasis on interconnectedness binds the community and strengthens its ties.

Conclusion

The *Winti* healer uses the powers that lie within every living thing to cure illnesses. These illnesses can be caused by both spiritual and physical entities. *Winti* healing relies heavily on spirituality, and uses spiritually endowed objects to aide healers in determining the cause of an illness. The community-oriented nature of the *Winti* way of life is responsible for its survival through slavery and colonization. Even though it is practiced by a relatively small group of people, the integrity of its community bonds will ensure that it is passed on for generations.

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