



HEALING PRACTICES AND INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE: THE EXPERIENCE OF AFRICAN RELIGION AMONG THE BACHAMA OF ADAMAWA STATE

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Abstract

Healing is an important phenomenal activity carried out by Pale or Nzo vo ngume on people who are sick, need of protection, goodluck, success, antidotes against diabolical forces which pre-existed before orthodox medication among the Bachama of Adamawa State. Commercialisation of healing by healing experts has become very worrisome. Clients are exploited and administered fake healing by healers, which risk to their spiritual and physical well-being. The paper examines healing practices and indigenous knowledge: The Experience of African Religion among the Bachama of Adamawa State. The paper made use of ethnographic and field survey and participant observation methods. Data were collected from personal experiences, case studies and books. The research unveils that, patients are been exploited or charged exorbitant fee by traditional healers in order to be healed, delivered from evil attacks, protected and given charms, love portion and charismatic lotion and antidotes. There are quacks, who portrayed themselves as healing experts, whose actions posed serious threats to people's health and wellbeing in Bachama society. The paper suggests that, there should be genuine healing by traditional m divine inorder to restore and offer solutions to people's related problems. People should also guard against patronising fake healing tycoons, who take advantage of their quest for healing, antidotes, protection and deliverance from evil and witchcraft attacks and are later exploited. All relevant stakeholders should support a campaign against fake medicine men, also on the danger of taking herbal medicine without being approved by Government. Government should also assist traditional healing experts to improve on their methods and standard of medication by providing them with funds and improved technology inorder to enhance the practice and patronage of traditional and healing. Punitive measures should also be meted on quack traditional medicine men to safeguard the integrating and trust reposed in traditional healing institution from being abused and ridiculed by quacks in modern era.

Keywords: African Religion, Bachama, healing and indigenous knowledge

Introduction

The Bachama are an offshoot of the larger Batta group found in Adamawa State of the present political structure of Nigeria in North-Eastern Nigeria (Joahua¹). Their origin dates back to Asia Minor in the Mesopotamian peninsula or Nubia at a place call Sin or Zin and Egypt. Though the history of the Bwatiye could be traced back to the East, notably Baghdad, through Chad, before settling in the Hausa land of Gobir. It was said that the Bwatiye, as they are commonly referred, were Gobir. It is on this note that, the paper seeks to examine healing practice and indigenous knowledge: experience of African Religion among the Bachama of Adamawa State.

It is only the person who is sick that needs healing, deliverance, success, protection and even an antidote against further deteriorating health conditions and attacks on lives and property from evil forces. Thus, frailty and weakness of human conditions, on how to avert any evil,



are indispensable in man's search for healing in indigenous knowledge system and healing in African Religion among the Bachama of Adamawa State. Healing in African Religion is normally administered by herbal experts, whose role are indispensable part of the African cosmological healing system in African Religion among the Bachama people of Adamawa State.

An African is concerned with living a pleasant, happy, full life and dying at a very old age. Thus, life is held dear and precious (Gbenda 50). Thus, adherents of African faith earnestly seek solutions to their related spiritual and psychological problems via healing, which can be administered by medicine men or experts using physical, material as well as spiritual methods. Thus, before the coming of orthodox medication as it is being experienced today by adherents of African Religion, healing experiences have potential importance to the health of individuals and communities (Gbenda 49). It has been observed that people with the longest lives in the world depend on traditional medicine as well as prayers. The healthiest life is the one with as much naturalness as possible (Angere 26).

The search for healing has become a top priority in African Religion among the Bachama, respectively. *Pale* or *Nzo vo ngume* employ a diverse range of healing practices, including herbal medicine, spiritual rituals and communal ceremonies. Hence, healing is sought for the restoration of the body from illness and other related spiritual and physical abnormalities being faced by people. In another observation, healing in the experiences of African Religion among the Bachama people of Adamawa State is faced with so many related challenges ranging from quacks administering wrong medication, exploitation of the masses and abuse of the healing profession, which are dangers to human lives. Proliferation of healing houses today is something to lament because the healing experiences in African Religion is under threat by orthodox medication, which dwindles patronage by those seeking for traditional healing. The research is aimed at exhuming these challenges with the view of restoring the paramount place of healing experiences in African Religion now and in the future.

Traditional healing experiences in African Religion among the Bachama like other Africans, is the sole responsibility of *Kpale* or *Nzo vo Ngume* to restore the physical, psychological and spiritual well-being of the people. These medicine men ensured sacrifices are offered to these deities: *Nzeanzo*, *huno-huno*, *Hama Bolki*, *Adomunogwe*, *Gbeso* and *Nburum* to avert any disaster or punishment from them when offended by the people. According to Dati, these deities were heroic migratory leaders of the Bwatiye. They are strong deities who are part and parcel of the Bachama worldview (as qtd. in Joshua 10). It is believed that, most of the deities were believed at one time to be real people (9). *Pla hase* are also believed to be among the occupants of nature, and whose dreadful impact can only be neutralized or contracted by *Kpale* or *Nzo vo*, who has direct interactions with the spiritual and physical realities in both physical and spiritual worlds.

Thus, the use of prescribed herbs, prayers and rituals are required in offering solutions to related health challenges bedeviling people. *Pale* or *Nzo vo ngume* gives medicine for *Ndanne* or *ndanha* (protection). More so, sicknesses are generally disturbing phenomena that render the human body incapable of doing anything because of the weakness and damage they cause to the entire body system. Hence, medical attention is sought by all those facing related health challenges to find lasting solutions from medicine men. It is in this view that, medicine men come into play at various points, both individuals and problems are unravelled and solved.



Hence, in another similar manner it has been reiterate that, healing is sought from those who have curative and preventive medicine against body frailty (Parrinder159).

Furthermore, when sickness defies normal therapy, Bachama believed it is being caused by diseases, *plagues* (evil spirits), demons, witches and diseases or as a result of *Humwa Tufto* (bad luck from sorcerers). Thus, the sole responsibility of *Kpale* or *Nzo vo Ngume* is to ensure healing and restoration of the ontological order of man to the sacred relationship. In like manner also, healing is the next step to restore such persons suffering from the aforementioned problems (Ikeobi43). Also, diseases, hunger, sickness, witchcraft, physical as well as psychological imbalances are treated with the healing power of medication and prayers, which cannot be overemphasized as far as healing is concerned Bachama of Adamawa State.

Healing

Healing is a process of restoring somebody or something to a healthy state. According to Hornby, “it is simply a process of curing, preventing, and restoring health. It also has to do with casting out evil spirits and demons” (54). In another succinct definition, “it is the process of restoring to bodily wholeness, emotional well-being, mental functioning, and spiritual aliveness (Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counselling221). Healing has been further asserted simply to cure, prevent and restore health. It is also casting out evil spirits and demons ”(Gbenda 50). Healing is the sole responsibility of *pale* or *Nzo vo ngume* (medicineman).

African Religion

Religion denotes man's experience and recognition of a supernatural being or beings and awesome recognition of their powerful existence in human experiences (Smart 1- 2). African Religion is defined as the living indigenous religion handed down to Africans by their forebears. Gbenda also asserts that “it is a religious tradition of the African peoples that is based purely on their culture” (5). In another manner, Gaiya defines African Religion as “ an institutionalised system symbols, beliefs, values, practices which are focused on the question of ultimate meaning to different African societies” (2). Shishima also posits that, “ African Religion is the indigenous religion of the African people which is written on their hearts and can be seen in other sources like songs, proverbs, idioms and symbols” (1). In another succinct definition, Adasu recaps that " African Religion is a religion which is being practised by men and women today as the religion of their forebears. It is therefore not only a heritage from the past but a living reality today"(14).

Ekwunife further defined African Religion in the Nigerian experience thus:

... living institutionalized religious beliefs and practices, which are rooted in the past... religious culture; a religion that was transmitted to the present overt and covert votaries by successive forebears mainly through oral traditions(myths and folktales, songs and dances, liturgies, rituals, proverbs, dances, pithy saying and names, sacred specialists and persons, initiation rites, festivals , sacred spaces and objects and religious works of art; a religion which is slowly but constantly updated by each generation in the light of new religious experiences through the dialectical process of continuities and discontinuities(1).

An Overview of Pre- Requisites for Healing in African Religion



Traditional healing in African Religion is an indispensable religious phenomenon that builds the African confidence of the African worldview, with confidence being deposited in the medicine men. Thus, before the coming of orthodox medicine, Africans depended largely on traditional forms of healing till date (Gbenda 48). An African is seriously concerned with living a pleasant, happy, full life and dying at a very old age. Hence, healers in African religious life include herbalists, medicine men, and, to a certain extent, priests. The services they render to people are highly appreciated, and the people cannot live or do without them (51). Thus, Onunwa similarly notes the following methodological process in the restoration of patients' health by traditional healers in African societies, to include:

- i. Having a thorough knowledge of herbs and roots which are mostly found at secluded groves, forests and at the mountains or riverine areas to be used.
- ii. Knowing the appropriate rituals to be performed at the right time. One of the secrets is that they practice holistic medicine, applying traditional herbs and medicine to forestall and cure diseases(82-88).
- iii. Knowing the right rituals to be performed, and the most efficacious herbs and spirits involved in their trade(122).
- iv. Treatment of patients may simply start with simple herbs and antidotes for a specific number of days required. Thus, some herbs are efficacious within their potency.
- v. A diviner are usually consulted if there is no improvement in the health condition after the first treatment. The medicine man identify the causes of sickness, and recommends the herbs and medication to be administered for the treatment of the sick persons(Gbenda52).
- vi. There is ritual washing of the sick with boiled herbs as a necessary way of making the patient 'whole' whose contact with spiritual agencies is disrupted but could be restored through rituals(52).
- vii. Healing involves both the physical and spiritual aspects of man, which are inseparable. Thus, body and soul work hand in hand.
- viii. Traditional healers may be itinerant medicine men, or they may build 'clinics' in their homes to admit patients and closely monitor the person until their health is restored.
- ix. Methods of therapy vary from one African healer to another, depending on the kind of disease ravaging the health of the sick. Thus, Ezeanya adumbrated succinctly three kinds of healing, such as: the physical, spiritual, and psychological. The physical healing is done by the use or application of substances such as herbs, plants, roots, leaves, liquids, powder, bones and parts of animals. The spiritual and psychological healing are highly necessary, it is common knowledge that disease all forms of suffering, calamities and misfortunes are caused mystically in the African worldview. They are caused by witches, evil spirits, divinities, deities or sorcerers(as qtd in Gbenda 5-6).

Relevance of Healing in African Religion among the Bachama people of Adamawa State in the Modern Era

There are related benefits of traditional healing in African Religion among the Bachama of people of Adamawa State in the modern era, as examined below :

- i. Traditional healing in African Religion is concerned with treating sickness, diseases, misfortunes and offering preventative therapy or antidote against further outbreaks of



diseases or warding off evil. Central to his therapy is the use of medicine to revive those on therapeutic medications. Hence, healing could be magical, ritualistic, or using pharmaceutical medicine. The medicine man sometimes offers sacrifices, prayers or refers patients to the appropriate priest (Shishima 91). Furthermore, medicine men are believed to handle spiritual and physical sicknesses in people. Bachama called them *kpale* or *Nzo vo Ngume*, who are deeply concerned with restoring sick people to normalcy and proffering solutions to impending dangers, which orthodox or scientific approaches cannot always unravel the secret of the working relationship between the spiritual and physical worlds.

- ii. In the traditional healing system, medicine men are concerned with treating sickness, unravelling the cause of diseases, and misfortunes. They sometimes offer prayers, sacrifices or refer patients to the appropriate experts for effective healing to be administered to them. Generally, the traditional healer is a highly respected personality in African society, whose significance cannot be overemphasized. Even in the age of civilisation, the proliferation of magical objects in human bodies by experts using instrumental aids is ejected from people's bodies with the help of a specialist, not an orthodox doctor.
- iii. Also, traditional healers treat people with different kinds of ailments ranging from stomach problems, dizziness, tuberculosis, mental disorders, menstrual problems, chest pains, snake bites, cough, body rashes, infertility and impotency and fracture cases among others. Thus, knowledge of traditional experts is vast, and they must heal those who are sick using a required combination of medicines, both herbal and for fracture, physical, and spiritual cases. Thus, traditional healers on some occasions referred patients to relevant experts (92). Medicine men in African societies are the greatest gifts and the most useful helpers of the society. Hence, every village in Africa has a medicine man within its reach. He is accessible to everybody and at most all times, comes into the picture at many points in individual and community life (Mbiti 166).
- iv. Healing is an indispensable phenomenon which is widespread in the traditional world view (Sarwuan 166). It is interesting to note that healers are categorised according to their specialty. Some handle spiritual and psychological cases like demonic possession. In this regard, healing varies according to sickness (Gbenda 53). Some healers exorcise people suffering from demonic possession using prayers and herbs (Dauda6).

v.

Challenges Affecting African Indigenous Knowledge and Healing among the Bachama of Adamawa State in the Modern Era

Despite the relevance of indigenous knowledge and healing in African Religion, the paper outlined some related challenges :

- xi. There is a high proliferation of quacks in the healing profession in African Religion when it comes to healing. Thus, medication for the sick is poorly administered and as such exposes the lives of the sick to the risk of deteriorated health conditions.
- xii. Sick people needing health assistance are also exploited by healers, which poses a serious problem for those needing healing today. Thus, many healers have distorted the essence of saving lives to enrich their pockets.
- xiii. The government is not doing enough to encourage healing in the African Religion among those offering healing services as a remedy in tackling related health challenges of people.



- xiv. The coming of orthodox medicine is posing a serious threat to healing systems in both religions. Hence, patronage is less and there is a mad rush for healing in the modern health system, which affects the efficiency of the former.
- xv. Thus, spiritual healing requires strong faith but is weak in African Religion among its followers, which has today remained a major concern for those seeking healing.
- xvi. Those seeking healing are not consistent, nor adhere strictly to one medicine man. Hence, they move from one healing home to the other in search of healing, and sometimes they suffer complications from various medications received in the hope to get healing.
- xvii. Stigmatization is a serious problem bedevilling healers in the Bachama religion. Very often, these medicine men often face societal stigma and marginalised, especially in communities where Western medicine is more in demand.
- xviii. Modern healers encounter resistance from patients who prefer alternative treatment over orthodox or conventional.
- xix. Traditional healers often lack access to modern medical equipment and resources, with their ability to provide a wide range of comprehensive care.
- xx. Cultural sensitivity and acceptance is another major problem. Traditional healers must balance and respect cultural traditions by adapting to changing societal norms and preferences.
- xxi. Traditional healers often face challenges integrating their practices with conventional medicine, which can lead to conflicts of synergy.

Recommendations

Amidst challenges bedeviling indigenous healing in African Religion among the Bachama of Adamawa State in the Modern era, the paper has the following recommendations:

- iv. African Religion should practice genuine healing to restore deteriorating health conditions of the sick, regardless of religious affiliation or being forced to observe some rites or rules.
- v. There is a need to promote ethnographic research to explore and value the role of traditional healers and their practices.
- vi. Government and well-meaning individuals should join hands to develop educational programs that teach the younger generation about the relevance of traditional healing practices.
- vii. There is also a need to promote community-based initiatives that recognize and value the role of traditional healers and their practices.
- viii. Government should try and support healers in the African Religion with basic needs like beds, ward's and sanitary parts to function well by saving people from the ravaging impact of diseases and spiritual attacks. Hence, the need to be respected and accorded full license should be highly promoted if the healers meet the stipulated guidelines.
- ix. African Religion should be able to sift between quacks and competent healers who are willing to render effective healing for the sick. Thus, people should insist on patronising genuine healers to experience genuine healing.
- x. Government should put punitive measures in place to checkmate fake and unregistered operators of healing houses in African Religion with the view of salvaging the lives of people from being exploited and their health conditions deteriorating.
- xi. Traditional healers in African Religion should share their knowledge and herbs with experts from another field of endeavour to treat patients effectively. Hence, they should



not relent to work hand and in hand in order to save lives from the hands of diseases, sickness and spiritual attacks.

- xii. Traditional healers should adopt a humanistic sense of treating the sick without charging them a high fee. Thus, they should serve as health restorers than become exploiters of the needy. Love should supersede every intention in healing experiences in the two religions which has no bond.

Conclusion

Traditional healing in African Religion among the Bachama people of Adamawa State becomes necessary because of the search for efficacious healing from traditional medicinemen, where there is high patronage due to the efficacy of such herbal administration, and despite the emergence of orthodox medicine. The study provides a vivid view of traditional medicinemen and some of the relevance, challenges bedeviling the practice in African traditional Religion in the modern era. Hence, traditional medicine has a lot of recorded successes in restoring, counteracting and diagnosing or giving antidotes to patients against any further spiritual attacks or warding off any impending danger. This, its position remains vital and inestimable in African religious worldview among the Bachama people of Adamawa State in the modern era. Thus, its significance has come to stay because of the immeasurable role it performs in people's lives. African Religion believed in the search for authentic healing when people are sick, seeking favours and warning against impending danger becomes a daring search.

Quality and reliable search for healing in African Religion is vital to one's health, security and success because of the interplay of forces in the two worlds. Hence, the human person is obliged to seek genuine healing from traditional experts without having mixed feelings of doubts, sentiments of religious doctrine or about the genuineness and nature of healing in African Religion. There should be romance with experts in the healing profession in African Religion to help boost the efficiency of healing people who are faced with related challenges of health like, sickness, diabolical attacks and a host of others. Thus, African Religion is the heritage of abundance treasures when genuinely searched, all hope of people is restored. People should rather patronise genuine traditional healers, whose venture into the healing profession is to offer related help in areas of concern.

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