

# LIFE AND HEALING PROCESSES IN URHOB MEDICINE

John Ubrurhe<sup>♦</sup>

## 1. Introduction

In all cultures, man is the centrepiece of the cultural phenomena. Conco has defined culture as an “abstraction which encompasses the total way of life of a society. It is the precipitate of a group expressing its adaptation to the physical environment.”<sup>1</sup> Briefly defined, therefore, culture is the totality of man’s way of life.

Culture evolves in human life, which assumes a central role in the all-encompassing cultural patterns in the context of the African belief system. The aim of this paper, therefore, is to examine the Urhobo concept of life and the means of preserving it. It will also investigate Urhobo comprehension of health, the multidimensional factors responsible for its diminution and Urhobo therapeutic methods of restoring, preserving and enhancing life. Since Urhobo traditional medicine is practised in a dynamic society, the paper argues that in order to meet the medical needs and aspirations of the people, the medical system must have a touch of science and technology.

## 2. God as Life-Giving Creator

God is the creator of human beings and He reveals himself to them in various cultures in different ways. This self-disclosure is universal. This is why Ezea remarked that all nations have the consciousness of God, which is the revelation of Himself to humans. The varying consciousness of God in all cultures is expressed by the various names with which they address Him. Thus, the Urhobo call Him Oghene, Yoruba Olodumare, Igbo Chukwu, Bini Osanobua, the cognate of *Osonobruhwe*, the Urhobo praise

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<sup>♦</sup>**Dr. John Ubrurhe** is associate professor at Delta State University, Abraka, Nigeria.

<sup>1</sup>W. Z. Conco, “The African Bantu Traditional Practice of Medicine: Some Preliminary Observations,” *African Therapeutic Systems*, eds., Z. A. Ademuwagun, et al., Massachusetts: Cross Road Press, 1979, 58.

name for Oghene; the Izon call Him Tamara and the Itsekiri Oritse. All these names depict Him as the Supreme Being and creator of everything, both animate and inanimate.

Myths abound in various cultural and religious traditions, which relate the creative activities of the Supreme Being. In fact, the myths of the Yoruba and Igbo have become paradigms. In the Bini creative myths, the uniqueness of Osanobua is well articulated in the attempt of Olokun, the archdivinity of the Bini pantheon and son of Osanobua to challenge his father in the attributes of splendour and majesty. On the appointed day, it is said, Osanobua sent his messenger to Olokun to meet him at the appointed place – the market square. Olokun wore his best regalia and came out to inform his father's messenger that he was ready. But to his acute mortification, the messenger wore the same dress with him. Olokun changed his regalia three times but in each occasion, he discovered that the messenger wore the same dress. He, finally, realized that he could not compete with his father, Osanobua. The messenger, however, was no other person than the chameleon.<sup>2</sup>

The Urhobo counterpart does not differ dramatically from the Bini's. Ohwo (Man) wanted to be creator, as Oghene, by creating a lifeless form of man. He made various attempts to give life to it but he could not. Oghene came and saw man in this inert state. Oghene stood it up and breathed on it, thus, imparting life to it. Oghene, thus, demonstrated his uniqueness of being the only one who could give life.<sup>3</sup> This accounts for the non-existence of images representing Him. He is not within the rank and file of the divinities who are contingent upon him while He exists absolutely on His own power. This relationship between God and the divinities is well illustrated by the Yoruba myth which narrates the conspiracy of all the one thousand and seven hundred divinities against Olodumare. They demanded that Olodumare should hand over power and authority to them so that they would govern the world for sixteen years. Olodumare, the omniscient God, suggested sixteen experimental days; for He knew that no life could survive without Him. The divinities accepted this arrangement and set on their task of governance. By the eighth day, the machinery of the universe had grounded to a halt and, finally,

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<sup>2</sup>E. B. Idowu, *African Traditional Religion: A Definition*, London: SCM Press, 1973, 152.

<sup>3</sup>Interview with Pa Iyoyo (age 110) of Abraka, 4 April 1992.

collapsed. The story concludes with Olodumare laughing at their folly and forgiving them. The Benevolent Father and King *par excellence* switched everything on to life again and the entire system began functioning normally and immediately.<sup>4</sup> The Urhobo axiom that “*Omo v’ Ose royeye vwavwa osho-o*” (meaning, “a son cannot measure his penis with his father’s”) portrays the unique life giving power of Oghene which the divinities do not possess.

From the above analysis, it is tacit that life is the greatest gift of God to man. While in nearly all creative myths other creatures are depicted as emanating from God or from the creative functions God delegated to his functionaries, God has had a more intimate relationship with human being than any other creature. The Genesis myth (chapters 1 and 2) supports the belief that God alone is the author of life. It evinces life as the spark of God in a human being: “Let us create man in our own image.” In African belief system, man is made up of three component parts: the body (*soma*), personality soul (*psyche*), and spirit or the motivating breath of life (*pneuma*). The *pneuma* is described as a non-physical and immortal entity in human nature.<sup>5</sup> It departs from the *soma* at death.<sup>6</sup> Man lives a fulfilling life when all these component parts are working harmoniously. This harmonious co-existence is possible only if the gods and other spiritual beings in his environment are favourably disposed. Thus, it is held that life of human beings depends on the whims and caprices of these gods and spirits. They, therefore, have to placate the gods constantly to win their favour. Thus, human beings are said to live a precarious life.<sup>7</sup> African belief system, in general, holds that the divinities have dominion over human beings. But over all other created beings, both animate and inanimate, human being alone has authority; for, God said:

Let him (human being) have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth (Genesis 1:26-31).

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<sup>4</sup>E. B. Idowu, *Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief*, London: Longman, 1968, 41.

<sup>5</sup>O. U. Kalu, ed., “Precarious Vision: The African Perception of His World,” *African Cultural Development*, Enugu: Fourth Dimension, 1982, 41.

<sup>6</sup>G. E. Okeke, “The Interpretation of New Testament Teaching on Death and Future Life in an African Context,” *Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis*, Department of Religion, U. N. Nsukka, 1981, 10.

<sup>7</sup>Kalu, “Precarious Vision,” 42.

This central position of human beings in the context of the African ontology has enabled Afrel (the acronym of African Traditional Religion) to be described as anthropocentric. This implies that Afrel is centred on human beings. Thus, the gods and other beings exist because of them. Anderson has also argued that the human being is the essence of the almighty intelligence which guides and controls the universe, and that he/she does not only live in the intelligence but also part of it and the whole of it. This intelligence, he argues, is for the human being to use as he/she sees fit.<sup>8</sup>

### 3. The Urhobo Concept of Life

The Urhobo believe that life is the greatest gift from *Oghene* and it belongs to him alone. All efforts are geared towards its maintenance, preservation, and enhancement. The sacredness of life is portrayed by the stringent sanctions imposed against its elimination. Nobody has the right to shed human blood except in war. Even in war, the warrior must undergo special purification rites without which he would face serious consequences. It is believed that nobody can commit murder without being caught because the spirit of the victim is believed to haunt the murderer. Hence, during war in those days if one were to kill an enemy, he would decapitate the victim and suck the blood. By sucking the blood, he was believed to enter into pact with the spirit. Back at home, the warrior would undergo a purification rite, according to which he had to stay outside, sleep on refuse dump and eat from coconut shell for seven days.<sup>9</sup>

The African concept of man as *imago Dei* presupposes a deliberate and concerted effort to preserve, restore and enhance life. As Tempel rightly points out, "Life belongs to God. It is He who summons it into being, strengthens and preserves it."<sup>10</sup> The Ashanti's belief is that when God brings illness he also provides medicine to cure it. Rattray attests to the supremacy of life,<sup>11</sup> and holds that medicine is one of the means of preserving, strengthening and enhancing life.

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<sup>8</sup>U. S. Anderson, *Three Magic Words*, California: Wilshire Book Co., 1954, 8.

<sup>9</sup>J. O. Ubrurhe, "A Functional Approach to the Study of Taboos: A Case Study of Urhobo Traditional Society," *Unpublished M. A. Thesis*, Nigeria: U. N. Nsukka, 1986, 98.

<sup>10</sup>P. Tempel, *Bantu Philosophy*, Paris: Presence Africains, 1978, 78.

<sup>11</sup>R. S. Rattray, *Religion and Art in Ashanti*, London: Clarendon Press, 1927, 165.

#### **4. The Urhobo Concept of Health and Illness**

Health and happiness are the most important desires of humans and these, not doubt, have proved elusive. Throughout the ages many researches have been conducted and yet enduring health and healing are still enigmatic. The significant position of health is well articulated by Hippocrates, the acclaimed father of modern medicine when he stated: “A wise man should consider that health is the greatest of human blessings.”<sup>12</sup> It was in an attempt to stifle disease which consequently brought pain that different healing processes have evolved in different cultures; for, illness and its healing process are deeper existential problems of human beings, problems that haunt the humankind universally in an unprecedented way, thereby leaving us all in gruelling tension amid hope and despondency.<sup>13</sup>

Health, which is defined as “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, not merely the absence of disease or infirmity,”<sup>14</sup> according to the World Health Organisation in 1946, is the primary concern of the Urhobo. Health is preferable to wealth, and, hence, the Urhobo axim says “*Omakpokpo ne efe*” (that is, “Good health is priceless”). The Urhobo man would rather suffer and remain in abject poverty in order to maintain and live a positive and sustained state of health. The Urhobo say: “*Oma kpokpo eye Ose r’ohwo*” (“Health is man’s lover”), because a healthy person is an asset to the community. He/she will not only contribute meaningfully to the development and growth of the society but also will keep the societal laws and regulations. Conversely, a sickly person retards progress, and accelerates societal insecurity and deprivation. So, the Urhobo, like all other Africans, leave no stone unturned to seek and acquire health.

Health and healing are fundamental themes of life and are the most important values in Africa. Sickness or disease in the Urhobo perception is a diminution of life, a threat posed to life. Thus, petition for health is the most common subject in prayer.<sup>15</sup> Lartey, in emphasizing the significance of health and healing, attributed the formation and growth of Independent

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<sup>12</sup>*The Watchtower*, August 16, 1991, 4.

<sup>13</sup>Jan-Martin Berentsen, “Opening Address to a Seminar on Healing Ministry,” *Journal of Mission Theology* 1, 1 (1991), 2.

<sup>14</sup>D. C. Silles, *International Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*, vols. 5 & 6, New York: Macmillan Co. and the Free Press, 1972, 330.

<sup>15</sup>A. Shorter, *Prayers in the Religious Tradition of Africa*, Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1975, 60.

Indigenous Pentecostal Churches in Africa to the failure of the Western Mission founded churches to integrate charismatic experience, especially in the area of healing, into their faith and practice.<sup>16</sup> He argues that healing, exorcism, divination, diagnosis and the restoration to wholeness of ill or disturbed persons are the crucial functions of a priest. He adds: to the African, the most important function of a priest is the medical one – the ability to diagnose correctly and to prescribe accurate remedies for various diseases. He further opines that the medical function is inseparable from his other priestly activities. The failure to accept this as a valid service of a religious person, he claims, is to seriously detract from a priest's acceptability and recognition by a traditional African.

Lartey has overstated his case by attributing healing to priest-healers. The import of his statement is that all priests in Africa are involved in the traditional medical system and that it is their main function. It is germane that some priests are healers but their main function is not medical. Hence, Metuh says that in Africa the role and status of a priest depend largely on the effectiveness and popularity of the divinity and how effectively he executes his intermediary function.<sup>17</sup> Lartey, by imputing the most important activity of an African priest to the medical one, has, no doubt, discredited the African acceptability and recognition of priest *qua* priest with a traditional African. Thus, the main function of a priest is that of a mediator and intermediary between Deity\deity and man and not medical as Lartey had held.

The Urhobo perception of the aetiology of disease is of tripartite dimensions.<sup>18</sup> Briefly, they are the natural/physical, mystical/preter-natural and supernatural causations. The causes of natural diseases depend on cause-and-effect theory. The remedies can be subjected to laboratory tests\analyses and the active principles discovered. The treatment is rational since no rituals are involved.

Supernatural diseases are caused by witches, sorcerer and evil eyes of enemies while the divinities and ancestors are responsible for mystical diseases. Mystical diseases arise mainly from breakdown in filial

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<sup>16</sup>E. I. Lartey, "Healing: Tradition and Pentecostalism in Africa Today," *International Review of Mission* 85, 297 (January 1985), 156.

<sup>17</sup>E. I. Metuh, *African Religions in Western Conceptual Schemes*, Ibadan: Pastoral Institute, 1985, 156.

<sup>18</sup>J. O. Ubrurhe, "Rituals and Their Efficacy in Urhobo Medicine," *Humanitas* 3, 1 (June 1992), 92.

relationships consequent on the failure of a victim to perform his obligation to the ancestors and/or the infringement of family moral code. Divinities are believed to cause diseases if the votary breaks any of its taboos or in the wake of a failure to maintain purity before or during ceremonial rites. The characteristics of supernaturally and mystically caused diseases include seriousness, protractedness and their inability to respond to the whole gamut of proven efficacious remedies.

The above aetiology of disease incidentally determines the types of diseases in Urhobo. Natural diseases are known as *iphori* or *ogaye* (female disease) while mystical and supernatural diseases are called *ogashare* (male disease). Thus, the mystical and supernatural diseases require psychometry to ferret the root causes. These categories of disease require different therapeutic processes in Urhobo medicine. There are basically eight therapeutics methods. Mume has noted that Nigeria has the highest variety of therapies and that these have placed Nigerian medicine in a superior position to any other country's traditional medicine, but here I intend to restrict the present discussion to herbalism, massage, hydrotherapy, fasting, and faith healing.<sup>19</sup>

### **5. Urhobo Therapeutic Processes: Herbalism**

It is the treatment of ailment through the use of herbs. Herbs and other vegetable remedies form about 90%, hence the name Herbalist Therapy.<sup>20</sup> In some cases, parts of animals, insects and so on may be included. Herbalism is one of the oldest forms of therapy. Its origin is coeval with the evolution of mankind. The Bible also affirms the use of herbal remedies. For instance, God said to Adam: "From every tree in the garden you must eat to satisfaction" (Genesis 2:16) while Ecclesiasticus 38:1-15 puts it thus:

Honour the physician with the honour due to him ... for the Lord created him; for healing comes from the Most High... The Lord created medicines from the earth, and a sensible man will not despise them.

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<sup>19</sup>J. O. Mume, *Tradomedicalism: What It Is*, Agbarho: JOM Nature Cure Centre, n.d., 49.

<sup>20</sup>G. Bibeau, E. Corin, et al., *Traditional Medicine in Zaria: Present and Potential Contribution to the Health Series*, International Development Research Centre, 1980, 17.

Urhobo herbal medicines display some mystical forces. For instance, there are some that possess occultic strength, some are *ifue* (antidotes) which counteract diseases that are supernaturally caused; some *umu-use* can be telepathically directed to summon a missing person, a run-away from a distance; *oyeregbone* or *oyoriwe* assists in the extraction of bullets or thorns from the body without any operation. *Ekpofia* is used to divert bullets from their target; mere chewing of *umuokpo* renders the user cutlass or sharp instrument proof. *Elephia* renders the user invulnerable to enemy's attack. The enemy cannot raise his hand to fight the user while *umuora*; *umu ro\_sie ihori ne ora* is a natural antiseptic which renders sores or fracture non-septic or it removes or kills worms from suppurated sores.

Herbal antiseptics have advantage over the Fleming type of treatment – the use of antibiotics and synthetic drugs. Herbal antiseptics not only heal the body but also assist in the building up of new cells. Antibiotics, on the other hand, by killing the microorganism, destroy the cells and the white blood corpuscles, which fight against microbes in the body. Hence, modern medical doctors advise the use of vitamin B complex together with antibiotics.

There has been a call to move from the use of synthetic drugs to Galenical treatment and to the use of medicinal plants. African medicine that was hitherto denied of its efficacy (some of the medicinal plants and their remedies) has been proved efficacious.

## 6. Massage

Massaging as a therapeutic system is very effective in the treatment of ailments of the nervous, muscular, osseous systems and, especially, for treating gynaecological problems and man's temporary impotency. Urhobo call it *Omewhoro*. The whole armamentarium of the masseur is the physical manipulation of muscles, joints and veins on the nude skin in a technical manner. In most cases, massage treatment may be applied to relax the muscles and veins and to allow circulation of blood. It is very effective for restoring potency in cases of impotency arising from overworking of the body, too much thinking, and the onset of old age. Massage aids the stimulation of muscles, joints and veins and allows circulation of blood. It is based on the physiology and anatomy of the human body.



## **7. Hydro-Therapy**

Hydrotherapy is the application of water of different forms and temperature for the treatment of ailments. Both the practitioner and those who have gone through the treatment procedures realize its curative value.

By regularising circulation of the blood in various systems of the body, hydrotherapy increases muscular tone and nerve force, improves nutrition and digestion, thereby increasing the activity of the respiratory glands. Hydrotherapy facilitates the elimination of broken or damaged tissues and poisonous matters and other noxious wastes which impinge on the proper functioning of the body systems. It is known in Urhobo as *ameanyoma*.

Hydrotherapy involves the use of cold, hot, compressed and steam vapour baths. Cold and hot baths, in combination with some herbs, are used for the treatment of different diseases. The fusion is then used for fever, headache, rheumatism, and general pains. The hot bath not only makes the skin capillaries relax but also increases the activity of the sweat glands. It has been discovered that water increases the consumption of oxygen to about 75%, while about 85% of the carbon dioxide in the body is eliminated through the use and consumption of water.

The compressed bath comprises of a piece of cloth wrung out of hot or cold water which is applied to some part of the body to produce the desired temperature. Hot fomentation is especially useful in the treatment of ailments such as pains, soreness, inflammation, rheumatic troubles, swellings and so on, while cold bath is used mainly to reduce high temperature and nose bleeding. Urhobo traditional midwives use hot fomentation for newly delivered mothers to relieve pain, relax the muscles and to allow the distended muscles of the uterus and tummy assume their normal positions.

## **8. Fasting**

Urhobo healers use *owevwechiro* (fasting) to cure ailments like obesity, indigestion, overweight, mental diseases and chronic diseases. Even dogs, cats, goats, and other domestic animals fast for days to enable them recover early from an ailment.

Eating too much, without corresponding exercise and proper elimination of the waste, results in overloading and overworking of the body systems. Ecclesiastics 37:30-31 puts this clearly as follows: "Overeating brings sickness, and gluttony leads to nauseas. Many have

died of gluttony, and he who is careful to avoid it prolongs his life.” Overeating retards the process of digestion and elimination, eventually producing a condition known as autointoxication or self-poisoning. Autointoxication is the underlying cause of some acute diseases. Fasting in a situation like this yields good results within a short time and the most effective means of eliminating such waste. Hence, Mume describes fasting as

the most effective means of body house cleaning known. Fasting is an eliminator of accumulated toxins as well as a general restorative. Fasting is a purifying process. It brings about a rapid elimination of toxic elements and poisonous materials from the body.<sup>21</sup>

Fasting is often prescribed before drinking some concoctions. Usually, this mode of treatment might continue for some time until the ailment is completely cured.

## 9. Faith-Healing

In Urhobo faith healing is associated with medico-religious practices. In the ancestral cult, the patient who committed an offence against the member/s of the family and is being tortured by them is made to confess his/her sin. After the confession, the patient is relieved emotionally after he has been pronounced forgiven. This is also the function of sacrifice in Urhobo medicine. Sacrifice helps to relieve the patient of all his emotional worries, which might be the underlying cause of the disease. Ezeabasili perceives the understanding of African medicine not only in knowing the therapeutics but “also a good knowledge of the dynamics of the culture especially the importance of sacrifice – the crucial psychological points of all cults and an essential bond between man and deity.”<sup>22</sup> According to the findings of the same researcher, Professor Lambo, a renowned psychiatrist, has also attested to the therapeutic function of sacrifices.

Faith healing is also adopted in Igbeuku, Igbeubiesha, and other similar sects of Urhobo traditional religion. These cults play a significant role in Urhobo medicine. They are robbing herbalists of many clients.

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<sup>21</sup>J. O. Mume, *Traditional Medicine in Nigeria*, Agbarho: JOM Tradomeblical Naturopathic Hospital, 1978, 65. It should be noted that most of the information on Urhobo therapeutic processes is gleaned from this work; Mume also discusses the eight therapeutic methods in it.

<sup>22</sup>N. Ezeabasili, *African Science: Myth or Reality*, New York: Vantage Press, 1977, 53.

Members of these cults forbid the use of any herbal and orthodox medicine. Their emphasis is on faith healing through the application of the native chalk (orhe) in the treatment of diseases.<sup>23</sup>

Faith healing of Igbeuku, Igbeubiesha, and other similar cults is beneficial in treating psychologically and emotionally induced ailments. Its armamentarium includes the invocation of incantations and prayers preceded by vigorous dancing which is a guilt-reducing situation. This situation makes for effective treatment of anxiety, inferiority complex, suspicion, faultfinding, and so on. These cults claim authority over wizard and witch induced diseases, demon possession, and sinful ones whose guilty conscience tortures incessantly. These cults compare favourably with all the shades of Christian healing ministries whose emphasis is also on faith. Faith is the bedrock for the acceptance and appropriation of the power of Jesus. As Jesus admonishes the apostles, "If you had faith as a grain of mustard seed you could say to this sycamore tree, 'Be rooted up, and be planted in the sea', and it would obey you" (Luke 17:16).

## **10. Conclusion**

Various therapeutic systems that exist in Urhobo medicine have linkage with other cultural systems. Some of the therapeutic methods have been scientifically developed in other parts of the world and introduced into orthodox medicine. The most recent is the Chinese acupuncture. Nigeria, with its greatest number of therapeutic methods, is capable of developing her own medical system. The problem with it is that the people of Nigeria have been so brainwashed by the missionaries and British colonial government to the extent that Nigerian government as well as the public tends to hate everything Nigerian. The colonial government and missionaries painted the traditional medical practitioner as a sort of quintessence of evil. He is regarded as "insensible to ethics; he represents

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<sup>23</sup>E. O. Okolugbo, "The Olise-Igbe Religious Movement," *Socio-Philosophical Perspective of African Traditional Religion*, eds., E. Ekpunobi and I. Ezeaku, Enugu: New Age Publisher, 1990, 14. Okolugbo describes the hierarchy in its priesthood and their functions. From the exchange of letters between Bernard Uyo, Omonedo's son and the A. D. O. of Ase District when Omonedo was arrested and subsequently convicted, added to the elucidation of the main issues involved in this aspect of Urhobo Religion.

not only the absence of value, but also the negation of values. He is the enemy of values, and in this sense he is the absolute evil.”<sup>24</sup>

In general, the attitude of many Urhobo (Nigerians) towards their cultural values and heritage has been very negative. The attitude of the government towards traditional medicine has been discouraging, backed by the orthodox doctors who view traditional practitioners as rivals. However, since 1980 in consonance with the World Health Organisation declaration that local materials and personnel should be utilized for the local health care delivery system of the people, the Nigerian government has changed her attitude. But a place of prominence has not yet been accorded to it. There are still some laws which do not give a free hand to the practitioners of ethno-medicine.

Traditional healers are handicapped in issuing sick certificates to their patients who are in paid employment. In most cases when workers are sick and are treated, the employers usually request for medical certificates to authenticate the workers' claims. Such certificates issued by the traditional healers have never been accepted by employers because the former have no *locus standi* to give medical certificates.<sup>25</sup> This disability suffered by traditional healers is consequent on the fact that most of the employment opportunities were provided by the colonial government and Christian missions who had frontal confrontation with everything traditional. They specifically organized campaigns of vilification against ethnomedicine and its practitioners, and were inelegantly dubbed with all sorts of designations. Another factor is the inability of the traditional practitioners to read and write. Most, if not all, of the Urhobo healers are illiterate and as such are incapacitated to issue such certificates.

Traditional healers are not invited to magistrate and high courts to give evidence on charges bordering on their medical practice. For instance, if a criminal charge is preferred against a psychiatric patient who had treatment under them, they may not be invited to give their expert evidence. Apart from the vile attitude of the government against them, they themselves have their shortcomings arising from their illiteracy and,

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<sup>24</sup>F. Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, France: Francois Maspero editeur, 1961, 32.

<sup>25</sup>T. Asuni, "Modern Medicine and Traditional Medicine," *African Therapeutic Systems*, eds., Z. A. Ademuwagun, J. A. A. Ayoade et al., Massachusetts: Crossroad, 1978, 179.

consequently, their inability to keep records. Their illiteracy, coupled with inability to keep records, has created serious problems for ethnomedical practitioners and are, therefore, incapable of dealing with their professional legalities.

Traditional healers run the risk of being charged with manslaughter for the death of a patient under their care. It is mandatory that death certificate should be issued before burial. Here, again, the traditional healer is exposed to a difficult situation since he was not trained or informed about the type of death certificate acceptable to law.

These disabilities are administratively imposed on the ethnomedical practitioners. These dilemmas could be resolved by a positive change of attitude by government towards traditional healers. This will ultimately lead to changing the laws which adversely deal with practitioners of traditional medicine.

It is hoped that the mass literacy programme embarked upon by both the Federal and State Governments will reduce to the minimum the high rate of illiteracy among the Urhobo healers. There is also the need to organize seminars and workshops for traditional healers where they will be educated on modern trends in medical practice. For, as Asuni puts it, "No matter what doubt anyone may have about traditional healers, it has to be accepted that they are still fulfilling a very useful function in the community."<sup>26</sup>

Traditional medicine is practised in a dynamic society, which is constantly in flux as a result of scientific and technological advancements. There is, therefore, no doubt that traditional medicine and its practitioners need a touch of science and technology if they are to be relevant to the medical needs and aspirations of the people. More concerted efforts should be made towards the development of Urhobo (Nigerian) medicine so that the health consumers will be able to benefit maximally from both orthodox and traditional medical systems. In this way, Nigeria with the greatest number of healing processes will be able to make its impact felt in the overall practice of medicine, towards the maintenance, preservation, and enhancement of human life.

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<sup>26</sup>Asuni, "Modern Medicine and Traditional Medicine," 179.