

Chapter 12

The Concept of Healing in the Zulu Worldview Within the Context of Traditional Religion

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ABSTRACT

This study is qualitative in nature and aims to analyze the Zulu perspectives on traditional healing system as part of the oral health practice, within the context of African traditional religion. This type of healing is very scientific within the context of African understanding, as it is very systematic, logically, and very relevant even today. It is also capable in healing different types of diseases including mystical illnesses which are African orientated. The healing practice entails the discipline of botany, zoology and anthropology. This kind of practice has been part of the African people for a very long time to restore life and to bring healthy balance between the human beings and the environment. It has been developed outside the sphere of influence of biomedicine of which it refers to the traditional scientific form of knowledge. Therefore, the healing concept in the Zulu perspective is orally done through consultation with the ancestral spirits which involve spirit mediums/traditional healers who are working interchangeable.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter will analyze the Zulu perspective on traditional healing system within the context of African traditional religion. The chapter will explicate the traditional healing of mystical illness which refers to some kind of pollution. The healing will be done through compound medicines which focus not on physiological aspect of illness but on symbolic world as well as spiritual world. This will be explicated within the African context, of which traditional religion has been used to refer to the relationship between human and God through the utilization of natural environment (Okeke, 1998).

The main aim of this type of healing is to bring healthy balance between human beings and the environment. This type of healing has been part of the African people and has been done orally through the consultation with the ancestral spirits. This includes both divine healers (*izangoma*) through diagnostic and herbal doctors (*izinyanga*) through therapeutic. Mashele et al. (2021) discussed that the main link

DOI: 10.4018/979-8-3373-4124-8.ch012

between traditional medicinal practitioners and African religion in healing context are medicinal plants from the natural environment. Therefore, the power of nature in medicine underlines the interconnectedness and interdependence between humanity and the rest of God creation (Metz & Molefe, 2021).

Cordeiro-Rodrigues and Metz (2021) stated that it should also be noted that for African people, religion is a necessity and not an option. The reason for that is because it provides them with an opportunity to relate closely to their natural environment and seek to establish harmony with it. Therefore, it should be borne in mind that the Zulu traditional healing system is part of the oral health practice, which is very scientific within the context of African understanding, as it is very systematic, logical, and relevant even today. It is also capable in healing different types of diseases including mystical illness that are African orientated (Jwara, 1998).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Physical environment, the perspective and healing among the Zulu nation

Henriques (2013) pointed out that the perspective of the Zulu people displays a close connection between the living and the dead which forms environment in which they live. Therefore, Zulu perspective when it comes to illness, reflects the greater knowledge of herbal for healing purposes. As a result, the Zulus were able to harness their local flora for health benefit of their community. It should be noted that the knowledge and appreciation of local flora does not constitute pantheism, where nature is worshipped.

One should bear in mind that this simply constitutes a healthy respect for flora and fauna which is religious in nature for its potential health benefits to the local community (Donda, 1997). Therefore, in the sense, the Zulus served as earth keepers who respect the plant life around them as well as animals as there are parts that were respected for having special qualities to enhance human healing and health. This is the Zulu perspective which affirmed that Zulus are very much concerned about their environment as the signs in nature and in dreams which give them messages regarding decision to be taken in their daily life (Hutchings, 2013).

Okon (2006), describes a people's perspective as the complexity of their beliefs and attitude concerning the origin, nature, and structure of the universe. According to Okon, the perspective of African Traditional Religion is divided into two categories, namely the material and religious perspectives. It is also linked with many African societies who believe that the universe is made up of the visible (material) and the invisible (immaterial). According to Emefie Ikenga-Metuh in Okon (2006), the material perspective sees the cosmos as a product of chance which has no meaning and has no end. On the contrary, the religious worldview sees the cosmos as having a great meaning and purpose for which every happening is interpreted based on what the people perceive as its meaning or purpose. The latter worldview is subscribed by the Zulu traditional healing system.

According to Onyeidu (1999) the African worldview is purely religious, it therefore means that religion and religious practices which are orally practiced, are their waking thought. It is for this reason that the entire culture of African is permeated with religious practices. Ezeanya (1980) agrees that Africa life is so much wrapped in religion, and religion is life. This is why most Africans perceive the world around them as a religious world, understand and interpret the world mainly through the prism of religion. They also see the universe as created by the Supreme Being where every life event is traceable to a particular spirit which must be appeased through ceremonies because it binds and forms religious values that

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