



# Mitochondrial Eve

*Journal of Humanities Post Graduate Studies Imo State University, Owerri, Nigeria.*

**Vol. 1 No. 3 September, 2024**

<https://mejhpgs.online>

## Igbo and Western Cultural Contact: Trado-Medical Implications in Nguru Mbaise

**Augonus Emeziem Anyanwu**

### Abstract

The interplay between Igbo and Western cultures has led to significant transformations in various facets of life, particularly in the realm of healthcare. The crux of the matter herein explores the Trado-medical implications of this cultural contact, focusing on the resultant hybrid medical practices in Nguru Mbaise. The Igbo people, one of the largest ethnic groups in Nigeria, have a rich tradition of herbal medicine and holistic healing practices that have been transmitted through generations. These traditional medical practices are deeply intertwined with the cultural and spiritual beliefs of the Igbo community which proffered permanent solutions to the ailment of any kind. But the advent of Western influence, particularly during and after the colonial era, Western medical practices was introduced, leading to a complex interplay between the two systems. This contact has resulted in a dual healthcare system where the co-existence of traditional and Western medical practices present traditional medicine to be of lesser efficacy, such notion this article intends to correct.

**Key Words:** Igbo, Western, Cultural Contact, Trado-Medical Implications, Nguru Mbaise

### Introduction

The advent of colonialism in Africa in general and specifically in Nigeria especially in the South-Eastern part of Nigeria has adverse effects on the people's cultures. However, people of different cultures have adamantly fought changes that can

irreversibly alter cultural identities. The South Eastern part of Nigeria, specifically, has been victims of aggressive Western indoctrination. Colonialism affected the entire facet of societies. A domain in which these effects can be readily observed is in that of trado-medical practices in Nguru- Mbaise.

Western medicine (biomedicine) and indigenous medicine (culturally and socially specific medicinal practices) have been in contest for centuries. Western biomedical knowledge has long challenged the ideas and medical understandings of non-Western societies. Each society has its own distinct reaction to these struggles, with many African societies taking an all or nothing approach. Some societies embraced the ideas and conceptions of the West, effectively sidelining indigenous values and ideals in the exchange. Other communities, in order to shield themselves from outside influences, refuse all permeation of biomedical knowledge and continue to operate according to their native medical traditions though this is progressively rarer. Very few cultures have been able to adapt some of the beliefs, habits and measures of foreigners as well as maintain the systems of their own culture in a collaborative fashion.

Igbo people have progressively blended the indigenous and Western medical perspectives to achieve a complex and detailed understanding of disease. This paper is concerned with the relationship between biomedical beliefs and cultural medical knowledge especially in Nguru, Mbaise, examining the effect of the former on the latter. Scholar Azuka Dike says “where the

new structure is a combination of the traditional values and Western values...we have a case of adaptation of borrowed objects to traditional functions or a blending of the two.” Igbo people are able to adapt borrowed Western knowledge of biomedicine and weave these ideas with indigenous medical understandings to create a blend of two mindsets. This adaptation is well noticed in the etiology, or causation, of disease. Disease causation can be approached from multiple perspectives. In modern biomedicine, origins and cause of illness are typically physical and explicable through Western scientific principles, a major feature of medical diagnosis in modern health systems. In Igbo indigenous medicine, illnesses have a broader set of components and explanations that include physical as well as spiritual causations. In this paper, the research will be limited to the tradio-medical implication of the contact or western biomedical with Igbo cultural medicine especially in Nguru Mbaise.

### **Tradio-Medical Implications**

Modern science and scientific methods began with Francis Bacon. Modern scientists claim that every knowledge claim must be supported by observation and experiment. It is modern because they wanted to separate

philosophy and metaphysics from viable means of attaining truth. However, one is tempted to ask if science has the total answer to the total question? For instance, why has science not found the causes, nature, and cure for Covid-19? Thus, the modern scientific method or theorem is accumulated to traditional experiential.

When the Western Modern medicine came with the use of their so-called scientific and technological “magic”, they seized the land and plundered its mineral resources and enslaved both men and beasts. It seemed like a dream, but it turned out to be a reality that has permanently remained and changed the Igbo cultural world. With the conquest and the subsequent effective occupation of the entire Igbo enclave, the colonial leaders rooted out the traditional sector and shattered its symbolic mind-set.

With the fall, the entire value-system began to crumble. The sense of the sacred, respect for life and human dignity began to lose the intensity of their customary norms. Also, the closeness to nature and its ecological environs lost its medical relevance. In fact, the British conquest of the traditional culture dealt a deathblow to the entire cultural system. According to Ekwuru, “if, for the West, as it has been interpreted within the

parameter of its colonial historiography, the conquest of the Igbo culture meant the beginning of an effective Igbo civilization, for the traditional Igbo, it sadly invokes the point of the conquest of their great traditional culture.

The Igbo perception was holistic and efficient in its application before the colonial conquest. This time, the ideas of efficacy of natural herbs were well known to the traditional Igbo people. Child birth, circumcision (ibi ugwu) and other practices (medical or spiritual) were carried out among the Igbo people and successfully. According to Chukuezi, “before the advent of the white man in Igbo land, Igbo people had their own native doctors and drugs or medications, as well as ways they preserved their health and several ways in which they treated illnesses or solved their health problems... (Anelechi, C. 147). Treatment of all forms and manner of diseases were the responsibilities of the dibia (native doctor). For instance, about eight days after the birth of a new child, the dibia omumu or dibia owa ahu would be invited to carry out the surgery. Regular instruments used in carrying out such practice includes an used or sterilized sharp local razor called aguwa, some pieces of cloth and concoction of herbs to stop the bleeding and facilitate the healing of the wound that

would be inflicted on the child after operation. Again, the native doctor (dibia ogbaokpukpo)- bone-setting applies miracle leaf, male or female clay, alligator pepper, and other herbs for treatment. These were the external materials for one who had any form of dislocation or who broke any part of the human bone. Uziza, udah, bay leaf were given for internal healing. Sickesses like malaria (ahu oku) and any type of flu were treated and by cured dibia mkpa ahihia/akwukwo using herbs and roots like red quava leaf, moringer, dongoyaro leaf, lime, pawpaw leaf, unripe pawpaw lemon grass cooked properly through the procedure of inhaling, drinking amongst other, ulcer were treated with the used of drinking crushed charcoal with hot water, piles were managed with crushed onion bitter kola and other roots boiled together, hypertensive cases were taken care of by preparations brewed from natural leafs discovered to be more realistic is the concoction prepared with hibiscus sabdariffa popular known as Zobo Leaf which its' campaign is currently being championed by a renowned Professor of Cardiovascular Physiology and the serving Vice Chancellor of the University of Nigeria Nsukka, Prof. Daniel Chukwu Nwachukwu in the 201<sup>st</sup> Inaugural Lecture titled: ***"The Marriage between Cardiovascular and Hibiscus***

***Sabdariffa let no one put Asunder"*** listing the health benefits of this herbal article.

Nwacukwu, C.D. says:

....."it is simple to prepare, do not require additives. It intends to draw the knowledge of the public in our effort of unveiling the anti-hypertensive substance in hibiscus sabdariffa which is called zobo in the Nigeria Language. Fortunately, what we used for our study is the concentration of the locally produced zobo. We found out that it has exacted significant anti-hypertensive, in some cases even higher than the normal anti-hypertensive, we equally did combination with other anti-hypertensive. Most interesting is that it is around us and very cheap he added...."

In support Nwachukwu's colleague Prof. Charles Igwe, adds thus:

.....Its benefits are of many dimensions, first, on health grounds, second on academic grounds, third on economic grounds, economically, we can use what God has given it to us to look for money, zobo juice can be added to the variants of juice produced and consumed on daily basis in Nigeria..

These scholars of repute through their clinical findings are richly in support of the efficacy of traditional herbs, plants and roots, enabling the gospel of Trado-medical make up especially in this 21<sup>st</sup> century. Amongst other Trado- medical practitioners of repute in Nigeria is .Anselm Adodo a Catholic Priest And founder of the Pax Medical Clinic

located in Ewu-Esan Edo State, in Nigeria. The mentioned institute has in the wealth of achievement through Trado-medical preparation and adequate dosage cured ailments which have defiled the used of modern and Western medications. Pax medical institute has not only succeeded in just oral and other kinds of therapy but has also loads of medical journals, bulletins, textbooks where ailments of different kinds are treated with corresponding and efficacious herbal preparations. Example of such handbooks is '*Nature Power*' etc. Adodo's well convinced wealth of knowledge has attracted foreign characters who have not only confirmed the reality in Trado-medicine but had co-worked to harnessed this knowledge also presented in his work "*Afrikoloy: Deconstructing and Reconstructing Knowledge and Values in Africa*" among others."

The Igbo people had knowledge of medicine had proved measures and efficacious value of those herbs for treating ailments of any kind gotten through inflicted, contracted amongst other means. Here, the native doctor (Dibia) puts together plants or herbs and administers them to the patient. There are different types of dibia: and each had knowledge of traditional plants and their medicinal values. The dibia possessed remarkable expertise

regarding plants and various natural occurrences. They were well-acquainted with the spiritual and phytochemical compositions of numerous plants and knew how to utilize them for medicinal benefits. It should be noted that some of these plants could also be employed for harmful intentions. The process of creating medicines involved not only the plants' botanical or pharmaceutical properties, but also their distinct characteristics such as form, color, taste, smell, and even the recitation of incantations (afa). These elements directly enhanced the healing energies of the plants for curative purposes.

It is generally agreed that the more therapeutic knowledge a dibia possessed the more famous he/she was likely to be and that patients often considered the fame and reputation of a dibia while seeking cures for their conditions. The dibia was very capable in treating illnesses within their areas of specialization.

Today, we can say that there is a perfect blending of modern medicine and Traditional medicine in Igbo land especially in Nguru, Mbaise. For instance, there is a man by the name Alhaji from Umuezie Nguru who is very good in Traditional medicine. Most times, he asks his patients to go for medical

diagnosis first and get the results for him so that he can ascertain the causation of the disease. He will inquire to know the health history of the patient before prescribing drugs for him. Some other times, he will direct his patient to a specialist. Some Medical Doctors also direct patients to him. Similarly, most of the herbs are now coated like Modern medicines with careful prescriptions for the dosages. Amongst attacks on Trado-medicine in Nguru Mbaise is the lack of adequate dosage which is envisaged to create avenue for harm or accidental case often referred to as “poisoning” in the discussion of the survival of Africans in diaspora and Caribbean during slavery, Uche Clement explains:

African medicines have dosage, it becomes harmful when non-experts mix two herbs that counters the efficacious essence of each other. Else, African herbs are truly beneficial and accurate in dosage, and have been proven to be richly efficacious when applied correctly. In fact every ailment have Trado-medical remedy for it in every African community of which the natives of Nguru Mbaise are not left out.”

### **Factors Relevant to Resilience of Folk Medicine in Nguru Mbaise**

From the study, it was found out that the following factors promote the continued patronage of folk medicine in Nguru Mbaise. Synchronization with the culture of the people – folklore in Igbo society, especially, in Nguru Mbaise is consistent with the culture of the people. Indeed, diverse folk medical traditions of the Nguru, Mbaise people are inseparable from the rest of their culture. To this end, they are likely to continue to subsist as long as other cultural elements subsist. The theory of cultural relativism strongly contends that justifications of folk medicine within a social group can only be explained by the people themselves as partakers in the cultural attribute. Ease of Access – Folk medicine practitioners are easy to access at night and during the day. They live among the people.

Affordable services – Their services are relatively cheaper. They may also accept deferred payments or payments in kind or by barter system. Shared system of beliefs exists between folk medicine practitioners and their patients. This facilitates understanding and co-operation during the treatment process. This rapport often extends and outlives the treatment duration.

The traditional healer operates in a natural environment which is familiar to his client. In

contrast, hospital environments are artificial set-ups that might negatively rouse the anxiety of patients.

Failure of western remedies to address some health problems makes romance, adherence and loyalty to folk medicine inevitable. Popularity of divine and demonic theories of disease causation. The understanding that certain diseases are sequel to anger of the gods or are due to demonic attacks by enemies and evil forces alike, provide further attractions to folk medicine even in this age. Traditional healers are seen as capable to communicate with the spirit world, offer acceptable sacrifices to appease offended spirits and or cast out demons

Successful treatment outcomes: One of their greatest assets is previous treatment outcomes. Some of their medicines are pharmacologically active and have offered relief to their clients. Relatively simple technology of folk medicine has been easy to maintain at various stages of development of the Igbo group thus promoting survival of this medical tradition.

## Conclusion

Reflecting on the effects and the implications of this cultural fusion as regards the weakened recognition of Trado-medicine, it could be traced to be multifaceted. On one

hand, the introduction of Western medicine has brought advancements in healthcare, such as improved diagnostic techniques, surgical procedures, and pharmaceuticals. On the other hand, it has also led to a diminished reliance on and potential loss of traditional knowledge and practices. However, there is a growing trend towards the integration of both systems, recognizing the strengths and limitations of each. For instance, traditional herbal remedies are increasingly being subjected to scientific research to validate their efficacy and safety, while Western medical practitioners are beginning to acknowledge the value of holistic approaches inherent in traditional practices. This hybridization has implications for healthcare delivery, accessibility, and patient outcomes in Nguru Mbaise. It necessitates a nuanced understanding of both cultural contexts to provide culturally competent care that respects and incorporates patients' beliefs and preferences. The contact between Igbo and Western cultures has significantly impacted trado-medical practices in Nguru Mbaise, leading to a complex yet potentially enriching integration of traditional and Western healthcare systems. This ongoing evolution holds promise for more comprehensive and culturally sensitive

healthcare solutions, benefiting from the strengths of both worlds.

## References

- Adodo A. & Lessen, R. (2021). *Afrikology: Deconstructing and Reconstructing Knowledge and Values in Africa*. Lagos Nigeria. Ofiridi and Beacon Academic. Pax Herbal Clinic & Research Institute, Ewu-Esan, Edo State. Benedictine Publications, Nigeria
- Adodo, A. (2000). *Nature Power, New Edition. A Christian Approach to Herbal Medicine*, Pax Herbal Clinic & Research Institute, Ewu-Esan, Edo State. Benedictine Publications, Nigeria
- Abigogun, J. Western Education Impact on Northern Igbo Gender Roles in NnsukaNigeria. AfricaTODAY 29-51.
- Anelechi, C. 2010. Medicine and Igbo Origins, Igbo Traditional Medicine. In The Igbo Origin Question. (Ed) Theophilus Okere. Vol. 1. No.9. Owerri. Gabtomy Prints LTD.
- Dike, A.A. The Resilience of Igbo Culture: A Case Study of Awka Town. Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1985.
- Falola, T. and Heaton, M.. Traditional and Modern Health systems in Nigeria,(Trentony: Africa World Press, 2006) 1-86.
- Huff, R.M. (2008), Folk Medicine, (Accessed 30/3/03 from Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia).
- Ifemesia, .C. (1979). *Traditional Humane Living Among the Igbos*, Enugu: fourth Dimension pub. Ltd.
- Isiugo-Abanihe, Uche C. "The Socio-Cultural Context of High Fertility among Igbo Women" International Sociology 9 (1994) DOI: 10.1177/026858094009002008.
- Iwu, M.M. (1981), Igbo Traditional Medicine, Nsukka: Institute of African studies, Nigeria pp 4-50.
- Laguerre, M.S. (1987), Afro- carribean Folk Medicine, Mass: Bergin and Garvey.
- Mume, I.O. (1978), Traditional Medicine in Nigeria, Warri: Tom Nature Cure centre, Nigeria pp 11-40.
- Nwala, T.U. (1985), Igbo Philosophy, Lagos: Literame Pub. Ltd.
- Nwankwo, I.U. (2005) Trado-Medical Services and Adults in Onitsha Metropolis Unpublished PGD Project, Imo State University.
- Nwaogu, M.A. (1997), Insight into Herbal Medicine: Approach to Healthier Life. Owerri: