

UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF RITUALS IN HEALING: A CASE STUDY OF “NYA” HEALING AMONG THE FRAFRA IN GHANA

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ABSTRACT

This paper reports an investigation on the role of rituals in healing with particular reference to “Nya” healing among the Frafra of Ghana. It examines Frafra self-understanding of sickness, symptoms, diagnosis and healing represented in “kaaba” as part of a larger effort toward the understanding of indigenous knowledge on healing and well being. It hypothesizes that the interpretive functions of the indigenous mythic world with all its symbolic representations is a central focus to understanding the role of rituals in the efficacy of healing among the Frafra. “Kaaba” as a concept is the social and cultural devise of identification, association, and interpretation of symbolic images, and events and indeed the reason d’etre of life in a given community that shares the mythic world. It enables persons to experience well being in all its totality.

KEYWORDS: Holistic Healing, Indigenous Worldview, Frafra Cosmology, “Kaaba,” “Nya Healing.”

INTRODUCTION

There are different accounts of the etymology of the name Frafra. The most popular version is that it was derived by a foreigner from the common informal greetings of the people: “fara fara.” An important documented use of the word is found in Cardinal (1921), who is alleged to have coined the term. He wrote that “Grunshi” has been further divided by us into “Frafra, Grunshi and Kanjaga.” The Frafra included all the “Nankani, Nabnam and Talansi” and is a word derived from a form of greeting spoken by these people who murmur by way of thanks or petition ‘fra-fra or furaura’ (Cardinal, 1921: viii).

The Frafra belong to the general linguistic group designated by Rattray as the “Mole Group” which also includes “the Mampelle, Dagbane, Kusal, Nankane or Gotene, Dagare, Nabte, Bulee, Wala and Loberu” (Rattray, 1932). Frafra has become the collective name for the three dialects that make up the Frafra. These are Gurune, Tallen, and Nabt and the people are called Gurusi, Talensi and Nabnam, respectively. Throughout this paper, Frafra will be used to designate the collective language, geography, religion, and culture of this triad. A popular social definition, which imputes all undercurrents that stress geography is BONABOTO; meaning Bolgatanga, Nan-

godi, Bongo and Tongo. This definition encapsulates peoples of all these four towns and surrounding areas.

The Frafra are found in the Upper East Region of Ghana. Until recently, the Frafra have occupied one district. As part of the national decentralization efforts, the Bongo District was first to be carved out in 1988 as a separate district. In 2004, another district, the Talensi-Nabdam District was created encompassing the Talensi and Nabnam areas with its capital at Tongo. The Frafra share borders with the Mamprusi to the South, Kasena to the West and Kusasi to the East; all of Ghana as well as the Mossi of Burkina Faso to the North. The Frafra occupy an area of about 1,900 sq km. Frafreland is about 500 to 700 feet above sea level. There are a number of rocky hills scattered throughout Frafreland. The highest are about 1,250 feet found in the Tongo and Nangodi areas. There are two main seasons, the dry and rainy seasons respectively. The rainy season starts at about May and ends in October or early November. The peak of the rainy season is in August and September, with varying rates of rainfall. In the analysis that follows, the concept is used in reference to these peoples.

The analysis is a quest to obtain Frafra self-understanding of their experiences of sickness, *kaaba* and wholeness. Data is drawn from interactions with communities in Dapone Tindongo, Sheaga, Tindongo, Yazore, Datuku, Duusi, Sekoti in the Talensi-Nabdam District and Akayonga in the Bongo District from November 1990 to June, 1991 and from 2003 to 2004. Data collection entailed the use of multi-disciplinary qualitative research methods informed by other quantitative research designs, and clinical pastoral education methods such as verbatim. These included participant observation, interviews and follow-up interviews. The primary goal was to obtain the Frafra understandings of *kaaba*.

For want of appropriate or equivalent vocabulary, indigenous Frafra concepts, derived from Talen, are used to articulate issues critical to the analysis. This is intended to minimize linguistic reductionism and contextualize the discussions.

EXPLAINING NYA HEALING

For a better understanding of *nya* healing among the Frafra, one requires an appreciation of healing in general and the role of *nya* in it. The three critical concepts for an understanding of healing among the Frafra, *kaaba*, *teb* and *belem*, are discussed. Healing among the Frafra, as will be seen shortly, is multifaceted with physical and spiritual dimensions.

Healing

It is common for the Frafra to employ various forms of healing including traditional and orthodox methods. When someone has a sprain from strains due to body pos-

tures, the person usually starts with some first aid treatment, usually hot water or oil massage. These days, most people buy mentholatum ointments and/or aspirin or any locally obtainable Western analgesics. Some may wait for a few days to see whether or not they are healed. Others will call for a healer who specializes in treating sprains and fractures. This often entails one or a combination of traditional methods including *kaaba*, *teb* and *belem*.

The word *kaaba* is a verb. It is used to describe and interpret different experiences of life. The Frafra perform *kaaba* as both a medical treatment and religious act in the holistic sense. It also has different meanings and purposes. The following are examples of how *kaaba* pervades all aspects of Frafra life. These examples also show why it is difficult to convey and/or translate adequately the Frafra notion of *kaaba* into English.

The Frafra perform *kaaba* for good harvest at the beginning of the farming season, during game expeditions, business undertakings, or any other task. There are also *kaaba* of praises and thanksgiving for successfully accomplishing the various tasks listed above. Furthermore, there are *kaaba* for successful marriages, pregnancies and safe deliveries of babies. *Kaaba* are what anthropologists might call "rites of passage."

Kaaba, as used in the above situations bears similarities with prayers of sorts in Christian tradition. *Kaaba* in these situations can imply either prayers of petition, confession or thanksgiving. There is also a medical usage of this word. When someone is sick and the initial first aid called *muuha* (plural) (a mixture of ground, molded and dried herbs) does not bring relief, then they ask for *kaaba* from someone in the village who specializes in treating that kind of sickness. The advice most members of the family and the community give is "*kika ba kaab*" (let them treat it). In these situations, *kaaba* may be defined as treat, heal or cure.

There is another word in Frafra that may be a synonym of English words like treat, heal or cure. That word is *teb*. It is used as both a noun and a verb. As a noun, it means a male or female healer. *Teb* as a verb connotes the idea of struggling by kicking one's feet. The implication here is that the healer and the sickness are engaged in battle.

A third word, which is used, is *belem*. *Belem* literally means to beg, plead or ask for favours. So *belem* translated as prayer in this case can only refer to prayers of petition. But as we have seen *kaaba* includes other forms of prayer. That is also why one cannot use one Christian meaning of prayer to refer to all types of *kaaba*. The Frafra use *teb* and *kaaba* as verbs interchangeably. So it was difficult to tell whether or not one uses *kaaba* or *teb* as an individual preference, or whether the choice of one or the other reflects on the severity of the sickness.

It is common to have many *kaaba* and *teb* for as long as the sickness exists. It is also a common practice for the Frafra to combine a number of treatments at the same time. A popular explanation for the use of multiple methods is “*nya pu kat taba*,” literally meaning roots/herbs do not prevent each other working.

Nya Healing

The word *nya* means roots. So *nya daan* means owner of roots. The Frafra use this term to describe a healer who uses roots. *Nya* healers compare with the *ran (lo) wal* among the Dinka in Sudan as described by Lienhardt (1987). A *nya* healer usually claims his/her healing tradition from the ancestors either from the paternal or maternal lineage. In this type of healing, the spiritual power of healing is passed on to one's *doam* (offspring) through observation and practice; direct and specific instructions for acquiring a knowledge of roots, leaves or bark of trees and; the techniques of how to apply them when a particular sickness strikes. The body of the healer is an extension of both the biological and spiritual powers of his/her paternal and maternal ancestors. Hence, the healer's body is capable of producing healing because the efficacy of the words lies in the powers of the ancestors, which he/she embodies. In the following, I shall examine some cases.

Case 1: Bone Setter

A young man twists his wrist. Within a few hours, his hand begins to swell so the immediate local diagnosis is a sprain. They send for a woman known to be the best bonesetter in the village. She arrives and after the usual exchange of greetings, she starts the healing session. The young man is called to sit in front of the main entrance of the house. The healer collects fresh droppings of cattle and mixes them with tobacco and ashes. As she mixes, she recites incantations; she calls on her ancestors, one after the other. She asks the ancestors to come and add their potency of healing, which has been passed down to her. She says, “I am doing the acts on your behalf with the belief that you will come and add the power that will heal so that this young man sleeps like a child.” Then, she smears the mixture lightly around the wrist and elbow of the young man. After that she invokes the blessing of her ancestors. The young man's family head responds, *banam ne yaabnam sak*, meaning, may our fathers and ancestors agree (permit or allow her healing to be effective). Asked what price to pay, she said that she would not charge. Rather, she said that if and when the young man felt healed, he was to do something to show his appreciation. That something could range from buying her cola nuts to weeding the healer's farm.

Case 2: *Zu maahud* (migraine)

A man of about fifty-two years old complains of *oowood* (cold) and *zug* (headache). His condition seems to get worse. It is generally agreed by most members of his family that he has *zug maahud*. *Zug maahud* seems to be what is diagnosed by west-

ern medical experts as migraine headache. He sends one of his children to call the *zub maahud nya daan* (the one who has roots for the cure of migraine headache). The healer sends word that he will come in the evening. At about sunset, the *nya daan* arrives, bringing some roots and herbs. He sits down and asks the family to bring a chicken. He ties the herbs in a bundle, and then calls the man and some members of his family. The *nya daan* then holds up a calabash of water, a live fowl (chicken) and the roots facing the *dug zaron* (the gate of the room) of the man. He begins his healing ritual by inviting the head of the family as follows: *deegen kaab tem* (do the invocation of the healing for me). The man replies aiming at fighting or neutralizing the power of the contagion in its host's body: *Kaaben tete* meaning do the healing for us.

Secondly, the healer or *nya-daan* poured water on the ground after whispering to his paternal ancestors to add healing potency. Then he turned to the heap of bundles of the *nya*. He called upon his maternal *yaabnam* to assemble around these *nya* and bring their healing powers. After these incantations, he poured the water on the *nya*. He also cut the last toe of the chicken and allowed a few drops of blood on the *nya*. The man put his nose on the smoke coming out of the *nya*. This act of putting a part of one's body through the smoke, the Talleh refer to as *nyel*. The *nya daan* then picked up a handful of ashes from the burnt *nya* and mixed it with *kpam* (oil, usually shea butter). He rubbed the mixture in the patient's palms and wiped it on the man's face. The Talleh refer to this kind of *kaaba* as *wobeg zug* (massaging the head with a concoction). The *nya daan* left the chicken in the house until the man was well. Afterwards the man would send the chicken and some gift of gratitude to the healer, which they refer to as *lebeh nya* (return the *nya*). It is believed that *bad pu lebeh nya* (if the *nya* is not returned) the sickness recur and perhaps becomes chronic.

In both cases, the physical and spiritual worlds are active. In the Frafra mythic world, the physical world is coterminous with their spiritual world. These two worlds constantly interact with each other in ways that diminish as well as promote the quality of human life. Humans are both objects and subjects of the consequences of the interactions between the physical and spiritual worlds. The Frafra also share their physical/human world with invisible spiritual beings and/or powers. The Frafra seem to have an ambivalent relationship with their world. On the one hand they are partners in healing. On the other hand they can be used against each other. Hence, sickness is an invasion from without. A power greater than the sick person attacks the sick person and penetrates his/her spiritual defenses and assaults its target (the human object) and causes one type of sickness or another. They are believed to be partially embodied and diffused in their owner's bodily fluids. Hence, his saliva or blood can be contagious. They can also be infused in other media such as herbs, roots, water and bones of animals or birds to affect their healing and protective power.

Nya healing focuses on neutralizing the contagion by killing or weakening the invading spiritual power or rescuing the captive spirit from its victim. To the Frafra, like

the Anufo, in the words of Kirby, "sickness is an entity, a power in itself" (Kirby, 1986: 88). Sickness is a contagion that invades the body. *Nya* healing first and foremost invokes the Frafra mythic world by reconstructing that mythic world with symbols of body, words, plants and herbs, and the spirit of the ancestors. The first question to answer is whether or not *nya* healing is, in the words of Ademuwagun, "strictly disease centered" (Ademuwagun, 1979:161) as in the Western scientific medical system.

In all cases, there is certainly the knowledge of herbs and the techniques of using them to treat various kinds of sicknesses. The technique of mixing cow dung, tobacco, ashes, herbs and oil and rubbing or massaging them into the palms and face were all technical knowledge acquired through practice. Therefore, it will appear that *nya* healing is a biochemical or pharmacological type of healing. In other words, it is "naturalistic" rather than "personalistic" healing. The pharmacological component of indigenous healing such as *nya* healing has become an intense area of study by medical doctors and scientists. The *nya* healer diagnoses and heals by emphasizing the unity of the physiological, psychological, and pharmacological, as well as the social, spiritual, and cultural. Therefore, the Western medical models imported into Frafraland urgently need to incorporate insights of indigenous *kaaba* if they are to succeed in presenting themselves as credible models of healing to the Frafra.

Other studies among the Ga (Kilson, 1976), the Bono (Warren 1979), the sick in the Akonedi shrine at Larteh (Mensah-Dapaa 1979), the Yoruba healers of Nigeria (Maclean, 1971), and the Asante (Twumasi, 1979) have arrived at conclusions similar to those made of the Frafra. For example, Appiah-Kubi (1989) found out that for the Akan: "...healing must be comprehensive, involving the entirety of the individual, his or her family and the society. Healing rituals include social, psychological, physical religious and herbal remedies – all the forces at one's disposal are called upon to combat illness" (1989: 215-216).

Appiah-Kubi (1989) makes a distinction between curing and healing. Curing is the aspect of technical knowledge of the cause and effect of drugs and herbs, acquired by both the Western physician and the traditional healer by training and practice, and the accumulated experience from such. Healing on the other hand "...implies the restoring of equilibrium in the otherwise strained relationship between a person, fellow human beings, the environment and god. This process includes the physical, emotional, social and spiritual dimension" (Appiah-Kubi, 1989: 216).

FRAFRA CLASSIFICATION OF SYMPTOMS AND DIAGNOSIS OF SICKNESS

This section begins with how the Frafra classify their symptoms and diagnoses of their experiences of sickness. Among the Frafra, there are many types of life-threatening situations. The Frafra use sayings to group these situations. A few exam-

ples include: When a woman goes to fetch water, falls down, and the pot either hits her leg and fractures a bone or hurts any part of the body, the Frafra say *boo n bo*, literally meaning some bad intended action has happened. When a man, in the course of farming, cuts his toes, they also refer to this as *boo n bo*. When a child is playing and falls and hurts himself/herself badly, they say *boo n bo*. When someone has a lorry, car or bicycle accident and he or she is hurt, people say *boo n bo*. Almost all *boo n bo* crises involve physical damage, including fractures and cuts. They are characterized by some amount of bleeding.

When one is feeling a rise in body temperature and/or general weakness in the body coupled with loss of appetite, they say *u nengbina n yalek* (his/her body is diluted). When one has a headache with a cold or catarrh, they say *oowood nkpe u* (cold has entered him/her). Again, when one has stomach problems of various kinds, they say *puo n doo* (*puo* pertains to sickness of the stomach). So the translation will be "sickness pertaining to the stomach is troubling him/her). With reference to the elderly, they usually say *pummahuk* refers to sickness pertaining to the stomach of older people. Therefore the translation is "sickness pertaining to the stomach of older people" is bothering him/her.

There are times when somebody will just complain that *u neng n dumit* (his/her body is painning him/her). There are also times a person may experience an acute pain on either the hand or leg on any part of the body which leads to a boil. The Frafra usually say *u nuuk be nuber n mod* (his/her hand or leg is painning). *Mod* refers to the white pus that comes when boils burst. *Mod* is some times more severe than a simple boil.

The Frafra also apply particular concepts when diagnosing sicknesses. The first category of sickness is diagnosed by the saying "*u tuu yaabnam*" (he/she has gone astray from the ways of the ancestors). This means that one has not behaved according to the ethical codes of the ancestors. It is also possible that the sick person may not have personally committed the offense. He/she could be suffering on behalf of the collective family in which the offense may have been committed either in the past or present. So the offender may be either alive or dead. This second diagnosis is best summarized by the saying *u galeme kiiha* (he/she has broken the laws of the clans). Hence, there are individual punishments for individual acts of disobedience as well as individual/collective punishments for individual/collective acts of disobedience. The latter transferred through the genealogy. In both the first and second cases, the causes of the sickness are the ancestors. A third diagnosis is also best expressed by the saying *ba eng me* (meaning, they have caused it). This diagnosis connotes the idea that someone has deliberately caused a sickness on another for malicious reasons. The one who causes the sickness is often accused of being jealous of some achievement of the afflicted individual or his/her family. At times, the afflicted has offended the one causing the suffering. At other times the one causing the suffering simply wants to demonstrate his/her special powers in order to induce fear, and command respect from the larger community.

For the Frafra, *boo n bo*, *nengbina n yalek*, *owoon nkpe u*, *kiiha* and *ba eng me* refer to the social, physical and spiritual aspects of their social interaction. These classifications seem to be their equivalent of the concepts of symptoms and diagnoses in Western medicine. These classifications of the symptoms and diagnoses reflect the Frafra mythical world in which the medical, religious, social, psychological, political, and cultural and interconnected and interdependent. When an individual experiences something that disrupts the social, cultural, physiological and spiritual harmony of his or her interactions, then many questions about that individual's body and community ties are raised. These ties are based on ancestral relationships. Hence, *boo n bo*, *ba eng me*, *nengbina n dumet* are used to diagnose and classify Frafra experiences of sickness by invoking the mythical world as the interpretative mechanism.

In the Frafra mythical world, the experience of sickness includes the social, psychological, physical and spiritual. Activities such as fetching water, children playing, falling from a bicycle, and farming clearly suggest that the everyday social activities are both social and spiritual. Their beliefs in the spiritual powers of wind, stones, plants, and rivers also suggest that the cosmos is both physical and spiritual. Consequently, stones, plants and rivers have an impact on the social, psychological, physical, cultural, and spiritual in everyday interactions. Thus, for the Frafra, there is no such dichotomy of actions as profane or sacred. They are at once profane and sacred, medical and religious as well as physical and spiritual.

The diagnosis of sickness resulting from inappropriate contact with the spirits of stones, trees and wind, and straying from the laws of the ancestors demonstrate that the Frafra mythical world is one in which the spiritual world is coterminous with the physical world. To be healthy means to enjoy the full protection of the spiritual powers including the ancestors because one is in the right relationship with social, psychological, physical and cultural ties.

MANIFESTATIONS OF NYA HEALING

Nya healing as holistic/integrative praxis

The studies from Ghana, and other researches cited above support the view that *nya* healing is neither strictly "disease-centered" nor is it only naturalistic as in the case of Western scientific medicine. *Nya* healing is also religious. In my view, the *nya* healing ritual in which a bird or an animal is killed suggests what Ruel (1990) calls "non-sacrificial ritual killing" (1990: 323). The sacrifice in the case of *nya* healing is one in which the fowl "acts as a vehicle rather than a surrogate and the ritual itself is concerned with broader impersonal qualities of life and well-being rather than the personalized deities or spirits that are commonly addressed in sacrifice" (Ruel, 1990: 323). In *nya kaaba*, the ancestors of the healer and the patient are invoked. However, they are invoked not because they caused the sickness but rather, the Frafra believe that the efficacy of the healing rests in their powers. The sickness is caused by a

spiritual contagion; therefore *nya* healing fights this contagion through herbs, words, water and bodily fluids.

In *nya* healing, the Frafra deal with the correspondences between their experiences of sickness and the interpretative functions of their mythical world. In the Frafra mythical world, they believe that human beings can become agents of spiritual powers. They can also use these powers for good or evil. Therefore sickness can be caused by another human being or a spiritual power other than ancestral spirits. This can take the form of a virus, or bacteria, physical harm such as being wounded in an accident, or cut by a cutlass on the farm, to name but a few examples. The purpose of *nya* healing then is to counteract or fight this spiritual contagion in its host's body.

The ancestors are said to reincarnate themselves. So the *nya* healers derive their healing powers from them. In some cases the ancestor is said to reincarnate herself/himself in that person. From the day of conception, the biological embryo also has spiritual, social, psychological and cultural ties based on this belief. The ties are reinforced in the culture by the fact that people call this child by names that express their relationship with this ancestor. This belief is responsible for two inseparable types of causes of sickness and healing. Unfortunately, Westerners like Fortes have treated them separately: the healing to neutralize the contagion and the healing, which address the reason why it is possible for the contagion to invade its host body.

The belief in the origin of the herbs for healing also adds weight to the efficacy of *nya* healing. In most cases, the roots and herbs are collected from trees or plants that are believed to have grown out of the graves of the founding ancestors of the healers. So the spiritual and physical relationship between the ancestors of the healer and the roots and herbs is literal. This is why the strictly bio-pharmacological investigations into the herbs used in indigenous healing should not diminish or negate the spiritual healing potency of the herbs. It also explains why even if these herbs are used for their biochemical properties, the Frafra will still approach *nya* healing from both biochemical and spiritual perspectives according to the interpretative function of their mythic world.

Nya healing works by invoking the holistic functions of the interpretative function of the Frafra mythic world; the basis of belief in the human agency of spiritual powers as well as the ability to mediate and transfer these powers for good or evil. No single theory from any one discipline can offer the holistic understanding looked for in these rituals. I shall therefore attempt a holistic approach by designing *nya* healing as a phenomenon of symbolic representation.

***Nya* healing as a symbolic representation**

In my attempt to analyze *nya* healing as symbolic representation, I believe some insights from psychoanalysis will be helpful, as already indicated. There are some mer-

its with such approaches. In this approach I am primarily concerned with the pre-Oedipus stage of development where symbol formation is critical for the child's sense of identify. I rely on the similarity between symbol formation and use in play therapy and symbol formation and use in ritual

The Frafra, as has already been pointed out, do not separate the religious from the social and the psychological. They experience life as a totality or what we have been describing as an interconnectedness of the social, psychological, spiritual, and religious and the cultural. I am interested here in looking at symbolic formation and its role in play therapy in the Object Relation school pioneered by Winnicott (1958). I believe that there are compelling similarities between *nya kaaba* as symbolic representation and symbolic play in play therapy that allows the latter to offer helpful insights into the former. The similarities between symbol formation and symbolic play as part of the bringing up of a Frafra child, and symbolic formation and play therapy, also convinces me that the latter can help bring insights into the interpretative function of the Frafra mythical world in the symbolic representation of *nya* healing.

Freud (1955: 16) conceptualizes play as an auto-therapeutic process. He writes: It is clear that in their play, children repeat everything that has made a great impression on them in real life, and that in doing so they address the strength of the impression and, as one might put it, make themselves master of the situation. It can also be observed that the unpleasurable nature of an experience does not always suit it for play. If the doctor looks down on a child's throat or carries out some small operation on him, we may be quite sure that these frightening experiences will be the subject of the next game; ...As the child passes over from the passivity of the experience to the activity of the game, he hands on the disagreeable experience to one of his play mates and in this way revenges himself on a substitute.

The role of the interpretative function of their mythical world in healing is best understood by Bretherton's (1984: 37) comparison between the healer and a mature artist:

Mature artists in their fictive event represent play much more consciously with the potential map-territory confusions and destructions and with the paradoxes of metacommunication than do young children. Some try to pack as many layers of meaning into a literary work or painting as possible. Others try to eliminate meaning altogether and play only with texture of paint and language. Some try to imagine alternative worlds or utopias, others tease an audience with inappropriate or omitted metacommunication, and yet others explore the paradox of levels of creating plays with plays and pictures with pictures.

There are two concepts that make clear the significance of using symbolic play as a metaphor for understanding how the Frafra mythical world functions as an interpreta-

tive mechanism in *nya* healing. The first one is word “map-territory.” A map of a place such as Lagos is Lagos represented on a paper that one can put in one’s pocket. With the map and the skill of reading maps one can go to Lagos and visit any places of interest. Yet there is a difference between the Lagos on paper and the physical territory of Lagos. One cannot read through the map of Lagos and claim to have been to Lagos. The map serves as a representation of the territory of Lagos and yet it is not Lagos. Similarly, *nya* healing as a ritual system is a “map-territory” of the Frafra mythical world.

The other word is “meta-communication.” “Meta-communication” connotes the idea that there is a common basic understanding presumed by child, therapist and parents, or the artists and audience that is necessary for them to know when an action is literal or non-literal. For example, meta-communication is a prerequisite for the mother to know when the child is actually crying, or play crying. Meta-communication is also necessary to distinguish reality from “make-believe.” However, one cannot define “make-believe” as simply a deceptive or false representation. One should rather compare “make-believe” reality in representation with actual life reality as the map of Lagos is to the territory of Lagos.

The construction of all mythical worlds in general and the Frafra mythical world in particular is best understood by Winnicott’s ideas (1958) on the formation of transitional objects and transitional phenomena in children. When a baby is born, the baby has no sense of independent existence from the mother. Both the baby and the mother are one as far as the baby is concerned. In the course of time, the baby kicks, clenches her or his fist, and slowly replaces the breast with her or his thumb. From the thumb, the child begins to favour an object that is not the mother. In most cases parents allow the child to become emotionally attached to this object. This object varies from child to child as well as culture to culture. In one culture, it is a teddy bear; in another it is a hand band (Winnicott 1958). Winnicott (1958: 5) calls this total experience of child and transitional object as “transitional phenomena.” The transitional phenomenon is the cultural symbol formation process. Freud (1965) refers to such objects as the thumb, the teddy bear, the talisman and hand band as transitional objects (Freud 1965). According to Winnicott transitional objects and transitional phenomena are the “designation of the intermediate area of experience between the thumb and the teddy bear, between the oral eroticism and true object relationship, between primary creative activity and projection of what has already been projected between primary acknowledgement of indebtedness” (1958): 37).

The above explanations offer insights on why the symbols of *nya* healing are inseparably related to the Frafra mythical world. These explanations also show that *nya* healing of the old world of pain or hurt is brought into focus with the potential world of healing or comfort. The symbols constructed in play provide the child with opportunities to play out his/her feelings of tension, frustration, insecurity, aggression, fear, bewilderment, and confusion. Similarly, in *nya* healing, the Frafra reconstruct their

mythical world, which they use to express and maintain their interconnectedness and all aspects of their well-being. These symbols are cultural transitional objects of the Frafra mythical world as well as reasons as to why *nya* healing provides holistic healing.

The healer re-enacts a social context in which the sick person and his/her community experience life anew. By re-enacting their common mythical worlds, they manipulate the symbols to get rid of this unpleasant experience. *Nya* healing then constructs a social reality in which the passive attitudes of the sick person and his/her community become active. Their repressed feelings become expressive, and the blurred meanings they attach to their experiences become clearly focused.

Nya healing as in play therapy is a phenomenon of representation of symbols in which the symbols are not "organized in terms of taxonomic structures or classification hierarchies but in terms of event schemata or scripts that are skeletal frameworks of everyday events"(Bretherton, 1984). *Nya* healing as symbolic representation is also an event representation phenomenon. The processes, by means of which the symbols are constructed, reveal multiple levels of meanings for the participant. It must be emphasized that for the Frafra, there is a direct correlation between the symbols in *nya* healing and their mythic world.

In *nya* healing, the healer uses different meta-communication options to project a shared mythic world and shared realities in the mythic world represented by shared symbols. The "make believe" in *nya* healing enables the sick person to create subjunctive variants on situations they face. Hofstadter (1979: 443) offers an important explanation of the term subjunctive world:

The creation of subjective worlds in ritual happens so casually and naturally, that we hardly notice what we are doing. We select from our fantasy a world, which is close, in some internal mental sense, to the real world. We compare what is real with what we perceive as almost real. In so doing we gain some intangible kind of perspective on reality. Think how immeasurably poorer our lives would be if we did not have this capacity for slipping out of the midst of reality into soft 'what ifs'!

CONCLUSION

It is obvious from the foregone analysis that the Frafra mythical world plays an important role as an interpretative mechanism in indigenous, causes, diagnosis classifications, and the efficacy of the healing rituals. I demonstrate that there is an inseparable unity of the social, the spiritual and the cultural, which reflects itself in the unity between symbols, ritual and the mythic world of the Frafra. Such a unity justifies the use of an interdisciplinary method in the investigation and analysis of the data. Also, Frafra oral diagnostic manuals and *nya* healing are symbolic constructions of their mythical world. The entire ritual system creates a subjunctive world for the

mythical world to perform its interpretative functions in times of sickness. The meta-communication between the healer, the sick and the entire community makes it imperative for the invocation of the mythical world. The investigation revealed that most of the healers in all the categories also possess skills, technique, knowledge of treatment of fractures, chiropractice, physiotherapy, family, and social therapy. The notion of sickness as a contagion and the Frafra belief that humans are agents of spiritual powers have important implications. The holistic approach in diagnosis and treatment of sickness in *nya* healing can also contribute to the debate between medicine and medical ethics and ecological ethics. Such unity between the shared mythical world and the creation of subjective variant situations in *nya* healing makes it possible for the Frafra mythical world to engage in its holistic interpretative functions. This suggests that any modern development interventions in the area of health should begin with the Frafra self understanding of well-being.

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