

## THE ISLAMIC DIALOGUE WITH AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION: DIVINATION AND HEALTH CARE

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**Abstract**—In rural Africa delivering better health care is more complicated than simply offering good medical services; it must also take into account peoples' religious orientation and *beliefs*. Here the non-material causes of illness are at least as important as the biological or material and, in many places, one can only determine the exact nature of the problem and its corresponding remedy after the fact, through a process involving divination and sacrifice. In northern Ghana, by adapting to traditional methods of divination, Islam is gradually introducing a *future perspective* and expanding the possibilities of *preventative action*. By so doing it is bringing about a religio-epistemological transformation that is, among other things, helping people to understand and make better use of Western bio-medicine and primary health care programs. The author argues for a similar adaptation and *dialogue* between African traditional beliefs and Western medical institutions.

*Key words*—beliefs, future perspective, preventative action, dialogue

### INTRODUCTION

From the viewpoint of someone in the field [1] one of the weaker links in African rural health care programs is education. In northern Ghana for example, despite extensive campaigns to educate villagers in water sanitation for the prevention of guinea worm, and other water borne diseases, there has been little change. No doubt more time is required to change something as basic as people's eating and drinking habits, but the high level of resistance in N. Ghana [2] to such rudimentary measures like boiling and filtering drinking water leads one to suspect that there is a culture-based nexus of miscommunication here.

In the Tamale area, for example, borehole water, which is quite potable, is rejected for 'more tasty' (but less wholesome) river or 'dugout' water. But the deeper, underlying reason for not drinking this 'safe' water is that in the minds of the people it is contaminated with the spirits of the ancestors. The white sediment in the water confirms their suspicions.

The final, ambitious objective of PHC campaigns is not merely to change a number of isolated habits and activities, but to change the way people think—to eventually get people to think in Western bio-medical categories, anticipating problems before they happen. This is not easy. The scientific principles fundamental to Western health care are not at all basic to the thinking of rural Africa. African traditional thinking processes, including those surrounding the cultural complex of illness management, are both strong and resistant to change.

This is not to say that there are no inroads being made. Those Western services and treatments which Africans deem an improvement over existing tech-

niques for problem solving and illness management are readily adopted on a 'self-help basis'; for example, the enormously popular chloroquine injections for malaria and the widespread use of antibiotics. The incentives for using them are strong and the results unequivocal. But, most importantly, their use does not require the acceptance of the entire Western medical institution or even a change in worldview. Insights, if any, gained from the use of these medicines will not necessarily affect other areas of medical care and will often lead to serious abuses [3]. Such isolated changes in practice rarely lead to a revision of one's basic premises regarding the dynamics of illness and health.

Greater progress and longer lasting results might be achieved if less time were spent trying to get Africans to think like Westerners and more time spent trying to discover how the basic elements of Western medical knowledge and the principle of anticipation can be incorporated into traditional systems of thought and action so that they make sense from the perspectives of the local people.

There is strong resistance to such an approach mainly because of the enormous success of bio-medicine in the 20th century and the power, wealth and prestige that Western medical institutions wield. However, the viewpoint that sooner or later Africans will have to accept that Western medical practice is better than their own, is objectionable more than simply because of the Western hubris implied. It also prevents the discovery of a higher truth through dialogue.

One of the most persistent blocks to cultural dialogue resulting in the ultimate miscommunication of our Western medical institutions in rural Africa is

our strong ethnocentrism. African systems of thought and institutions are simply not taken seriously. Disregard fosters miscommunication. The miscommunication, in turn, prevents us from developing scientifically and culturally sound indigenous skills and practices which will improve the quality of health and life as a whole.

Dialogue is important because the "way of the White Man," as Africans describe it, is not necessarily better for the African in a number of important ways. Success, for example, is rarely measured in purely material terms, and the legitimate questions that concern them, namely the primary and secondary levels of causality, i.e. "who or what sent the bug here in the first place, and why did it affect me and not the other person," are not answered by science. But, most importantly, the spirit world—the ancestors, spirits of the 'wild,' spirits of divination and ecstatic spirits of possession, personal guardian spirits, magical 'medicines' and mystical devices, witchcraft, and God—though not a part of the 'material base' of Western science, are absolutely basic to African experience and problem-solving.

Even though Western medical science recognizes no efficacy beyond the psychological regarding these thinking processes, and as a result ignores them, they have not ceased to exist. Even though PHC programs continue to harp on prevention, the people continue to wait until an illness becomes unmanageable before turning to Western medicine. The reason is clear: Western medicine does not have answers to Africa's most fundamental and persistent questions. Furthermore, it cannot claim to cure all ills, and it is here that the African will say, "this is an African problem and needs an African solution." When the Western forms of treatment fail, people return to their more traditional forms of problem-solving.

#### OBJECTIVES

In this paper I would like to introduce another set of culture-based institutions which are militating for change in the African world, namely, those of Islam. Islam takes quite a different position from that of Western medical science. It conducts a dialogue from inside the cultural base and thinking processes of the people and because of this stance that which is communicated makes sense when viewed from the perspective of the people.

I shall be speaking of the typical form of Islam in Black Africa, as has been described by Trimmingham [4-6], which was carried across the trade routes of the Sahara and has had a thousand years to take root, develop, and be refined in the African crucible. It is an Islam that makes sense out of a complex of African institutions including those of religion and medicine, enters into these systems on their own terms, and transforms them from within bringing about slow but lasting changes. It adapts to local circumstances but also gradually transforms the

structures of society. This Islam takes African problem-solving very seriously. At the same time, it insinuates into the African mentality and institutions some fundamentally new perspectives which can be a solid epistemological base for Africans to develop their own medical systems, not incompatible with medical science.

I will attempt to analyse this process by which Islam adapts itself, yet at the same time, precipitates change, by examining the practice of divination. Divination is uniquely suited for this investigation since it both reflects the social structure and reveals the underlying dynamics regarding the management and control of illness. It is central to the traditional process of problem-solving and illness management and has been incorporated by Islam as it is practiced in West Africa.

To bring us down to earth, I will begin with a brief look at the divination process among the Anufo of N. Ghana. I have published elsewhere [7] an account of the way in which the divination process symbolically reconstructs the Anufo universe in terms of relationships between real and mystical agents. The situational rules and idealized patterns of action employed by these agents form a model of a system of religious knowledge.

But it also models an ideal version of society as a whole. Divination frames the problematic situation of a client in terms of imbalanced relations within an ideally conceived social structure, thereby both describing and affirming the power relations within this structure. It molds society by prescribing a strategy of re-harmonization in the established terms of these ideal power relations. I will examine the relationship of divination to the social structures, and in terms of a process of re-harmonizing relations in the seen and un-seen worlds. Although this appears to be a very static-harmonious intellectualisation of what actually happens on the ground, in reality, there is much leeway for dialogue with other systems and for incorporation of new ideas in a flexible atmosphere of adaptation and change.

My main objective will be to consider the religious and social dynamics of this dialogue and the changes that have occurred in the process of divination itself and in the traditional system of knowledge. Then I shall draw some implications for an improved dialogue between African Traditional Religion and Western medical science.

#### DIVINATION AND THE SOCIAL STRUCTURE

African divination has most often been presented, not as a means of predicting the future, but in terms of its role in explaining the past [8-10]. It links with the past, with the ancestors, with the way things are in an ideal order, and it points the way to re-harmonize the chaotic elements at the root of the misfortune. Anufo traditional divination, like that of other peoples of N. Ghana [9, 10, p. 346] also faces the past.

In so doing it reflects the Anufo social structure and system of knowledge.

Many authors have noted the symbolic relationship between divinatory symbols and the world at large [10, pp. 352–353]. Turner [12, 13 p. 242] has said of the Ndembu that it should be possible to look at the social structure to determine the elements of symbolic units used in their divination. Willis [14, p. 278] speaks of the body in certain kinds of illness being used as a “kind of cosmological map”. I have shown in an earlier publication [7, pp. 126–127] that both cowrie divination and the use of the diviner’s stick pointing to various parts of the body communicate symbolically. Through the use of the cowries and the wand, the diviner offers a portal to the ‘true world’ and graphically reconstructs an ideal social structure in terms of visual and verbal symbolic units which bear a direct correspondence to the five hierarchical categories of mystical power relations among the Anufo. These will be discussed below.

#### ANUFO SOCIAL STRUCTURE

The Anufo of Northern Ghana are a part of a larger group of peoples extending into N. Togo having linguistic and cultural affinities. They are an amalgam of two distinct social systems: (1) a tripartite ‘Estate’ type of system [15] of ‘Nobles’ (*Donzom*), ‘Commoners’ (*Njem*), and ‘Muslims’ (*Nkaramom*) and (2) a subordinate group descended from the surrounding autochthonous peoples (the Kombas, Konombas and Biobas of N. Ghana). The peoples being considered in this paper, commonly called the ‘Nalori’ Anufo, are of the latter group.

The social organization consisting of patrilineal, patrilocal kin-groupings, the authority structures, particularly at the household (*awulu*) levels, their subsistence agricultural economy, and especially their worldview, religious beliefs and the values, shrines, rituals and behaviour that proceed from these beliefs, vary little from their present day kinsmen, the Komba and Konkomba, whom Cornevin generically refers to as the ‘Paraguruma’ [16].

Thus the Nalori Anufo have combined two distinct social systems. There are parallel systems of governance: an elaborate state system and a simple acephalous. There are dual economic systems: subsistence agricultural and (at least formerly) a feudal pre-capitalist structure with specializations in trade (especially slave-trade), smithing, weaving, and leather work. There is a dual reckoning of kin-groupings: one of the segmentary lineage type as described by Tait [9] and the other, whether or not there be any biological connection, by affiliation with one of the three Anufo estates. But most important for our paper, they manifest dual religious systems: the ancestor-based worldview and beliefs of the Konkombas combined with a flexible Dyula-based old Qadiriyya Islam [5, p. 169].

#### ISLAMIC INFLUENCE

In earlier publications [17, 7, pp. 43–44, 18], I have described a gradual process of Islamization among the Anufo by which Nobles and, now, Commoners have begun to convert (*bu yo tuba*) (Ar. *tauba* repentance) [4, p. 248]. Islamic elements of etiquette such as their distinctive handshake, urinating while squatting, greetings and salutations, blessings, clothing, ceremonial activities such as marriage and name-giving are all a part of the shared general culture. Formerly Commoners did not (indeed could not) convert to Islam, for being a Muslim was not a matter of choice but of inheritance; not a system of beliefs but a profession. The Muslim clerisy formed a distinct political and social unit within the larger cultural group and they used their literate skills on behalf of the chief’s court. They prayed for the common good, made and sold protective amulets, performed limited surgery, and controlled the weaving and trading industries. Nobles were always considered to be honorary Muslims, but as aristocracy they were already on a higher plain than the Muslims.

Due to political and economic pressures most of the Nobles began to more closely identify themselves with Islam in the 1930s. This was not an isolated instance. Froelich [19] mentions that Islam made more profound progress in fifty years of Colonial rule than in the thousand years preceding it. In N. Ghana ‘Indirect Rule’ tended to foster Islam and this inadvertently provided the aristocracy of the ruling tribes of N. Ghana with an alternative channel of power with which to further their own interests. But in recent years the movement toward Islam has begun to include those of humble origins as well, and it has been accompanied by a gradual change in world-view and in problem solving methods. The change in problem solving is especially manifest in the divination methods of diviners who have become Muslims.

#### ANUFO DIVINATION

If we leave out oracles of ordeal, witch-catching shrines and some specialized oracles for determining the cause of death like ‘corpse carrying’ [7, p. 106], the Anufo in Ghana solicit three main types of diviners. These can be described as (1) the Komba type of cowrie-diviner, or that of the Anufo Commoners, in which the forms and their meanings are exactly the same as those of their neighbors the Kombas and Konkombas, (2) the Muslim estate type of divination (*miebo*) which involves marking in sand, and (3) Muslim cowrie-divination which combines elements of both. I understudied diviners representing each of these types and will be making comparisons between them. Please refer to the three diagrams as they are being compared.

## COWRIE DIVINATION

With the Anufo, as with the Sisala 103, and many other peoples of the Volta basin, this form of divination makes use of a set of ten cowrie shells which are cast by a diviner (*munsueyifo*) on behalf of his client. Among the Anufo, the method is called *munsueyi*. Christaller [20] provides evidence that this is probably from the Akan root for 'mischief, calamity or misfortune,' thus meaning the removal of misfortune. This is confirmed by a similar usage in neighboring groups. Pollock [21] makes reference to a 'ceremony of reconciliation' among the Atwodi called *mmusuo* which is performed to remove mystical dangers. Similar references emphasizing the removal of such spiritual dangers are also found in E. N. Goody [15, p. 241] and in Steemers [22, p. 3]. The purpose of the institution is to investigate the underlying causes of misfortune in order to remove them. Although, among the Anufo and their neighbors, the actual removal of the pollution (*fi*) viewed as the cause of the misfortune, is done by means of sacrifice at the appropriate shrine by the client himself rather than by the diviner.

Thus, unlike other types of diviner in Eastern and Central Africa, the Anufo *munsueyifo* is only a diagnostician, not a healer. He, like the shells and his other paraphernalia (the bag [*kuruku*], wand [*munsue baka*], and shrine [*munsue amue*]) is regarded as only the vehicle by which the spirit of divination makes known the unseen power relations at the root of the problem. Household heads acting on the behalf of extended families and elders on behalf of the village, regularly visit them to seek guidance in their decisions, check for impending difficulties, enquire as to the cause of a given misfortune, and receive direction about the exact nature of sacrifice that must be made at a particular shrine.

Unlike some of their neighbors (e.g. the Sisalas) [10], the Anufo do not limit the source of misfortune to the ancestors alone but also include territorial spirits, 'spirits of the wild' and personality shrines as well as impersonal natural forces as possible trouble sources. Incidents such as lightning striking the compound, incest, or beating an elderly person, can all destroy basic harmonious rhythms in nature and produce a state of pollution which can bring about misfortune or illness etc. to anyone in the compound.

## THE ANUFO SPIRIT UNIVERSE

Among the Anufo there are five levels of mystical intervention which relate directly to the ways in which the Anufo structure their relationships among themselves, with nature, and the wider world. Since they are culturally prescribed ways of perceiving, and thus categorizing, problems, they are also the focus of and provide the agency for problem-solving. These categories include:

1. God (*Nyeme*) who has no shrine, but can be contacted through holy men or people thought to be close to God such as Muslims or Christian missionaries, especially through prayer and almsgiving (*salaka*). The sphere of God's authority covers relations and events over large geographical areas or between states and ethnic groups; but it also impinges on individual affairs in times of crisis. The Anufo refer a matter to God, for example, when all other agencies have been tried and found wanting.

2. Territorial spirits and their shrines (*mie amue*) govern the relations among peoples of a given geographical location. They are therefore sought out in times of famine, drought, pestilence, widespread diseases of man and beast, war and widespread infertility.

3. Shrines of the kin-group which include the household itself (*awulu*), the ancestral shrines (*awulu amue*) shrines passed through affinal kin (*amue tale*), and the personal shrines of long dead ancestors. All matters affecting the relationships between members of the kin-group and their general welfare are at issue here.

4. Personal identity and destiny shrines, which harbor one's ancestral spirit (*afiili*) and one's personal spirit guardian (*nyeme*) (small 'n'), are all subsumed under the same shrine context (also called *nyeme*). Here psychological and personality difficulties which do not involve the family are treated. This is a more expansive category than the 'individual' level because the personhood of a man's wife and children are subsumed under his shrine and are identified with him.

5. Individual 'self help' or 'medicine' shrines (*ayili se*) which range from various sorts of spiritual agents (usually spirits of the wild (*jinam*)) who may enter into private contracts with individuals for good or evil purposes to various forms of magical devices or herbal remedies, amulets and Western medicine (especially tablets and injections) are combined in this category. Such 'self-help' devices are available to all (including women and children) on an individual basis. They are readily traded, bought and sold, and except for the various forms of spirits of the wild (which may include divination spirits and fertility spirits), do not usually have shrines, shrine custodians or require sacrifices.

## DIVINATION PROCESS

The symbolic formats and vocabulary of individual symbols [7, pp. 127-142], are common and are accepted, with minor deviations, by all Anufo cowrie diviners and, indeed, by all elders and household heads as well. Therefore, rather little interpretation is given by the diviner and, ideally, the less the diviner speaks the more the process is thought to be governed directly by the spirit of divination. The client sees the roots of his problem in the cowries and the rest follows from this. The diviner need not give advice,

for the cowries have said everything. That is, once the problem is manifest, the corresponding shrine and spiritual agent can be readily identified. By repetitively casting the cowries, a number of recurrent themes begin to emerge. Then the problematic area is gradually narrowed until the solution is discovered in terms of a sacrifice at a particular shrine.

Situational spheres including the household, the larger territorial domain, issues related to chieftaincy and rank, or the individual/personal context also have their own specific cowrie symbols. These are identified as general concepts such as: "life, death, fertility, illness, victory, defeat, secret, public, success and failure, prevention, protection, security, chaos/disaster, general agreement." A number of types of misfortunes are also symbolized including: "disunity, quarrels, illness, death, death in battle, snake-bite, physical combat, loss of property, bad death, woman trouble, man trouble, court case, bad luck, failure, bad pregnancy, loss in personal relationship, anger, sorrow, and dejection."

Sometimes the symbol for a particular type of shrine or type of sacrifice that is identified with a shrine turn up frequently in a divinatory session. This signals a possible problem in that area. Some cowrie combinations symbolize actual shrines such as those for the "spirits of the wild," the personality shrine, the divination shrine, medicine shrines, territorial shrines, and shrines in general. There are also specific symbols for colors, which can become referents for particular shrines, sacrifices or types of misfortune, and whether the misfortune is impending or actual. Once shrines are identified, the problem is automatically categorized in one of the five hierarchical levels of problem-solving (i.e. God, Territory, Kin-group, Personal, Individual). Then by virtue of the type of problem, its intensity and duration etc., the nature of sacrifice is determined. These are labeled by color [23], by the type of animal [24] to be sacrificed, by food [25], or any combination of these. Then it is the client's task to make the appropriate sacrifice, secure in the belief that things will soon be back to normal. If the problem continues, the method is not disproved but the client simply makes another trip to the diviner to discover the extenuating circumstances.

#### MUSLIM DIVINATION

Most Muslim converts continue to use cowrie divination to solve their most crucial problems. But in the hands of Muslim diviners this process of divination is gradually changing. For an understanding of how it is changing I will turn to a method of divination that, in Anufoland, is considered to be a model of Islamic orthodoxy—that of 'sand divination' (*miebo*). Much like the Nupe procedure (*hati*) [26], the Anufo sand diviners make markings in sand and then propose to read in them events of fortune or misfortune relevant to the client. This method

functions less as a utilitarian method of solving problems than as an idealistic new way to perceive them.

The Anufo system [27] organizes itself in terms of three broad interpretative groupings: (a) those codes referring to wealth, success, health and high social position, (b) those signs referring to poverty, misfortune, ill-health, and other worries of the moment, (c) those related to sex and men's control over women's reproductivity.

When comparing these themes with those of cowrie diviners, a number of traits are immediately evident. The themes are much more 'optimistic' or accented toward good fortune, than those of cowrie divination. They are also more explicitly dualistic, for ultimately all of the interpretations break down to either a specific bad or good fortune. I recorded 10 out of a total of 16 figures as 'optimistic,' three neutral with three 'pessimistic' themes. In sand divination, however, even the pessimistic or bad signs are to be viewed as only predicting the possibility of impending evil which, it is thought, can be avoided by means of magical amulets, prayer and almsgiving. All the 'houses' (*talu*) [4, p. 248] or four patterns of four marks in the sand, are rather to be regarded as starters for discussion than as conclusive pronouncements. The tracing in the sand itself, and the predictions that result, are really only the basis for a discussion of the client's problems into which the Malam injects his views and advice. The advice of the Malam usually involves prayer, almsgiving and the use of magical talismans made by the sand-divining Muslim cleric himself.

#### MUSLIM COWRIE DIVINATION

The principles and procedures of sand divination are meant to influence the way in which misfortunes are experienced and interpreted by an Anufo convert. Gradually, the ancestors are replaced by God as crucial agent, and all measures of redress are replaced by prayer and almsgiving. Ancestor sanction is replaced by a moral code, and the idea that divination looks to past events to determine the cause of misfortune is replaced with the concept of preventative action and a view to the future. Sand divination thus encourages the client both to frame the problem from an Islamic worldview and to choose a solution acceptable to Islam.

In the African context, then, divination is not in itself considered un-Muslim but rather the opposite, as Nadel has mentioned of the Nupe [26, p. 65]. "Divination is clearly one of the tools bestowed by God upon man so that he may be better fitted to cope with the practical problems of life on earth; but these include also the problem of handling successfully all the other transcendental tools." Sand divination introduces the Muslim perspective to traditional problem solving. It attempts to re-order the process and the tools (shrines) for dealing with the problems

At the other end of the spectrum are the Komba influenced diviners of the Anufo Commoners who operate most successfully within the acephalous type of political framework and who anticipate in their clients misfortune or disrupted familial or social relations (including relations with ancestors). They are retrospective, the majority of their thematic divination signs are pessimistic and make broad references to spirit agents and shrines which seek redress and renewal. However, neither of these groups exist in isolation from one another and even within their separate groupings elements of procedure and methods of interpretation are regularly co-opted.

Evidence of such borrowing is to be found in the growing number of cowrie diviners who combine elements of the Muslim worldview in the divination process. Their clientele tends to include Commoner converts to Islam (*tubafo*). At first glance this would seem to repudiate the process of Islamization observed by Trimmingham [4, p. 103] which views the traditional shrines and their custodians, especially the compound elders, as a threat to Islam. This is because the compound elder as the director of cult ceremonies "stands at the central point of the social organization acting as intermediary between this world and the unseen in the communal interests." But if the shrine custodianships of the elders are regarded as an intrinsic threat to Islam, and are denounced accordingly, it is interesting to note that diviners and magicians are not—at least not initially. This is because the magician and diviner are seen as individuals acting on their own interests. Their symbols and advice can, therefore, be adapted to new cults. In other papers [17, 18] I have discussed the process of Islamic

conversion in terms of the incorporation of the most important levels of spirit intervention (i.e. the levels of God, Territorial Spirits and Kin-group spirits) into the Islamic worldview first and then the gradual transformation of the more individual-based spirit and magical phenomena second. This research then both confirms and augments Trimmingham's thesis.

#### THE DIALOGUE BETWEEN ISLAM AND TRADITIONAL SYSTEMS OF KNOWLEDGE

Here lie the three foundations of commonality upon which Muslims build the bridge of dialogue with the traditionalist system of knowledge: the concept of sovereignty, the concept of a reservoir of sacrificial power to maintain harmonious balance among the universe of spiritual entities, and the future-based concept of prevention. The progression is from an elaboration of the concept of God's sovereignty to access to God through storing up units of positive power by prayer and meritorious action, to use of this power to prevent misfortunes, to access to a future orientation and a strategy of planning.

Anufo Commoners believe in a sovereign God. They are sensitive to a certain irony in their sacrificial actions, for example, which would seem to belie their belief in God as the supreme power and authority. This can be seen in statements like 'all sacrifices are lies' (*i kele ti kole*), or 'sacrifices are not good' (*tieyo ti a kpa*) and in the invocations made to God when pouring the libations that precede every sacrifice. But this sovereignty is not keenly felt because of God's inaccessibility. The Anufo say, "Has anyone seen God?"

Table 1. Traditionalist vs Muslim divination

Cowrie divination	Muslim Cowrie divination	Muslim sand divination
<i>Mechanics of divination</i>	<i>Mechanics of divination</i>	<i>Mechanics of divination</i>
Ten cowries	Ten cowries	Markings in sand
Etiquette stresses divination shrine	Etiquette stresses power of God	Etiquette stresses power of God
Extensive symbolic vocabulary	Limited symbolic vocabulary	Arcane mathematical vocabulary
Some cowries symbolize shrines	No shrines symbolized	No shrines symbolized
Concentration on red/black symbolism	Concentration on white symbolism	Focus on Quran as solution
Mostly pessimistic symbols	Optimistic symbols	Markings are neutral/interp important
Negatively valenced	Positively valenced	Neutral valence
<i>Interpretation of divination</i>	<i>Interpretation of divination</i>	<i>Interpretation of divination</i>
Diviner passive/div spirit active	Diviner active/div spirit less active	Diviner completely in charge/no spirit
Emphasis on Spirit's guidance	Emphasis on deductive logic	Emphasis on skill of diviner
Emphasis on past	Emphasis on present/future	Emphasis on future
Pessimistic outlook	Optimistic: life/health	Optimistic and preventative
Seeks solution with shrines/not God	Solutions with shrines through God	Solutions through God's 'name' (word)
Diviner does not question client	Diviner questions client	Extensive dialogue with client
No advice given client	Diviner advises client throughout	Diviner advises client throughout
the cowries speak for themselves	to seek practical solutions	to seek Islamic remedies
Stresses placation of spirits	Stresses placation of spirits	Stresses power of God's word
through sacrifice	through lada (merit)	through lada/through the clerics
General prevention not viable:	General prevention possible:	Prevention is possible with help:
too many agencies involved	focus is on God first	focus on God
each agency controls special areas	all agents controlled by God	other agents not important
powers are unpredictable	God is predictable	only Islamic 'word' necessary
concept of storage not developed	possible to store merit	merit gained with help of clerics
The cowrie symbolism is specific	The cowrie symbolism is general	No symbolism/arcane quasi-math formulae
The interpretation follows cowries	Interpretation not linked to cowries	Far fetched, circuitous explanations
The interpretation is objective	The interpretation is subjective	Interpretation highly subjective
Interpretation is final diagnosis	Interpretation is basis for discussion	Interpretation is a format for teaching

according to an Islamic set of priorities. It, therefore, gradually reduces the need to go to cowrie diviners since it reinforces Islamic solutions to recurrent problems.

There are very few sand diviners in Nalori but there are many cowrie diviners who have incorporated its underlying principles into cowrie divination. Today there are a growing number of Muslim cowrie diviners who have adapted their traditional practice to the needs and questions of a Muslim clientele. These are having a marked effect on the every-day lives of Anufo both Muslim and non-Muslim alike. At this point, I would like to compare the methods used by this type of cowrie diviner with the more traditional type.

My Muslim cowrie diviner, Bawa, made use of the same set of ten cowries but gave slightly different interpretations to these common signs. He did not use specialized cowries to depict shrines as did other cowrie diviners. His symbolic vocabulary was also much less extensive than that of the normal non-Muslim diviners. Most of the cowrie symbols carried a number of meanings depending on their context. Bawa's interpretation depended less on the context of cowrie castings than on the relationship developing between the diviner and the client, and, unlike other diviners, he felt quite free to enquire about certain problem areas of his client

Bawa emphasized 'white' offerings rather than sacrifice to insure a continuation of good things and to prevent misfortune. The concept of *lada* (Ar. *alada*, custom) or 'merit' was prominent. Instead of the mystical source of the trouble 'eating' the client, it 'eats' the white offering, or as Bawa put it, "When disaster opens its mouth to 'eat' you, give it something else to 'eat'."

Another basic difference in the perspective of Muslim cowrie diviners is alluded to in Bawa's explanation of how the diviner is influenced by the spirit of divination. My non-Muslim diviner informants placed a good deal of emphasis on being tuned into the divination spirit, but Bawa seemed rather lax in this regard nor did he have as much divination paraphernalia to insure this as they did. The interpretation Bawa put on the cowries was much more important and indicative of the true 'spirit' of divination than allowing the cowries to speak for themselves. As Bawa put it, "It is the brains (*ti boroko*) in my head that are the inspiration for my interpretation of the cowries. Then from the brains to the heart." The emotional surge was also reckoned as important. Bawa occasionally described his hair rising on end under the spirit's direction. But this thrill never obscured the light of reason.

The strongest difference between Bawa and more traditional cowrie diviners, however, occurred in the tone of optimism that pervaded the sessions. Bawa always started each session by designating two of the cowries as 'life' and 'health,' then periodically throughout the session he would point to the recur-

rence of these cowries or to their intrusion into other themes. Bawa never ended a session without being able to assure his client of an optimistic outcome. Some of the standard optimistic pronouncements he used included: "general agreement (*ano se*), other agreement (*sese su*), a gift (*sa miesu*, lit. hand grasping), good load (*sooli kpa*), exalted (*bie kpa*), victory (*telemasu*), running (*ngmatili*, lit. making sacrifice will bring you luck), success (*nahole*, lit. truth), white teeth or laughing (*je fofoe*), happiness (*je wo nu*), good all around (*bie ni fombolo*), white is there (*fofoe wo nu*)."

Bawa seemed more subjective than other cowrie-diviners. He found it nearly impossible to give the cowrie configurations the same interpretation twice (although such cowrie configurations, as I said above, were almost always recognized and consistently identified by non-Muslim diviners). If I gave Bawa a verbal signal like, 'telemasu' he found it impossible to lay out the cowries in that configuration. Bawa was very specific, however, and left nothing to the imagination of the client. While explaining a scenario in great detail he habitually pointed rather arbitrarily to the various cowries without making much of an effort to have them conform to any symbolic vocabulary. His method in this respect was very reminiscent of Amidu's sand divining. Although he took great care to label every detail, if I asked him to repeat, he would proceed to give another interpretation entirely. Such "far-fetched and circuitous explanations" were also observed of the Nupe Muslim diviners by Nadel [26, p. 47]. Bawa's interpretive method depended very little on symbolic consistency in the cowries and had little 'objectivity,' but demonstrated a great deal of inspiration or personal subjectivity, and was elaborated for the client in a mock deductive manner. Although his solutions were detailed and lengthy, they stressed the general themes of almsgiving and 'white' offerings which were applicable to any shrine regardless of the problem.

#### ACCOUNTING FOR THE SHIFT IN METHODS

The differences that exist in the divinatory method and interpretation between such Muslim cowrie diviners as Bawa and standard non-Muslim diviners such as Ako demonstrate the case of a knowledge system in a state of change. At one end of the Anufo societal spectrum are the sand diviners with a preference for optimistic, broadly based statements which value predictability and planning. They encourage literacy, and scholarship in interpreting the written word, which is seen as the source of all 'truth' rather than the ancestors. Ecstatic possession is replaced by professional status and clerical expertise as a criterion of authenticity and, outwardly at least, the use of magical devices is eschewed in favor of amulets, talismans, potions and formulas derived directly from the written word (*Nyeme duma*).

Table 2. Comparative worldviews

Cowrie diviner's worldview	Muslim cowrie diviner's worldview	Sand diviner's worldview
Seen vs unseen worlds God is unknown, therefore inactive Unseen world is the 'true' world Power of the Spirits is important Unseen world = the Seen inverted Hierarchy of the Unseen powers 1 Ancestors & Earth Spirits 2 Personality Spirits 3 Magical remedies, witchcraft, etc. 4 God & other last resort measures including Western medicine	Seen vs Unseen worlds God is known and active Seen and Unseen worlds are one Power of God and the Spirits Unseen world = the Seen intensified Hierarchy of Unseen powers 1 God 2 All other spirit/material agencies are subsumed under God including Western medicine.	Theocentric worldview God active: clerics, ulama, prophets All things subordinate to God Power of God alone is important Unseen is visible through Quran Hierarchy of Unseen Powers 1 God, God's 'word' (magic), cleri 2 Muslim cultural remedies 3 Western medicine

The Muslim concept of the sovereignty of God, while not denying the actions of spirits and ancestors in the lives of people, in effect, subsumes all occult causality under one heading—God. As long as He is pacified (*bu kpata Neme*) all other spiritual relations will ultimately be harmonious. In other words, Islam provides a way to make God accessible. Men may align themselves with God through lawful observances, prayer and almsgiving, and through Him have control over the other spirit agencies.

In the Estate system, professional clerics made God temporarily accessible for certain functions of state and made useful amulets and magical potions (*tibu Ar. medicine*) available to individuals. But, in general, their sphere of influence extended to only three of the levels of spiritual agency—to God, to the territorial level and to the individual level. With the conversion of the Noble Estate, and now with individuals converting to Islam from the Commoner Estate, it is gradually becoming understood that God's sovereignty can be made assessable to everyone at all the five levels. Islam can now meet needs at all five levels of spiritual intervention because, in effect, it allows all five levels of spiritual agency to be subsumed under the first—God.

Access to preventative power arises from the concept of storage. The Anufo non-Muslim Commoners have a well-developed concept of prevention as can be seen from a proverb which was used to describe how sacrifices worked: "If the room was not cracked the cockroach would not get a chance to enter" (*So akpaki ma watalawa nya ma wulabili*). Indeed this view underlies the whole concept of sacrifice. But like their subsistence level grain storage bins, the reservoirs of preventative power are small and only affect the particular shrines to which they are attached.

Just as the extremes in weather and insects seriously curtail the amount of food that can be stored, the variety and number of shrines and their capriciousness makes storage of sacrificial power impractical. To this predicament the Muslims have introduced merit (*lada*) which vastly expands the concept of storage. This idea fits neatly within the traditional worldview in problem solving, for it enables units of sacrificial pacification to be stored up as a bulwark against the wrath of the ancestors or the caprice of a 'spirit of the wild.' It does not diminish the need to make the obligatory sacrifices to the ancestors or, on the prescribed occasions, to renew the spirit shrines, but it lifts the onus of having to continually look to the past for the interpretation and solution of present problems.

This pattern gradually begins to manifest itself in the types of problems that are brought to diviners and in the interpretation of the problem and the advice which now involves preventative action, planning and a future orientation.

Given the high profile concept of a sovereign God and the possibility for unlimited storage as the basis for preventative action, a future orientation gradually replaces a view to the past. This future perspective of Muslim diviners, however, is rudimentary. It is not so much a bi-product of literacy and the concept of linear history [28] as it is the condition for its existence and expansion. It creates new dependencies as well as perspectives. There is a new stress on the specialized skills of the clerisy. People can remain secure in the knowledge that God's power will quell any unforeseen eventuality while proceeding ahead with self-help and scientific knowledge applied to the major problems at hand.

Table 3. Comparative approaches to western medicine

The cowrie diviner's approach to Western medicine	The Muslim cowrie diviner's approach to Western medicine	The sand diviner's approach to Western medicine
Chosen as a remedy only after every other has been tried and failed	Chosen as one of many equal possibilities in God's creation.	Chosen as secondary in importance to Islamic custom and remedies
Unable to choose Western Medicine because process of illness management is socially controlled. Must deal with the unseen forces first.	Western Medicine becomes a valid and logical choice after all possibilities of mystical intervention have been blocked by lada.	Western Medicine is only one of many possible alternatives, all of which are regarded as less important than Islamic remedies.



## CONCLUSION

What I have tried to show here is that the very acceptance and transformation of the institution of divination by Muslim clerics has advanced the process of change in conceptual categories, and is bringing about a cultural transformation. A major characteristic of this transformation is the acquisition of a future perspective and the possibility of preventative action. This, in turn, paves the way for the acceptance of Western bio-medicine.

At one extreme are Muslim 'sand-diviners,' the divination choice of a small minority, who make use of a vocabulary of standard problems and misfortunes which is optimistic in tone, broadly based in the belief that God's sovereignty is accessible and offers a strategy of predictability and control through the accumulation of meritorious acts.

At the other extreme is the divination choice of the vast majority—the non-Muslim Commoners who make use of cowrie diviners to discern the roots of present misfortune by looking to the past. They are retrospective and pessimistic in outlook, and they give highly specific advice at all levels of spiritual agency except the sphere of influence reserved to God. When they have tried every possible shrine and sacrifice to no avail, the Anufo say, "it is now over to God" (*iti Neme jole*). Muslims turn to God at the beginning and non-Muslims turn to God at the end of the problem-solving process. We might equally say that about their turning to Western medicine.

Cowrie-diviners seek the underpinnings of misfortune in the activities of unseen agents which are manipulated and appeased through sacrifices. Muslim sand diviners centralize and consolidate control over such mystical agents in God. Without denigrating the importance of underlying causes, these diviners do not focus on them or attempt to reveal them so much as to give advice that will bring about a solution no matter what the cause.

Sand-divining is marginal to Anufo problem solving. It is one of many methods available to both Muslims and non-Muslims toward more effective self-help schemes. Cowrie-divining, on the other hand, is intrinsic and essential to Anufo life and problem solving. Both Muslims and non-Muslims make use of the cowrie-diviner's services when the revelatory message becomes crucial to the problem solving process.

As the influence of Islam becomes greater, the relations with mystical agents, and the importance of the social relations they represent, tend to fade into the background. It is then that a new form of diviner, the Muslim cowrie-diviner, enters the scene. When misfortunes arise, the mystical agents are no longer immediately suspected. When problems persist and become serious, however, even Muslims must consult cowrie-diviners. But the advice they receive from those with a Muslim perspective tends to confirm

a Muslim interpretation and emphasize solutions acceptable to this mode of thought.

Gradually a new perspective arises. This enlarged perspective then influences other areas of life. Along with a new literate, linear thinking come literal solutions. A dream about death is an indication that there will be a death, not the opposite as would be interpreted by a non-Muslim cowrie-diviner. Dreams become an intensification of the real world about us rather than a revelation of the unseen realities. Planning, calculations and advice, then, become an integral part of the divinatory process for they are better able to mediate and deal with the real world.

This process is evident in the methods and objectives of the Muslim cowrie-diviner Bawa. His optimism, universality in attributing cause, the emphasis on 'white' offerings to counterbalance danger, caprice or malevolence, his advice toward achieving a successful outcome through practical action rather than sacrifice, and his emphasis on God's benevolence all symbolize and gradually bring about a dramatically different worldview than that of the Anufo Commoner diviner as exemplified by Ako.

Anufo shrines and, therefore, the divinatory process itself are more than problem solving mechanisms but are categories actually mediating society's conceptualization of itself. By providing a qualitatively different strategy to problem solving through divination, Islam gradually transforms the worldview of society as a whole.

## APPLICATION TO THE DIALOGUE WITH WESTERN MEDICINE

The dialogue between Islam and the African Traditional Religions of N. Ghana has brought about a shift in worldview and strategies in problem solving, and is quite inadvertently making it possible for large numbers of the African rural population to accommodate the fundamentals of Western bio-medicine.

The transitions are basic and they create the possibilities for a new way of thinking and solving problems. They make possible a new way of detecting and interpreting illness and introduce the possibility of prevention. Thus, quite informally, they prepare traditional minded people to respond to some of the basic premises of Western thought and medicine.

By stressing the sovereignty of God as the first point of dialogue, Islam de-mythologizes the power of local shrines and then becomes the overarching category which re-organizes and subsumes their traditional remedies. In the process, it upgrades medical science to the status of at least an equal partner among the various traditional remedies.

Secondly, the introduction of the Islamic concept of 'merit' (*lada*) has greatly increased awareness of predictability and control in the general population. By focussing on prevention of the problem rather

than simply treating it, Islam does the long-range groundwork for preventative health care.

Thirdly, by creating the possibility of a future orientation and a strategy which necessitates planning, Muslim cowrie-divination is preparing the way for the evolution of an African-based 'scientific-method.'

#### TOWARDS BETTER COMMUNICATION

In the light of the above discussion, the effectiveness of Western medical science in rural Africa could easily be increased by implementing some unconventional measures: first, by discovering, through applied research, the fundamental differences and incompatibilities that exist between African traditional perspectives and those of the West. No amount of parallelism in these systems will eventually insure an overarching scientific perspective. Secondly, where dialogue is already taking place between these perspectives, as in the case of Muslim divination, for example, the effectiveness of the dialogue can be increased by concentrating culturally attuned propaganda on those persons and institutions facilitating this dialogue (in this case the diviners) rather than on the general public.

The reader may note that there is creative adaptation and openness so long as there is dialogue between the forces of tradition and those militating for change (Islam in this case). Once this dialogue is closed, as can easily happen when Muslims become dominant, the possibilities for creative solutions are likely to decline.

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23. 'White' (*fofoe*) is for preventative offerings, *salaka* or almsgiving, Muslim intervention, and for God. 'Red' (*kokole*) is for 'hot' problems involving extreme danger, severe or chronic misfortune and for illness. 'Black' (*bili*) is for the 'Earth' shrine, for evil, for spiritual or physical pollution and for moribund illness and death.
24. Sheep, white chickens and doves are associated with the 'white' shrines and are used as offerings to God, to the personality shrines, and sometimes in connection with other shrines but to prevent any impending misfortune rather than to redress a misfortune that has already occurred. The cow or bull is sacrificed to the 'Earth' shrine, goats and guinea fowls are sacrificed to dangerous shrines such as to medicine shrines or in certain dangerous situations to ancestral shrines and to 'Earth' shrines. Chickens are sacrificed at every level depending on their color but are standard for the ancestral shrines. Other bush animals regarded as polluted such as vulture and toad are often sacrificed as part of rituals involving the purification of anti-social practices or events like 'bad death' or in the preparation of protective medicines used by hunters and medicine men.
25. 'White' foods include milk, honey, bean cakes, millet cakes, rice, millet and guinea corn or any farmed grain (*tukpo ano*) and sometimes coins, cowries and other objects associated with Muslims such as thread or cloth. 'Red' foods include all blood sacrifices. 'Black' foods

- include ritual meals prepared at the renewals of certain types of powerful medicine shrines consisting of 'black soup' (*tolo bili*) made from the calcinated herbal mixture associated with the shrine.
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