FROM BELIEF TO ACTION: EXPLORING THE MEDICO-LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OF OCCULT AND PARANORMAL BELIEFS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract
This study explored the relationship between belief in paranormal and medical and legal practices among Nigerians. Data came from books, media reports and personal interviews. Evidence strongly supports the existence of strong relationship between paranormal beliefs and how Nigerians attend to medical and legal issues. This manifests in frequent cases of ritual killings, referral of sick people to witch doctors and magicians, unconventional oaths by politicians, and apparent use of charms in courts. The attendant consequences include non-utilization of formal medical facilities resulting in rampant cases of avoidable deaths, trial by ordeal, flagrant abuse and neglect of the constitution, and other social vices. Hence, the writer argued that the issue of paranormal and occult beliefs can no longer be treated with levity. Value re-orientation and proper education were recommended as part of measures to curb the negative consequences of the belief in the occult and paranormal.

Key Words: Occult, Paranormal, Normal, Ritual, Charms.

Introduction
Belief in the paranormal and the occult coupled with the attendant practices (positive and negative) has remained one of the most difficult questions and arguments to contend with, especially in this era of globalization and scientifc-technological development. The scenario becomes more disturbing when one notices that many orthodox doctors, scientists and academically-informed people by their various antics and posturing seem to give credence to the occult and the paranormal.

In our world of today, books, magazines, radio and television talks are awash with news of certain individuals who allegedly possess occult and supernatural powers, or who have achieved one paranormal feat or the other. These include stories about persons caught in possession of human heads or other vital organs allegedly meant for rituals aimed at making money influencing court cases as well as making quick sales in business. The claim also extends
to raising the dead to life, predicting future course of events, recovery of lost or stolen property, and curing certain ailments through the mechanism of spoken words, etc.

Belief in the reality of the occult and the paranormal is rife in Africa and especially in Nigeria where I come from. Also rife are cases of occult and paranormal practices: alleged cases of ritual killings, kidnapping, witchcraft, thugsery and other electoral violence, armed robbery, etc. There are also reports about people who refuse certain orthodox treatment (e.g. blood transfusion) on account of their occult or religious belief and die as a result. There are also cases of patients who lost their lives on account of their inability to submit themselves to orthodox diagnosis and medication out of a strong belief that their illnesses were spiritually inflicted. For instance, in the recent time, it was reported (see *The Nation*, July 26, 2014, pp. 14&15) that Goitre is ravaging a certain community in Lagos State of Nigeria, yet most of the victims have continued to stoutly resist medical treatment on the ground that their affliction has a spiritual source and as such can only be handled spiritually. This development has become problematic as it impacts negatively on both human and social development. The need to explore the nexus between paranormal beliefs and attitudinal behavior among Nigerians in the face of prevalence of belief-induced bizarre activities by some Nigerians forms the motivation for this study.

**The Paranormal and the Occult: A Thematic Exposition**

The reality or otherwise of the paranormal and the occult has, no doubt, given both concepts a controversial posture. In this controversial posture, the world of the paranormal and occult has triggered off different theories. Worthy of note, however, is the fact that virtually all the contending schools are in agreement that the paranormal, if it exists, would be any activity or phenomenon whose occurrence is deemed to have taken place contrary to the accepted notions of what is physically possible.

In his contribution to the debate, Paul Kurtz (1986) was of the opinion that the issue of the paranormal should be approached with caution and open mind. To this end, he derided those skeptics and scientists who hold the view that paranormal concepts should be rejected a priori on the ground that they contradict the basic conceptual categories by which we understand and interpret the world. It would be wrong, he argues, for us to rule out such claims as logically impossible, adding that the history of science is replete with such futile attempts.

As Kurtz put it,

> In my view, it is difficult to impose preconceived limits to inquiry or to rule out such claims as logically impossible. The history of science is littered with such vain attempts. Whether or not paranormal phenomena exist and, if they do, how they may be interpreted can only be determined in the last analysis within the process of scientific verification and validation and not antecedent to it (Kurtz, 1986:6).

Kurtz further emphasized the need for subjecting paranormal phenomena to scientific scrutiny in view of the fact that what sometimes appears to be bunkum because it does not accord with the existing level of commonsense may turn out to be true. He distinguished between endoheresis (which are deviations made within the domain of science) and exoheresis (which are deviations made outside of science). While noting that exoheresis are those deviations made outside of science by those who do not use objective methods of inquiry and whose theories cannot be submitted to test, replication, validation, or corroboration, he warns that one must be extremely cautious here, for an exoheretic may be founding a new science (Kurtz, 1986:8). One can only say that Kurtz’s observations portray the world of the paranormal as a world characterized by belief and uncertainty.
Stephen Toulmin (1986) seems to share Kurtz’s views regarding the status of the occult and the paranormal. He is of the opinion that at any stage in the development of science, there is a point beyond which we cannot know for certain exactly what it is that we do and do not understand and exactly where a line should be drawn between phenomena that are as yet mysterious and happenings that are frankly incredible. Kurtz bemoaned the extreme position adopted by the Viennese philosophers of the 1930s and 1970s in respect of their demarcation criteria for telling (pure) sciences from pseudoscience. According to him, the Viennese philosophers’ position runs contrary to the modern approach to philosophy of science, which he notes had moved away from the more extreme claims of the Viennese philosophers. Like Kurtz, Toulmin warned against taking hard line presumption about what is “natural”, normal” or abnormal, adding that the content of scientific theories changes such that what today we view as impossible may tomorrow become possible. In his words:

The content of scientific theories changes, sometimes drastically; so we may be tempted to rule out, as “inconceivable” and “paranormal” things that a later stage of science acknowledges as quite possible, or even actual (Toulmin, 1986:16).

Although not certain about the existence of paranormal realities, Herbert Read (1960) joined the league of those who are of the opinion that we should approach the occult and paranormal with open mind. He attacked the dogmatic stance of scientific philosophy vis-à-vis supersensible realities. He was of the opinion that a distinction had always existed between wisdom and understanding even before the emergence of scientific philosophy; a distinction he noted was acknowledged by Locke and Newton (1960:15). For him, the tendency towards radical empiricism developed at a point in the development of human understanding, and this radical empiricism was based on a determination not to ask questions that cannot be answered without indulging in speculation.

For the radical empiricists, the only acceptable answers are those which are based on empirical observation, and which can be checked or proved by repeating the same empirical observations. But as Read noted,

It appears now that science (especially physics) has retreated farther and farther from a direct reliance on sense data (although rigorously maintaining principle of verifiability) by constructing an invisible world of atoms as remote from normal experience as the unseen stars (1960:16).

One can safely submit that whereas Read recognizes the existence and (perhaps) the authenticity of sense knowledge, he posits a parallel source of knowledge in which intuition is the prime methodological apparatus. The paranormal seems to be realizable within the framework of Read’s philosophy.

There are anti-supernatural philosophers and scholars who are vehemently opposed to the claim that the paranormal is real. Notable among such philosophers is David Hume, a thorough-going empiricist philosopher. In his celebrated article on miracles, he emphatically denied the actual possibility of miracles and by implication, the paranormal. Coming from his scientific background, Hume argued that nature had been established by overwhelming human experience to be uniform and inviolable, and to that extent not subject to any form of intrusion. Supernaturalism and its consequent paranormal realities have no place in Hume’s philosophy, for, according to Hume, “….no testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle, unless the testimony
is of such a kind that its falsehood would be more miraculous than the facts it endeavours to establ...” (Mortimer, 1990: 491).

Hume’s stance on the ontological status of the paranormal enjoyed support from Stephen Hoffmaster (1986). Hoffmaster’s lack of faith in the paranormal stems from his conception of the field of the paranormal as one that is not only amenable to fraud, but also replete with fraudsters. Accordingly, he views efforts in that direction as a wasted one, adding that no progress has been made in the researches carried out so far in the field. This situation, he said, is unlike in the field of science where significant and incredible results have been achieved. He states:

One major characteristic of science is its continued change, the ability to be self-corrective in the long run, and to constantly increase in precision and application of theory. Considering pseudo-science in general and ESP in particular; when one wades through the verbiage one finds such progress largely missing (1986: 79).

In his notable article entitled: “Sir Oliver Lodge and the Spiritualists”, Hoffmaster (1986) cited many instances of observed contradictions in alleged paranormal cases; the methodological problems involved in investigating them, as well as cases of alleged practitioners of the paranormal found to be fraudsters, to demonstrate the difficulty in accepting paranormal claims. It is on the basis of these observations that Hoffmaster wrote off the paranormal and its associated claims as spurious claims.

Another notable anti-paranormal scholar is Piet Hoebens (1986). Like Hoffmaster, he saw paranormal claims as mere calculated frauds. He advised that people should be very skeptical about the alleged authenticity of paranormal claims, adding that one should not lose sight of the fact that some psychological factors are bound to lead one to toe an occult interpretation of non-paranormal events. Further to this, he noted that in parapsychology, sense and non-sense overlap, making it difficult for a neutral observer to tell the difference (Hoebens, 1986: 29).

In his article: “Sense and Nonsense in Parapsychology”, Hoebens (1986) carried out an independent and comparative analysis of some popular parapsychologists, using their various books on the subject, with a view to demonstrating that virtually all paranormal claims are no more than “the more you look, the less you see”. Based on this, he submits that comments and actions of parapsychologists vis-à-vis the paranormal are in the main consistent with personal values which, according to him, are incompatible with the spirit of scientific inquiry.

From the positions reviewed so far, it is very clear that the world of the paranormal and the occult is a world characterized by uncertainty: uncertainty on the side of the practitioners, as lack of a guaranteed steady replicability of a given paranormal feat makes things difficult for the practitioners themselves; uncertainty on the side of ordinary believers in the paranormal as they cannot even demonstrate the reality of the object of their belief. The uncertainties that characterize the world of the paranormal notwithstanding, I ally myself with the position of those philosophers and scholars who advocate for the attitude of open-mindedness vis-à-vis the occult and the paranormal. This position is coming on the heels of my conviction that reality is two-sided - the seen and the unseen - and that these two sides of reality might be operating different sets of laws. There are strong indications that both sides influence each other, considering the sundry reported activities indulged in by many (Nigerians) Africans as a result of their belief in the unseen (paranormal) world.

From the foregoing and by way of conceptualization, the term paranormal could be conceived as those events or occurrences that are considered to be beyond the range of normal
experience or scientific explanation. In other words, it is to be used with reference to those events which, in accordance with the notion of what is physically possible, ought not to occur. Coming under the umbrella of the paranormal are phenomena such as Extra Sensory Perception (ESP), clairvoyance, psychokinesis, levitation, palm reading, prophecy, divination, astral travel, necromancy, and witchcraft, etc.

Derived from the Latin word ‘occultus’ which means “to cover up”, the term occult, on the other hand, refers to the body of knowledge that is hidden or secret in the area of the paranormal, preternatural or supernatural. An event, occurrence or phenomena dubbed as occult is believed to be shrouded in mystery; it is shielded from public knowledge and understanding. When used with reference to knowledge, it means knowledge that is only known or accessible to the initiates of a certain group or class. If the reference is to an organization, the understanding is that the activities and operations of such organization are only known to its initiates. All paranormal manifestations - both in thought and action - have occult accretions for the reason that the processes leading to their manifestation are not known to all, but only to the allegedly chosen or initiated ones.

**Some Implications of Paranormal and Occult Beliefs**

According to Balm (1992), ethics pertains to what is good and how to get it and what is bad and how to avoid it or the oughtness, that is, what ought to be done to achieve what is good and what ought not to be done to avoid what is evil both actual and potential. Since the major concern of ethics is, according to Echekwube (1999:36), those acts that proceed from the intellect (human acts) and will of the moral agent, who is taking a deliberation on how to act for or against certain motivations, it becomes imperative at this juncture that we bring in ethics to bear on the paranormal activities undertaken by man. Given the fact that paranormal practices (actions) are direct consequences of human beliefs and are, therefore, conscious or deliberate human actions; and since every human act has some implications - positive and negative - let us examine some of these implications.

**Legal Implications**

In Nigeria as in most part of the world, the judiciary remains the arm of government that is charged with the responsibility of justice administration. This noble task is achieved by way of interpretation and application of the laws of the land. In the course of its justice administration, the judiciary is not known to be guided by morality and religious sentiments, except morality as implied in the laws. It is for this reason that an act done with the noblest intention may be adjudged by the courts to be illegal.

Belief in the paranormal and the occult has some legal implications that are potentially so complicated as to require careful thought and detailed examination. Some of the cases brought before the courts are mainly the natural consequences of the belief in the supernatural and they raise some very disturbing questions that have continued to pose a serious challenge to both the psychiatric and the legal professions. It may be interesting to note that many hideous crimes that had been perpetrated in the past and which continue to be committed today are usually and quickly attributed to the accused’s belief in one form of the paranormal or the other.

Statistics has shown that belief in the supernatural had led many people into committing one crime or the other. These crimes range from murder, kidnapping, witchcraft, armed robbery stealing, and reckless driving, to breach of peace. Consider, for instance, the issue of divination which is seen as the process of contacting the supernatural with a view to finding answer to a question regarding the cause of an event or to foretell the future. It is a well-known fact that Africans, especially Nigerians, have entrenched belief that some individuals are endowed with
the power or ability to see into the past and as well foretell the future. Africans’ belief in divination is such that even in this era of globalization most Africans dare not embark on any serious project or mission without first consulting the oracle, priest or pastor as the case may be. It is also interesting to note that information sourced from these quarters is deemed more credible and reliable than that provided by a renowned professor in a related field.

The irony of the whole thing, however, is that divinatory consultations seem to have done more harm to the people than good. The truism in this assertion is supported by the sundry crimes that have been perpetrated by many people as the aftermath of their divinatory consultations. For instance, many innocent people in Nigeria have been made to pay the supreme price for allegations bothering on witchcraft, poisoning, stealing, blockage of others’ progress or that of the society as a whole. Many have even been banished from their communities following occasions of divinatory consultations. The following headlines in a Nigerian newspaper buttress our point: Christopher, Orji (2004). “Community Ostracized Family for Witchcraft” (Daily Sun, Nov. 25, p. 3), Biyi, Adegoroaye (2006). “Village Chief Roasted for Alleged “Witchcraft” (Daily Sun, Jan 28, p. 12), Val Okara (2006). “Murder at Dawn: Woman killed over Allegation of Witchcraft” (Daily Sun, Feb. 1, p. 30), and Tunde, Raheem (2005). “Oracle Tears Village Apart” (Daily Sun, Dec. 1, p. 3).

One thing that is common with all these reported cases cited above is that in each case, the allegations coupled with the attendant action(s) visited on the accused were instigated by oracular information. Of particular interest in these reported cases is the one entitled: “Oracle Tears Village Apart”. According to the contents of the story, information sourced from the oracle threw a village in Ondo state of Nigeria into a pandemonium with a couple forced to walk the street naked. The duo of Pa Emmanuel Kajola and his wife were accused of being behind the mysterious deaths of young ones, non-growth of farm products, and other calamities in their community. Consequently, they were sent packing from their village. What is more, family disorder, mutual suspicion, and allegations and counter allegations of evil doing among members of a community are in most cases caused by information given by oracles which are controversial most of the time.

Interestingly, the courts have always been disposed to see the perpetrators of these kinds of offences as law-breakers and proceed to punish them accordingly. For instance, in 1978, a Buffalo-based newspaper, Buffalo Evening News, carried a story about one Mrs. Grail Trait who was alleged to have methodically butchered her four children with kitchen cutlery in the evening of July 16, 1978. Trait told her psychiatrists that she was possessed by evil spirit and she decided to dispatch her children to God in order to save them from similar position. Even the reports tendered by the three court-appointed psychiatrists that interviewed Mrs. Trait showed clearly that the woman was quite obsessed with ideas of “sorcery”, “voodoo”, “roots”, and demonic possession. The interesting aspect of the case was that although Mrs. Trait was shown by two reports to be psychotic and not responsible for her behavior at the time of the crime, the court nevertheless adjudged her competent to stand trial. Accordingly, she was tried and found guilty of eight counts of murder in 1980. The court hinged her conviction on the inadmissibility of spectral evidence (Stevens Jr., 1993:207-208).

In Africa, belief in such paranormal phenomena as witchcraft, charms and juju, ritual money, possession etc, is known to be common, just as almost every members of the African communities shares it. Ironically, however, our courts tag such beliefs as unreasonable. The position of the courts is that although offences arising from such beliefs can be categorized as “mistakes of facts”, they are not mistakes of law. They may, in fact, be honest, but nevertheless
unreasonable beliefs. Thus, in a case decided in 1954 by the West African Court of Appeal, the court noted that it would amount to laying a dangerous precedent for the court to exonerate an accused person of criminal liability on a mere excuse that the accused honestly believed his victim to be a witch, and that such a belief is prevalent in his community.

The subject-matter of the case was witchcraft, and the principal actor was one Mr. Gadam. Believing that the witchcraft of a neighboring woman was responsible for the miscarriage and moral sickness of his wife, Gadam took a hoe and killed the woman. When the matter was brought to court, the court noted that although Gadam’s belief was honest, and that a belief in witchcraft was prevalent in the community where he lived, he was nevertheless guilty of murder. Gadam appealed the case to the West African Court of Appeal. In upholding the decision of the lower court, the Court of Appeal cited a previously decided case to buttress its position. In this connection, the presiding judges quoted with approval, a passage from the trial judge in a previous case, wherein the judge has this to say:

I have no doubt that a belief in witchcraft such as the accused obviously has is shared by the ordinary members of his community. It would, however, in my opinion be a dangerous precedent to recognize that because a superstition, which may lead to such a terrible result as is disclosed by the facts of this case, is generally prevalent among a community, it is therefore reasonable. The court must, I think, regard the holding of such beliefs unreasonable (Okonkwo & Naish, 1980:105-106).

A similar thing happened not long ago in Nigeria, when seven persons were sentenced to death for a case of ritual murder (Daily Sun, June 27, 2013, p.10). It did not matter what belief that made these convicts to ritually murder their victim. What matters is that their belief no matter how honest it may be has resulted in the violation of the law of the land. In convicting the accused, the trial judge noted that their action contravened Sec. 319 (1) of the Criminal Code Cap 30 Vol. 11, Laws of the Eastern Nigeria, 1963 as applicable to Imo state. Unconventional oath-taking is yet another dimension to the judicial implications of the belief in the occult and the paranormal. In this aspect, persons accused or suspected of possessing witchcraft power or doing any other thing considered to be anti-human are subjected to unconventional oath taking before they could be reintegrated into the community. Unconventional oath-taking can take the form of swearing the Holy Bible or taking an oath before a dreadful shrine. In some cases, the accused who, instead of taking oath, admits to have committed the alleged offence is made to perform some ritual sacrifices meant to appease the gods. Many people were alleged to have died after taking such oaths.

The “Ogwugwu Okija” saga in Anambra state of Nigeria is a good example of the unconventional oath-taking aspect of the judicial implication of paranormal and occult beliefs. In the case of the Ogwugwu Okija, several human skulls and corpses at various stages of decomposition were discovered in the shrine. Upon interrogation, the chief priests of ‘Ogwugwu’ told the police that those skulls and corpses were brought to the shrine by the relatives of those killed by the shrine in accordance with the laws of the shrine. According to the chief priests, the deity is bound to kill any person who, being guilty of any offence as charged, swore to it (Daily Sun, August 6, 2004:14&6). The point to be made here is that this method of trial by ordeal runs contrary to the conventional methods of trying the accused persons by the courts. Further to this is the fact that the conventional courts are in most cases relegated to the background owing to the high degree of confidence people place on the ability of deities to administer justice without fear or favor.
Belief in the paranormal vis-à-vis the judicial implications raises some fundamental moral questions. Are the numerous deaths occasioned by such beliefs morally justifiable? That is, are we free to kill our fellow men on mere suspicion that they are witches and wizards? How do we ascertain that they are what we accuse them of? Or has belief or opinion become the same as knowledge? Are we not taking laws into our hands by killing our fellow beings on account of such unjustifiable allegation? Is ostracism not a violation of the individual’s right to freedom of association? Is trial by ordeal not a violation of a person’s right to personal dignity? Are deities representatives of the true God in their own respect? If they represent the true God, does it mean then that God, who is alleged to be omnibenevolent and impartial, sanctions ostracism and murder? The plethora of murder and other criminal and immoral practices perpetrated by human beings, both in Africa and beyond as a result of the paranormal and occult beliefs, are enough pointers to the legal and judicial implications associated with such beliefs.

Medical Implications
It seems to me that Phillips Stevens Jr. was making reference to the implications of deep-seated paranormal belief vis-à-vis the conventional (orthodox) medicine when he noted that there exists a profound risk in attempting to interpret belief system engendered in and structured by one cultural framework, through models of reality and principles of etiology developed from the perspectives of another (Stevens Jr., 1993:203-204). It is evident in most African societies, both in the pre-modern and modern time that certain ailments and misfortunes are easily attributed to the handiwork of the occult and supernatural forces through the agency of some individuals. To this extent, incessant malaria, miscarriage, AIDS, leprosy, stroke, chicken pox, etc., have their causal mechanisms explained within the framework of the supernatural forces.

Given the above mental disposition, a married woman who fails to conceive after many years of marriage is sure to blame her problem on either her ex-boyfriend or some other women colleagues of hers whom she believes are not happy with her; a man who gets involved in an accident would most certainly trace its causal mechanism to the witchcraft power and antics of her mother-in-law; if a man gets afflicted with stroke, the relations would cry foul that his enemies have poisoned the man; and if after eating in a friend’s house, a man develops stomach ache or diarrhea, he would claim that his host poisoned his food. In the event that any of these ailments really occurs, one step is sure to be taken: it is either a practitioner of the paranormal say, a pastor, a prophet or a native doctor is invited or the person in question or his relations consult the practitioner in his temple.

The obvious implication arising from this conception is that since the traditional cultural beliefs to which these victims regressed hold that magic could be countered by magic, it leaves no room for the lengthy analysis required of conventional medicine or psychological therapy. In most cases, attention is turned to orthodox medicine only when the unconventional methods could not yield satisfactory result. The point I am trying to make here is that most (Nigerians) Africans ascribe the cause of some of their sicknesses or ailments to the evil machinations of the devil or the gods, either by himself or themselves, or through the agency of some men. This kind of interpretation or diagnosis derives from their own cultural heritage; and in terms of treatment, the most effective method (it is felt) is that worked within a framework that is culturally familiar to the patient. This approach portends a lot f implications at all levels of society.

Medically speaking, belief in the paranormal phenomena has in many ways impacted negatively on the lives of Africans. For instance, many sicknesses and deaths whose causal mechanisms could have been medically explained were attributed to the supernatural forces manifesting through the agency of some human beings. However, because of the belief that
magic could only be countered by magic, those afflicted with one ailment or the other could not be taken to orthodox hospitals that possess the effective apparatus to detect the real cause of their ailments. Consequently, the affected persons lost their lives, courtesy of superstitious belief. In this connection, Onodugo (2008:28-29) raised alarm that the strong belief in the influence of the paranormal on the physiological changes resulting in different ailments has assumed unbelievable dimensions. According to him, “no death occurs now without some hidden cause different from the one diagnosed by the doctors”. To this end, he observed that patients and their relations would have exhausted the options of prayer houses, seers and Babalaos (native doctors), whom they expect to reveal the person(s) behind their ailment before presenting themselves to hospitals. And by the time they present to the hospital, nothing much can be done any more. A good example of how occult belief has influenced Nigerians negatively vis-à-vis medicine and health can be seen in the recent publication by a national daily (see The Nation edition of July 26, 2014, at pp. 14 & 15). In the said publication, the newspaper reports that a certain community in Lagos state is currently being ravaged by goiter. It adds that even though the Lagos state government has offered to salvage the situation by volunteering to treat the victims free of charge, yet a good number of them have refused to surrender themselves to treatment on the ground that their problem was spiritually caused by witches and wizards and as such cannot be solved by orthodox medication.

In a related development, it is alleged that some practitioners of the paranormal with a good knowledge of magic and counter-magic do, by themselves or at least the request of their clients, cause their fellow human beings to die. It is also alleged that some of these practitioners sometimes recommend human sacrifices as the panacea to a given illness. I am, however, of the opinion that any medical remedy that recommends the termination of human life for the purpose of saving another life is at best unethical, and, therefore, questionable.

Further to the above belief in the paranormal weighed from the perspectives of medicine and health, has the propensity of distorting the social equilibrium of a society given the fact that such belief is characterized by mutual suspicion, allegations and counter allegations. These characteristics combine together to raise the social tension of a community. Besides, paranormal and occult belief is anti-human as far as medicine and healthcare are concerned. The reasons is that belief in the existence of witchcrafts, juju, gods and goddesses, divination, etc creates in the patients anxiety disorder, and these disorders more often than not make these patients difficult to manage. I think that Onodugo (2008: 30) was right in observing that such sustained anxiety state may lead to hypertension, depression and other ailments with the entire gamut of problems associated with them.

Suggestions

There is nothing said here so far about the negative consequences of the paranormal and occult beliefs that is in any way intended to suggest that there is no merit in such a belief or in belief in general. Far from such insinuation, the notion of belief is of high-level essence in the life of a person. It is so because belief is the foundation of human actions. Our actions or behaviors depend on our beliefs. Show a man your behavior or actions and he will tell you your belief system; also tell him what your beliefs are and he will predict what your behavior or actions would be like. A person who knows that I believe in life after death and in post-death judgment can easily predict what my reaction to stealing and conscious murder of my fellow human beings would be.

As faith without action is dead, so is attitude or action without belief is baseless. When we talk of reorientation of a person, we are not necessarily talking about the person in a strict
sense, that is, the core of his personhood; we are only making reference to reorientating the person’s belief(s). When a person declares himself a Marxist, the impact of Marxism is expected to be seen in his behavior or attitude. Similarly, believers cutting across all systems seem to argue that their various systems are strategic to their development of correct behavior.

Belief has a cohesive value. It is a veritable instrument that binds people of similar and different origin, sex, culture, education, etc together. Take religion, for instance: people who belong to one religious family share similar views and exhibit similar attitude towards life. What is more, being conscious of the strategic place of belief in our own lives makes us tolerant of others. The knowledge that we always act on the basis of our belief (except in cases of compulsion and conscious moral weakness) puts us in better position to understand better people of other beliefs and orientation. It is pertinent to state that beliefs have the propensity to build up and to destroy, both directly and indirectly. It becomes necessary, therefore, to warn that humans should become cautious of the kind of belief they propagate. Propagating false belief as though it is true is equivalent to projecting false picture of reality as a justified true belief.

It is my conviction that belief should be dynamic and not static. To this end, any belief system that is worth its onions should at all times be amenable to critical weighing and balancing aimed at providing its own justifications or grounds for its continued acceptance. Herein lies the core of my problem with paranormal and occult beliefs. Vast majority of the practitioners of the occult and paranormal have not been able to provide enough justifications for most of the bizarre actions originating from their beliefs. Talk of ritual murder for the purposes of magic money; human sacrifice for the purposes of healing a given illness; unconventional oath-taking as well as ostracism and trial by ordeal following witchcraft accusation. In all these cases, persons caught in the act concerning any of the above-listed purposes have not been able to provide justifications for the authenticity of their beliefs. Up till now, I am yet to see or hear that enough demonstration has been given by anybody on how human beings or parts could be used to magically produce the currency of any country or to cure illnesses. The same applies to witchcraft allegations. Besides, not all practitioners of the paranormal are genuine. Koch (1972:84) corroborates this when he observed that “the so-called unveiling of the future by the diviners reveals itself as no more than a frightful psychological pressure, to which many are not equal, especially as most of the divinations are unmasked as arbitrary products of the imagination or as subconscious desires latent in the seeker, which have been tapped by the mediumistic gifts of the fortune-teller”.

Altogether, belief in the paranormal and occult should not be dismissed with a wave of hand. This is because postulation of the existence of powerful external foes fosters social cohesion as is manifested in belief in witchcraft. A good number of Nigerians and indeed Africans believe that witchcraft is very effective in healing the sick. Although this is an unjustified belief that has no place in the knowledge and practice of scientific medicine and ideology, yet Africans in their cosmological views give the impression that it is only magic that can be used to counter magic. Granted that ostracism and trial by ordeal following witchcraft allegation (which in turn was orchestrated by divinatory consultations) are undertaken by Africans without justifiable reasons, but it has to be observed that divination, prophecies as well as séances have in some ways been very useful to the society.

Most Nigerians are of the firm belief that past and present causes of a given misfortune could be detected and its solution offered through the instrumentality of divination. What is more, Africans are wont to believe that future events and occurrences could be forecast accurately and precautionary measures taken accordingly. What about the unconventional oath-
taking? It provides some measure of hope and emotional stability when one is made to understand that even if his wrong-doers maneuver human laws and escape justice, they will surely not escape the wrath of divine forces. Though these beliefs may not hold water, holding them altogether provides the people with some measure of security and psychological relief.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, I would like to suggest that much as there is nothing fundamentally wrong with holding a belief and especially paranormal beliefs, caution should be exercised not to allow such beliefs to sway us into negative actions, especially where we lack justifications for our beliefs. This suggestion is made bearing in mind that there is a strong nexus between belief and action. Since nature has endowed us humans with intellect, it becomes incumbent on us to try to offer valid possibilities of rational explanation in the face of apparently complex or unresolved problems. Whereas the positive virtues of paranormal and occult belief should be sifted and utilized for the good of the individuals and society, its negative sides ought to be de-emphasized through public education aimed at re-orientating the masses on the dangers of uncritical acceptance of and attitudes to pseudo-science or borderline science as some would like to dub the world of the paranormal and occult. Our orthodox doctors and the media should be in the vanguard of this education and re-orientation for a good number of them are in most cases the reason for the continued widespread of paranormal and occult beliefs.
References


