



# Traditional Medicine and Education

by Sasha Leigh Coutinho

# About Me

- MA International Relations at Oxford Brookes University
- Dissertation looked at resistance to African medicine in global health
- Title: “The residues of colonialism in medical knowledge production and their impact on the development and acceptance of African traditional medicine: A look at Madagascar and Uganda”
- Conclusion: extension of colonialism
- A Eurocentric view persists in the medical field and others

# Background

- Traditional medicine and COVID
- Madagascar (COVID Organics) and Uganda (Covidex) (Okello, 2021; Razanmparany, 2020)
- Negative or apprehensive media coverage (The Economist, 2020)
- Narratives highlighted mistrust in TM, and often used colonial language (Simpson, 2017; Smith, 2012)
- Africans not seen as having valuable and legitimate knowledge (Fanon, 1963)
- Fast progress with vaccines compared to other medicines
- Mistrust of vaccines in many African countries (Mataishe, 2021)



# History

- Traditional medicine oldest methods of curing diseases and ailments
- Existed in all parts of the world
- Improvement in TM led to inventions of “modern” medicine
- During colonisation, missionaries would imply that medicine was introduced to Africans
- Western medicine socially constructed as superior to African medicine
- Colonial hospitals took over traditional healing practices (Andersen, 2010)
- Western/colonial education helped maintain this

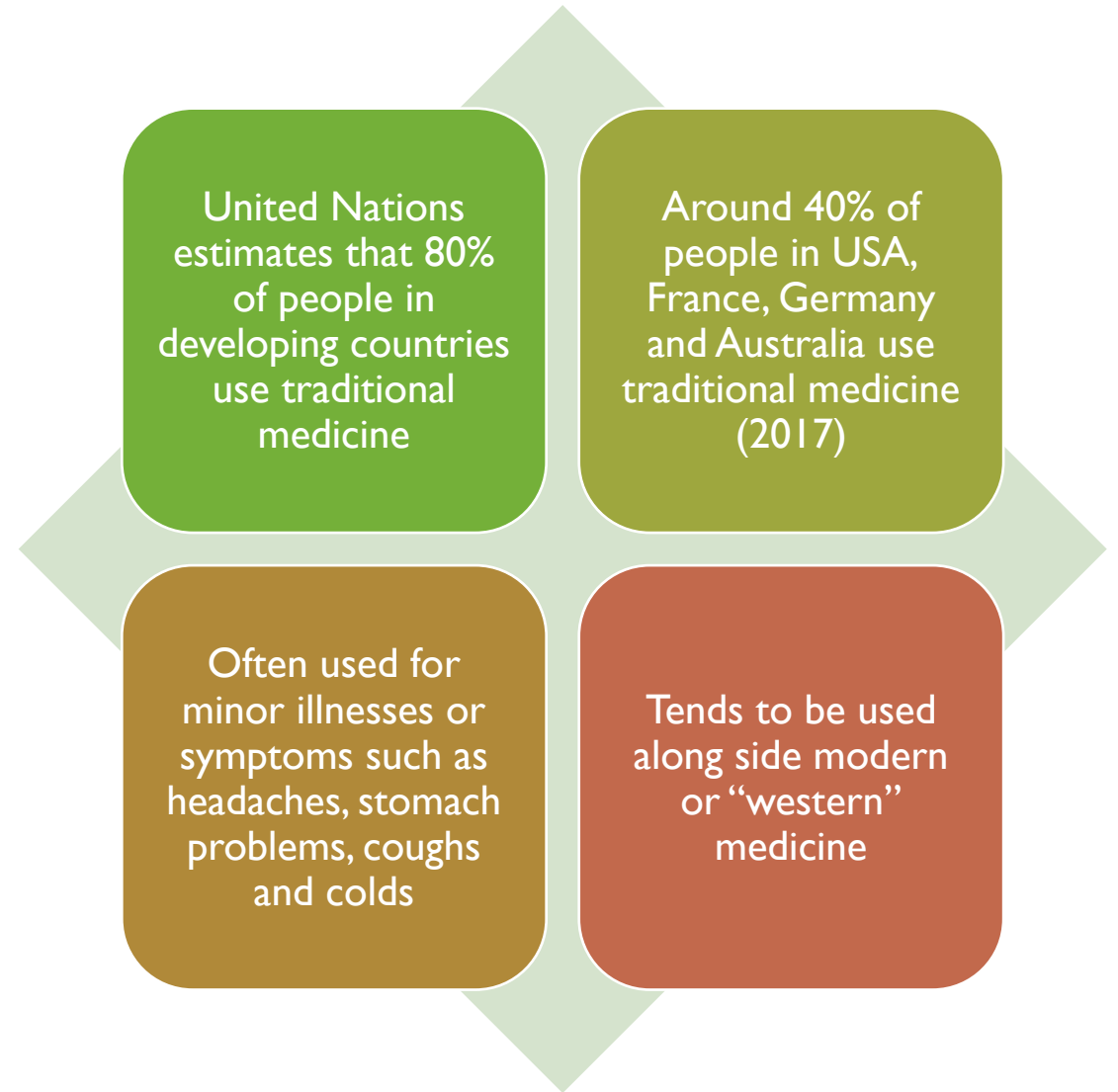
# Importance of Tackling This

Universities are vessels of knowledge production

Universities have colonial histories

Higher education is used to maintain the status quo, but can be used to achieve a new one

# Prevalence of Traditional Medicine



# Current state of TM Education: Africa

- Desire to implement it at primary level through to tertiary level in Nigeria (Abioje, 2015)
- Some foundation laid, but concrete databases not yet implemented in Zimbabwe (Mawere, 2015)
- Lack of rigorous data collection to support policy change in South Africa following the Traditional Health Practitioners Act of 2007
- Failure to implement traditional medicine in public hospitals, etc in Uganda (Mayekiso and Mawere, 2015), but interest in expanding education is high (Mwaka, 2018)
- Malagasy Institute of Applied Research (Razanamparany, 2020)

# Impact of TM Education

Positive behavioural changes (less smoking and drinking)

Improvement in some physical and psychological symptoms such as menstrual pain, headaches and dizziness

It can be generalised to other communities in similar situations

It could encourage communities to take an independent stance in the management of pandemics

Can be used for local contexts of global pandemics

Informal methods can be used to spread information quickly (Mawere, 2015)



# Political Impact

- ✓ Improve safety of patients
- ✓ Opportunity for quality control
- ✓ Promote autonomy and encourage self-determination
- ✓ Safeguard intellectual property rights
- ✓ Reduce impact of conspiracy theories
- ✓ Increase trust in government and education system
- ✓ Opportunities for women to take a leading role (Morris et al, 2014)
- ✓ Can counter vaccine hesitancy

# Barriers to TM Education Implementation

- ☐ Indigenous knowledge wiped out during colonialism
- ☐ Lack of infrastructure to support re-education
- ☐ Western model of education still prevalent in African countries
- ☐ STEM preferred to humanities, therefore slow process of re-teaching history and culture
- ☐ Not seen as profitable or in line with development
- ☐ Religious perceptions block acceptance of the idea of ancestors
- ☐ Negative attitudes (Abioje, 2015; Mawere, 2015, Nhemachena, 2015)
- ☐ Inaccessibility of some plants/transport links



# Negative Language

Quackery

Unscientific

Evil acts

Irrational

Void of logical  
thought

Primitive

Illegitimate

Superstitious

Witchcraft

Devil's work

# What changes can be made?

Introduce African science to children from primary school level

Teach the history of indigenous knowledge and the history of colonial medicine extensively at secondary level

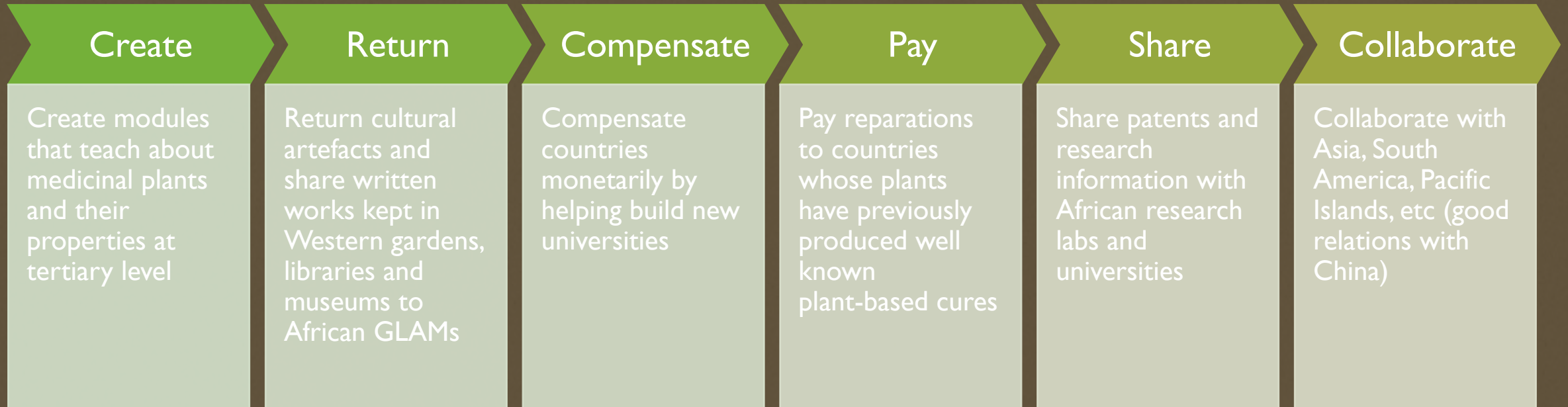
Expand religious education to teach about various traditional beliefs within each country

Revive and update African astronomy and astrology systems (Mawere, 2015)

Empower traditional midwives and traditional healers to spread educative material orally



# At an International Level



# Reshape our View

Experiment

Scientific

Social good

Rational

Logical

Room for  
modernisation

Accepted by  
locals

Rooted in  
ancient proven  
knowledge

Good faith

God's work

# Extra: TM Education in Asia

- 28 institutions of higher learning in China
- 11 institutions in Korea
- 80 institutions in Japan (Park et al, 2016)
- India currently implementing educations reforms (Patwardhan, 2017)



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