

NOTES

1. Imperato, P.J. 1975. "Traditional Medical Practitioners Among the Bambara of Mali and Their Role in the Modern Health Care Delivery System," *Tropical and Geographical Medicine*, 27, 2: 211-21.
2. Miner, H. 1965. *The Primitive City of Timbuctoo*, Garden City, New York: Doubleday.
3. Imperato, P.J. and Traore, D. 1968. "Traditional Beliefs About Smallpox and its Treatment Among the Bambara of Mali," *Journal of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene*, 71, 5: 224-28.

Feierman replies:

I did not intend the brief mention of Pascal James Imperato's use of the words "traditional" and "pre-scientific" as a sweeping criticism of his valuable work. But the original comments do stand. Imperato and Traore write that "The transition from this form of pre-scientific traditional thinking to the scientific, finally comes when someone asks how he contracted smallpox and not why" (1979: 17). I demonstrate that so-called "traditional" medical thought has strong pragmatic elements, based on observation. It asks questions which Imperato and Traore characterize with the word "how" in addition to others asking "why". Observation and testing did not wait for the arrival of biomedicine in Africa; they were practiced back in the distant past. Similarly, twentieth-century city dwellers in Africa and Europe ask questions about the ultimate moral causes of their suffering; these are not restricted to "traditional" Africa.

Imperato claims I have overlooked implications of mutability in his description of Mali's ancient cities, but he actually writes in the article cited that "In old cities such as Djenné and Timbuctoo, little change has occurred since the inception of the colonial period.... These cities have remained rather insulated from the changes generated by Western technology in other large African cities" (1979: 202). In reality, western technology is not the only source of medical innovation. Islamic medicine renews itself from within as new texts flow from one part of the Muslim world to another. Local non-Islamic medical traditions also alter themselves; they do not await the stimulus of contact with western technology. When household structures and disease patterns change, healers are forced to adapt or to be perceived as irrelevant.

Local African practitioners are the creators of medical knowledge, not merely recipients of a medical tradition. We need a history of folk therapeutics in the active voice.

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- Imperato, Pascal James. 1979. "Traditional Medical Practitioners among the Bambara of Mali and their Role in the Modern Health Care Delivery System," pp. 202-7 in Z.A. Ademuwagun et al. (eds.), *African Therapeutic Systems*. Waltham, Mass.: Crossroads Press.
- Imperato, Pascal James, and Dominique Traore. 1979. "Traditional Beliefs about Smallpox and its Treatment in the Republic of Mali," pp. 15-18 in Z.A. Ademuwagun et al. (eds.), *African Therapeutic Systems*. Waltham, Mass.: Crossroads Press.