



Egyptian Idea of Ma'at into the Healthcare to Cultivate Balance and Harmony

IKECHUKWU MONDAY OSEBOR, CAROL C. OHEN
University of Delta, Agbor, Nigeria

Abstract. Nigerian health sector faces many challenges including medical tourism, inadequate infrastructure, and limited access to quality healthcare services, insufficient funding, a brain drain among clinicians, and many others. The health crisis in Nigeria has led to widespread poverty and exacerbated health disparities. Different approaches have been used by the Nigerian government to address the health crisis but have failed. This study suggests the implementation of the Egyptian philosophy of Maat to mitigate the effects of the health crisis in Nigeria. The Maat ethics is the application of the principle of balance, harmony, and order and had served as the moral foundation of ancient Egyptian society. Using the philosophy method of analysis, this study maintains that the integration of Maat Ethics into public health initiatives would enhance resilience and response mechanisms to health crises, promote community engagement, ensure equitable access to healthcare, and foster solidarity among diverse populations in the Nigerian health sector. This study concludes that by synthesizing ancient wisdom with modern public health strategies, this research aims to contribute to the development of culturally responsive and sustainable interventions for mitigating health crises in Nigeria and beyond. Additionally, incorporating traditional practices and cultural beliefs into modern healthcare approaches can help bridge gaps in access and improve health outcomes for all Nigerians.

Keywords: Maat, Health, crisis, corruption, Nigeria, Egyptian

1. Introduction

The Nigerian health sector is in a state of comatose, and the provision of health care facilities is at low ebb (Innocent et al, 2014). This situation has led to lip service and dauntless statements by politicians that healthcare facilities would be made available at every nook and cranny of Nigeria. Medical tourism in Nigeria is fast becoming a culture among the elites and a few privileged

Nigerians. Abubakar et al. (2018) maintained that "Every month, almost 5,000 people leave the country for various forms of treatment abroad when such treatment should have been carried out in Nigeria. About 1.2 billion dollars is lost to medical tourism yearly in Nigeria, which could have been invested in the development of the country's health-care system and the country as a whole." Corruption within the healthcare sector has been pointed out as a major cause of infrastructural decay in the health sector; mismanagement of resources, embezzlement of funds, and the diversion of medical supplies meant for public use (Vian, 2008). The Nigerian health sector receives insufficient funding from the government, resulting in inadequate infrastructure, equipment, staff, and substandard technology such as diagnostic laboratories that can be found in only a few health centers located in urban areas (Obansa & Orimisan, 2013). Many rural communities in Nigeria lack access to basic healthcare services due to the uneven distribution of healthcare facilities and healthcare workers, including the "Japa syndrome" among medical personnel (Ekpenyong et al., 2019). The quality of care and accessibility to health-care delivery within Nigeria can be judged as a lopsided distribution of health facilities between urban and rural communities (Ademiluyi & Aluko-Arowolo, 2009). Hospitals and clinics often lack essential infrastructure such as electricity, running water, and medical supplies, which compromises the quality of healthcare services provided (Ani, 2021). Medical equipment and health workers require electricity or diesel to run the hospital generator, but these are lacking in Nigerian hospitals (Ani, 2021). Nigeria has a shortage of healthcare professionals, including doctors, nurses, and other essential personnel (Aluko et al., 2009). This shortage contributes to long wait times and reduces the quality of care available. Many skilled healthcare workers immigrate to other countries in search of better opportunities, leaving Nigeria with an even greater shortage of healthcare professionals (Naicker et al., 2009). Nigeria faces recurring outbreaks of infectious diseases such as malaria, cholera, and Lassa fever, which strain an already fragile healthcare

system. Many Nigerians lack adequate knowledge about preventive healthcare measures, leading to a higher prevalence of preventable diseases and health issues (Aluko et al., 2009). Nigeria has high rates of maternal and child mortality due to factors such as inadequate prenatal care, lack of skilled birth attendants, and limited access to essential maternal and child health services (Sageer, 2019). The majority of Nigerians lack health insurance coverage, making it difficult for them to afford healthcare services, particularly for serious illnesses or medical emergencies (Obembe & Fonn, 2020). In Nigeria, the Federal Ministry of Health (FMOH) and the Medical and Dental Council of Nigeria (MDCN) regulate the practice of medicine and dentistry in the country, including the registration and licensing of medical and dental practitioners. They are responsible for policy formulation, regulation, and coordination of the health sector (Gbenro, 2018). They aim to ensure access to adequate, affordable, and efficient healthcare services through various programs and schemes. However, these agencies have not lived up to expectations due to the lack of inclusion of African ways of health management. Addressing these challenges requires the ancient Egyptian concept of Ma'at, involving the integration of honesty, truth, and fairness in Nigerian healthcare to improve government funding, infrastructure, healthcare workforce management, and measures to tackle corruption and improve health literacy among the population (Mancini, 2004).

2. A Historical Analysis of Ma'at's Literature

The African healthcare system, rooted in diverse cultures and traditions, embodies a holistic approach to well-being. The Egyptian literature of Ma'at is relevant in the contemporary African healthcare practices, aiming to foster balance and harmony in health care sector. Ma'at (pronounced may-et) is the prehistoric Egyptian goddess of truth, justice, harmony, and balance (the concept known as ma'at in Egyptian) first appears during the period known as the Old Kingdom (around 2613 - 2181 BCE) (World History Encyclopedia, n.d.). Ma'at is a central tenet of ancient Egyptian civilization that symbolizes the principles of law, order, justice, and balance. Egyptians worshipped Ma'at by living life according to the principles of justice, order, and harmony (Britannica, 2024). It originated in ancient Egyptian religion and was personified as a goddess. The concept of Maat was integral to Egyptian society and influenced various aspects of life, including law, governance, ethics, and religious beliefs. Maat was often depicted as a woman wearing an ostrich feather

on her head, symbolizing truth and balance. The ancient Egyptians believed that living in accordance with Maat was essential for maintaining cosmic order and harmony in both the earthly and divine realms. The weighing of the heart ceremony in the afterlife, where the heart of the deceased was weighed against the feather of Maat, illustrates the significance of Maat in Egyptian beliefs regarding judgment and the afterlife (Britannica, 2024). Ma'at philosophy holds significant philosophical relevance due to its holistic approach to ethics, justice, and cosmic order. The term "Maat" refers to both a goddess and a concept representing the cosmic order and moral code that governed ancient Egyptian society (Britannica, 2024). It underscores the interconnectedness of all aspects of life and the importance of maintaining equilibrium for individual (Hatala, 2008). Ma'at philosophy provides a framework for ethical conduct in healthcare. This includes principles such as respect for autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, and justice, which guide healthcare decision-making and practice. Upholding these ethical principles ensures that healthcare professionals act in the best interests of their patients while respecting their rights and dignity.

3. Ma'at Ethics

Ma'at is a code of conduct that guide human behavior right or wrong through the application of moral principles of balance, harmony, and truth in human behavior. It sets forth a moral code that guides individuals to live in accordance with these principles (Osebor, 2023; Elechi, 2006). Ma'at Ethics encourages people to act with integrity, honesty, and compassion towards others, fostering a sense of community and interconnectedness (Hatala, 2008). The moral principle represents the cosmic order and justice in Egyptian mythology (Britannica, 2024). It stresses the idea that actions have consequences and that justice will ultimately prevail. This ethics influenced the development of Egyptian law, emphasizing fairness, impartiality, and the protection of rights. It also served as the basis for legal proceedings and judgments, ensuring that disputes were resolved in alignment with cosmic harmony (World History Encyclopedia, n.d.). Ma'at is a moral principle that views the universe as an interconnected and harmonious system where everything is in balance (World History Encyclopedia, n.d.). This holistic perspective highlights the interconnectedness of all life forms and the interdependence of different elements within the cosmos. The interconnectedness, individuals are encouraged to live in harmony with nature and the universe, fostering a sense of unity and cooperation (Mancini, 2004). Ma'at emphasis self-awareness, self-discipline and self-improvement.

Individuals are encouraged to reflect on their actions and strive for personal growth in order to align themselves with the principles of ma'at (Hatala, 2008). This emphasis on self-reflection and self-improvement promotes inner harmony and fulfillment, leading to a more meaningful and purposeful life (Javanparast et al., 2011). . In an increasingly interconnected world facing complex challenges such as environmental degradation, social injustice, and political unrest, the concept of ma'at serves as a reminder of the importance of balance, harmony, and justice. The principles of ma'at to contemporary issues, individuals and societies can work towards creating a more just, sustainable, and harmonious world. In essence, Ma'at moral code offers a comprehensive framework for understanding the interconnectedness of the universe and guiding ethical behavior, justice, and personal development. Its principles continue to inspire individuals and societies to strive for balance, harmony, and truth in all aspects of life.

3.1 Analysis of Ma'at Ethics in the Healthcare

When applied to the healthcare sector, it entails profound moral implications, shaping both the delivery of care and the ethical considerations surrounding it. It advocates for balance in all aspects of life, including healthcare. This means adopting a holistic approach to health that considers not only the physical but also the mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being of individuals. Healthcare providers should strive to address the root causes of illness and promote overall wellness rather than merely treating symptoms. Ma'at Ethics is importance for community and collaboration. In healthcare, this translates to fostering partnerships between healthcare providers, patients, families, and communities to collectively promote health and well-being. It involves engaging with diverse stakeholders to develop culturally competent and inclusive healthcare practices that meet the needs of all individuals (Mancini, 2004). At the core of Maat is to maintaining balance and harmony in all aspects of life (Martin, 2008). This balance extends to the individual, society, and the universe as a whole. It emphasizes the importance of equilibrium between opposing forces, such as good and evil, order and chaos, and life and death (Vernant, 1984). Maat places significant emphasis on truth and justice in the health sector, considering the moral implications of corruption in the Nigerian health sector (Israel, 2014). It gives emphasis to clinicians to maintain fairness and equality in the healthcare. This translates to ensuring that all individuals, regardless of their socioeconomic status, receive equitable access to healthcare services. This includes addressing disparities in healthcare delivery, such as unequal distribution of resources and

unequal treatment based on factors like race, ethnicity, or gender. The indigenous knowledge of maat symbolizes the importance of coordinating the health sector in Nigeria with honesty, integrity, and moral righteousness (Osebor, 2023; Elechi, 2006). Doctors are to adhere to the Hippocratic Oath of Justice. Central to Ma'at philosophy is the concept of truthfulness and transparency (Hatala, 2008). In the healthcare sector, this entails honest communication between healthcare providers and patients, including providing accurate information about diagnoses, treatment options, and potential outcomes. Transparency also extends to organizational practices, such as disclosing conflicts of interest and ensuring accountability in decision-making processes. On the other hand, the government ensures that actions are fair and equitable, with consequences meted out accordingly to defaulters. Maat moral codes are not a replacement for medical laws but aim to promote the establishment and maintenance of order and stability in society, particularly in the health sector. This includes adherence to laws, respect for authority, and the preservation of social cohesion, all of which contribute to the overall well-being and functioning of the community (Monday, 2019; Javanparast et al., 2011). But recognizing the interconnectedness of all living beings and the environment (Monday, 2020). Actions taken by individuals can have ripple effects that impact others and the world around them. Therefore, it encourages mindfulness and responsibility in one's thoughts, words, and deeds. Individuals are responsible for upholding moral principles in their daily lives (Monday, 2020). This involves self-reflection, self-discipline, and accountability for one's actions. The moral code of Maat provides a cosmic perspective on life and existence (Osebor & Ogelenya, 2023). It acknowledges the cyclical nature of the universe and the eternal struggle between order and chaos. Aligning with Maat, philosophical individuals seek to align themselves with the cosmic order and fulfill their role within the greater cosmic scheme (Wane, 2011). The principles offer timeless ethical guidance that can inform individual conduct and decision-making in contemporary society. They provide a moral compass for navigating complex ethical dilemmas and promoting virtuous behavior (Martin, 2001). In healthcare, Maat is interpreted as promoting and practices of environmentally sustainable and minimizing the negative impact of healthcare activities on the ecosystem.

3.2 The challenges of Ma'at's Philosophy

Ma'at's principles include truth, honesty, justice, and harmony (Mancini, 2004). While integrating Ma'at

philosophy into Nigerian healthcare holds immense potential for enhancing holistic well-being, several challenges and opportunities exist (Blignaut, et al., 2021). Effective integration of Ma'at in Nigerian health-care requires sensitivity to diverse cultural perspectives and practices within Nigeria, recognizing the richness and complexity of indigenous healing traditions alongside modern healthcare interventions (Osebor&Irabor, 2023). These challenges would strengthen collaboration between traditional healers, modern healthcare practitioners, policymakers, and community members. It is essential for bridging gaps, exchanging knowledge, and promoting mutual respect and understanding of diverse healing modalities. Further research is needed to evaluate the efficacy, safety, and cultural appropriateness of integrating Ma'at ethics into the healthcare practices to ensure that interventions are evidence-based and tailored to local contexts of medical practice (Schleiffet al., 2021). In the context of Nigerian healthcare, the principles of Ma'at offer valuable insights and guidance for promoting holistic health and healing. The question that comes to mind is how Ma'at intersects with key aspects of healthcare recognizing the interplay between physical, mental, social, and spiritual dimensions (Hatala, 2008). Nigerian healthcare embraces a similar holistic approach, considering factors such as community dynamics, cultural beliefs, and environmental influences in assessing health needs and providing care. Central to Ma'at is the concept of prevention through living in accordance with truth and balance. Likewise, Nigerian healthcare emphasizes preventive measures, including community education, lifestyle modifications, and traditional healing practices aimed at maintaining health and averting illness before it manifests. Incorporating Ma'at principles into healing practices involves restoring balance and harmony to the individual and the community. Traditional Nigerian healers often integrate rituals, ceremonies, and herbal remedies to address physical ailments while also addressing spiritual and emotional imbalances, aligning with the holistic approach advocated by Ma'at. Ma'at underscores the importance of social justice and equity in maintaining harmony within society. Nigerian healthcare systems prioritize community engagement, empowerment, and advocacy for health equity, echoing the principles of Ma'at by striving to address underlying social determinants of health and promote fairness in healthcare access and delivery.

4. Conclusion

In summary, the moral implications of Ma'at philosophy in the healthcare sector revolve around

promoting equity, justice, truth, harmony, balance, ethical conduct, and community collaboration. Embracing these principles, healthcare systems can strive to provide compassionate, holistic, and culturally sensitive care that respects the dignity and rights of all individuals while promoting overall well-being. Healthcare in Nigeria can benefit greatly from incorporating Ma'at philosophy, an ancient Egyptian concept of balance, harmony, and truth. Integrating Ma'at principles into healthcare practices, we can promote holistic well-being and improve patient outcomes. This approach emphasizes the importance of maintaining balance in all aspects of life, including physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health. The philosophy is focusing on prevention; early intervention, and patient education, healthcare providers can help individuals achieve optimal health and wellness. Ultimately Ma'at philosophy in the healthcare sector, we can create a more harmonious and balanced society in Nigeria, the principles offer profound insights into the fundamental aspects of life including interconnectedness. Its relevance extends beyond ancient Egypt, providing valuable guidance for ethical living, social justice, environmental stewardship, personal development, and cultural heritage in the modern world. It has an integrating the timeless wisdom in the healthcare systems, we can cultivate a renewed focus on balance, harmony, and holistic well-being, ultimately advancing health equity and resilience across diverse communities This study serves as a starting point for deeper exploration and dialogue on the intersection of ancient wisdom and modern healthcare in the African context, inviting stakeholders to collaborate in co-creating culturally responsive and sustainable health systems grounded in the principles of Ma'a

References

- Abubakar, M., Basiru, S., Oluyemi, J., Abdulateef, R., Atolagbe, E., Adejoke, J., & Kadiri, K. (2018). Medical tourism in Nigeria: Challenges and remedies to health care system development. *International Journal of Development and Management Review*, 13(1).
- Ademiluyi, I. A., & Aluko-Arowolo, S. O. (2009). Infrastructural distribution of healthcare services in Nigeria: an overview. *Journal of Geography and Regional Planning*, 2(5), 104- 110.
- Aluko, J. O., Anthea, R., & Marie Modeste, R. R. (2019). Manpower capacity and reasons for staff shortage in primary health care maternity centres in Nigeria: a mixed-

- methods study. *BMC health services research*, 19, 1-15.
- Ani, V. A. (2021). Provision of reliable electricity to primary health care facilities in Nigeria—a new focus of interventions. *International Journal of Energy for a Clean Environment*, 22(2).
- Blignaut, S., Pheiffer, G., Le Grange, L., Maistry, S., Ramrathan, L., Simmonds, S., & Visser, A. (2021). Engendering a sense of belonging to support student well-being during COVID-19: A focus on sustainable development goals 3 and 4. *Sustainability*, 13(23), 12944.
- Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia (2024, January 12). *Maat*. *Encyclopedia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Maat-Egyptian-goddess>
- Ekpenyong, M. S., Bond, C., & Matheson, D. (2019). Challenges of maternal and prenatal Care in Nigeria. *Journal of Intensive and Critical Care*, 5(01).
- Elechi, O. O. (2006). *Doing justice without the state: The Afikpo (Ehugbo) Nigeria model*. Routledge.
- Gbenro, V. (2018). *Exploring the impact and roles strategic government leadership plays in adoption and use of eHealth in low resource countries: A case study of the medical and dental council of Nigeria as a professional health regulatory agency* (Doctoral dissertation).
- Hatala, A. R. (2008). Spirituality and aboriginal mental health: An examination of the relationship between aboriginal spirituality and mental health. *Advances in Mind-Body Medicine*, 23(1), 6-12.
- Innocent, E. O., Uche, O. A., & Uche, I. B. (2014). Building a solid health care system in Nigeria: challenges and prospects. *Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, 3(6), 501.
- Israel, M. (2014). Research ethics and integrity for social scientists: Beyond regulatory compliance. *Research Ethics and Integrity for Social Scientists*, 1-264.
- Javanparast, S., Baum, F., Labonte, R., & Sanders, D. (2011). Community health workers' perspectives on their contribution to rural health and well-being in Iran. *American Journal of Public Health*, 101(12), 2287-2292.
- Mancini, A. (2004). *Maat revealed, Philosophy of Justice in Ancient Egypt*. BUENOS BOOKS AMERICA LLC.
- Mancini, A. (2004). *Maat revealed, Philosophy of Justice in ancient Egypt*. BUENOS BOOKS AMERICA LLC.
- Martin, D. (2001). *Nature, maat and myth in ancient Egyptian and Dogon cosmology*. Temple University.
- Martin, D. (2008). Maat and order in African cosmology: A conceptual tool for understanding indigenous knowledge. *Journal of Black Studies*, 38(6), 951-967.
- Monday, I. O. (2020), The Relevance of Deep Ecological Principles in Aquatic Crisis: A Philosophical. *Bangladesh Journal of Bioethics* [14] 11 (2): 35–41. <https://doi.org/10.3329/bioethics.v11i2.50392>.
- Monday, O. I. (2019). Pragmatic organ donation: Rinterpreting vroom's expectancy theory.
- Monday, O. I. (2020). Is altruism always sufficient for organ donation? vroom's expectancy theory, for expanding the organ donor pool. *Saudi Journal of Kidney Diseases and Transplantation*, 31(2), 503-507.
- Monday, O.I. (2021). The Ethical Implications of Eco-Individualism on Sustainable Environments. *European Journal of Sustainable Development Research*, 5(3)
- Naicker, S., Plange-Rhule, J., Tutt, R. C., & Eastwood, J. B. (2009). Shortage of healthcare workers in developing countries—Africa. *Ethnicity & disease*, 19, 60-64.
- Obansa, S. A. J., & Orimisan, A. (2013). Health care financing in Nigeria: prospects and challenges. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 4(1), 221-236.
- Obembe, T., & Fonn, S. (2020). Affording unavoidable emergency surgical care—The lived experiences and payment coping strategies of households in Ibadan metropolis, Southwestern Nigeria. *PloS one*, 15(5), e0232882..
- Osebor, I. M. (2023). Native-centric Ecology as A Panacea to Aquatic Crisis?. *Sapientia: Journal of Philosophy*, 18(ISSN: 1595-4943).
- Osebor, I. M., & Irabor, B. P. (2023). THE ROLE OF METAPHYSICS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF NATIVE-CENTRIC EDUCATION. *Oracle of Wisdom Journal of Philosophy and Public Affairs (OWIJOPPA)*, 7(3).
- Osebor, I. M., & Ogelenya, G. (2023). Identity Crisis and Self-Identity: A Reinterpretation of Karl Jaspers's Transcendental Philosophy and Existence. *NIU Journal of Social Sciences*, 8(4), 131-134.

- Sageer, R., Kongnyuy, E., Adebimpe, W. O., Omosehin, O., Ogunsola, E. A., & Sanni, B. (2019). Causes and contributory factors of maternal mortality: Evidence from maternal and perinatal death surveillance and response in Ogun state, Southwest Nigeria. *BMC pregnancy and childbirth, 19*, 1-8.
- Schleiff, M. J., Aitken, I., Alam, M. A., Dantew, Z. A., & Perry, H. B. (2021). Community health workers at the dawn of a new era: 6. Recruitment, training, and continuing education. *Health Research Policy and Systems, 19*, 1-28.
- Vernant, J. P. (1984). *The origins of Greek thought*. Cornell University Press.
- Vernant, J. P. (1984). *The origins of Greek thought*. Cornell University Press.
- Vian, T. (2008). Review of Corruption in the Health Sector: Theory, Methods and Interventions. *Health Policy and Planning, 23*(2), 83-94.
- Wane, N. N. (2011). Spirituality: A philosophy and a research tool. In *Spirituality, Education & Society* (pp. 67-82). Brill.
- World History Encyclopedia (n-d) Maat <https://www.worldhistory.org/Maat/>