

Health and Healing in Africa; new arenas and emerging markets

Proposal for edited volume & writers' workshop 14-15 January 2010

ASC/Brill African Dynamics Series, M. Dekker & R. van Dijk (eds.)

In many African countries the domain of health and healing has become the subject of neo-liberal transformations in society. Whereas health and healing indicate distinctive domains where the pursuit of well-being of people is concerned – health being located in domains that primarily relate to bio-medical science, governmental policies and formal institutions while healing indicating a cultural-historic domain of cosmologies and practices that often are termed ‘traditional’ – we contend that both have increasingly become the subject of commoditization, monetization, in short the ‘market’. Africa has a long history of the confrontation and contestation between different models of health and healing. The introduction of bio-medical care through the establishment of missionary health facilities which later became incorporated in colonial and post-colonial governmental public health services, had set in motion a contestation of existing cultural-historical practices of health and healing that were increasingly placed under scrutiny and control. Postcolonial governments fostered the emergence of traditional healers’ associations to formalize traditional healing, regularize membership and governing bodies, and standardize practices and amounts to be paid for treatment. At the same time, health features prominently in the UN Millennium Development Declaration, with a strong focus on bio-medical care that almost by-passes healing practices. While the literature often euphemistically speaks of an emergent ‘medical plurality’ that arose with the coming of missionary and colonial medical practice, in actual fact the medical domain became an arena where different interests are playing out.

Furthermore each of these domains – public health on the one hand and cultural/historical forms of healing on the other – has developed into arenas on their own account. Important political, cultural, medical, pharmaceutical and economic interests have become attached to each of these medical spheres. These divergent interests are partly resulting from the functioning of international bodies and donors, or result from internal dynamics produced by contesting constituencies within these domains. Access to public health or formal policies may be brokered by informal networks of reciprocal assistance or local agents with powerful positions. In the domain of ‘traditional’ healing a wide range of different forms of healing exist side by side, each having different historical origins, working with different substances or spiritual models of well-being for example combining world religions (Christianity, Islam) with local healing traditions. In other words there are arenas within a wider arena, battles within a battle.

One elementary process that appears crucial in the ways in which these arenas are developing is the process of monetization and commoditization. In the present-day context of plural medical systems, the emergence of markets for healing and health have meant a great deal for the ways in which these arenas are manifesting themselves. People are spending considerable parts of their resources on medical treatment in the public health system and may maneuver to gain access to formal institutions related to population, nutrition and social protection policy. Yet also in the cultural/historical forms of healing the shift from kind to cash in the payment for treatment –as has occurred in Africa on a large scale – has meant a great deal for the manner in which healing became a ‘commodity’. As healing in its various forms thus increasingly became an object of profit-making, entrepreneurialism and market-competition the attempts of defending and pursuing certain interests became an increasingly important marker of the medical terrain. The market of healing is conjoined in this sense by other new markets such as that of religion where new forms of entrepreneurialism have emerged precisely in their use of healing-practices, for example by powerful charismatic groups providing spirit-healing to the general public on a massive scale.

This volume explores the various aspects that are related to this process of the rise of 'markets for health and healing' in Africa. The various contributions not only explore the contradictions and problems this 'marketization' is producing for African communities, households and individuals but also the ways in which this is culturally being translated. Whereas processes of in- and exclusion, rising inequality of access, politics of distribution are being addressed the book will also devote attention to the cultural understanding of the new arenas that emerge because of the influence of new powerful actors.

Suggested contributions/chapters:

1. Introduction; contestations of a market of health and healing: Marleen Dekker & Rijk van Dijk
2. Kenya: school-feeding program and child health: Wijnand Klaver, Dick Foeken, Sam Owuor & Alice Mwangi
3. Ghana: prayer camps of Pentecostals and public health concerns: Rijk van Dijk
4. Cameroon: traditional vs. cosmopolitan health care providers: Wouter van Beek
5. Ghana: reproductive health and population policy: Yinka Akinyoade
6. Togo: community based health insurance and child health: Andre Leliveld
7. Ethiopia: intra-household differences in financing health care expenditures through social networks: Marleen Dekker
8. Kenya: public health and malaria; historical and contemporain: Ken Obongi & Marcel Rutten
9. South Africa: inclusion and exclusion and the role of brokers in formal insurance markets: Erik Bähre
10. Swaziland: child health, hunger and access to medicines: Ria Reis
11. South Africa: traditional healers as entrepreneurs benefiting from the formal health system: Robert Thornton
12. Ghana: the nurse as entrepreneur. Reality and creativity on a hospital ward in Accra: Christine Böhmig