

אנתרופולוגיה

Zeitschrift für Medizinethnologie • Journal of Medical Anthropology

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**Local Lifeworld
and Global
Mental Health—
Perspectives
from Medical
Anthropology**



Zum Titelbild/Front picture *Curare* 38(2015)3

The cover picture shows an amulet against the evil eye, a worldwide popular practice to obtain mental health. Here it is an individually created “house blessing” in Modern Hebrew from a market in Jerusalem written on the “Hand of Miriam” (or hamesh hand). In similar way the “Hand of Fatima” (Hamsa hand) as a protective symbol is used in folk beliefs in Arabic Muslim societies in North Africa and the Near East (see fig. 1 in SCHREIER M. 2014. “Guter und böser Blick bei Immigranten in der Schweiz.” *Curare* 35,4: 247–250).

Die letzten Hefte / The last issues:

Curare 37(2014)4: AGEM und 60 Jahre „Interdisziplinäres Arbeitsfeld Ethnologie und Medizin“, Teil I / AGEM looking at Six Decennia of Interdisciplinary Discourses in “Anthropology and Medicine,” Part I

Curare 38(2015)1+2: Selbstreflexion im Kontext medizinethnologischer Langzeitfeldforschung / Self-reflection in the Context of Long-term Field Research in Medical Anthropology

Die nächsten Hefte / The next issues:

Curare 38(2015)4: AGEM und 60 Jahre „Interdisziplinäres Arbeitsfeld Ethnologie & Medizin“, Teil II / AGEM looking at six decennia of interdisciplinary discourses in anthropology and medicine, part II

Curare 39(2016)1: Contributions to Anatomical Concepts in Classical Tibetan Medicine

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Journal of Medical Anthropology**


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Medical Anthropological Glimpses of Global Mental Health. Editorial

The glimpse of the performance. Complementary and alternative medicines and—not to mix up—recent developments towards an “Integrative Medicine” are of special interest for researchers in medical anthropology. HELMAR KURZ shows how contemporary developments within Brazilian Spiritist healing practices serve as an example, that new perspectives for a methodology of qualitative research, regarding comparable processes, can be discovered by perceiving healing practices as “performative” practices.

The glimpse of the dynamics of settings characterized by medical pluralism. BONTHA V. BABU and colleagues show in a public health study in an urban Indian area how migrant groups and peoples have their own beliefs and practices towards health and illness and tend to follow illness preventive and health promotion strategies which are basically rooted and shaped by their original culture.

The glimpse of the local lifeworld within global biomedical engagements. The new increasing importance of traditional medical treatments in times of rapid change and social pressure is a long known observation and remains a permanent challenge to analyze in local situations where multifold advocacy is demanded. Two case studies show this in detail: ABU BAKER tries to explain how fertility complications and social pressure in a Sudanese town encourage women to refer to traditional healing institutions for a cure, while viewing biomedicine as ineffective in this area. FRANK KRESSING argues that growing shamanic activities in Ladakh provide one among several strategies to cope with local recent forms of alienation (war and tourism). Special emphasis is put here on the divination aspect of shamanism and its preventive function.

The glimpse of the local effects of global political developments. The political dimension is shown by AMBER GEMMEKE, when she specifically studies the interrelations between migration, religion and mental health in the Dutch mental healthcare, and hereby reveals the fatal influence of increasing ethnic targeting.

Reading ANTONIO SCARPA’s 40 years old foreword one can find similar ideas with differing words.

EKKEHARD SCHRÖDER

Editor of *Curare* on behalf of AGEM

Ethnoiatrics: from Ethnopsychonosography to Ethnopsychotherapy

With much pleasure I have accepted the kind invitation to introduce *Curare*, the new journal on the study of ethnoiatrics, edited by the Arbeitsgemeinschaft Ethnomedizin e.V. Given the interdisciplinary character of ethnomedicine, this new journal will always be ready to receive any form of collaboration whatever: from the botanist and pharmacist, from the anthropologist and the tropical doctor, from the ethnologist and sociologist etc., but I wish to point out that the subject is “*Zeitschrift für Ethnomedizin und transkulturelle Psychiatrie.*”

Therefore, not only ethnomedicine is represented in the journal, but distinctly separated from this, also transcultural psychiatry: a justifiable separation. In ethnomedicine in fact, we already have the chapter of ethnopsychiatry which is to be added to the others: ethno-pharmacognosies, ethno-pediatrics, ethno-geriatrics, etc. Ethno-iatric is revealing itself to be so vast that it has been necessary to carry out scientific medicine. For us ethnopsychiatry is the only empirical traditional psychiatry, based on beliefs, on customs, on practical cases, of culture origin, and which goes from ethno-psychonosography (often much different from the pathology of psychiatry) to an ethno-psychotherapy—like the experienced one by the psychiatrist Henri Colomb of Dakar, and it seems with some success. Transcultural psychiatry, as it is also called by another neologism, widens the field of research: for the study of native mental patients, of their treatment of the complex problems that derive from it for example ... but with the mentality, the preparation, and the techniques of modern scientific psychiatry that obviously doesn’t regard “ethnos” anymore but “anthropos” only.

It is also true that the importance of psychosomatic medicine lately has emphasized the real importance of psychiatry, and has brought it to a dominant position in the interpretation of certain phenomena where the psychic factor seems to prevail. I have to hand the program of a great African state for the study and the valorization of traditional medicine, where the role of psychiatry is most important, owing to the presence of a great number of

“therapeutic rites” deriving from presumed psycho-therapeutic action.

We should not risk, however, to identify ethnomedicine with psychiatry, the “primitive” or much “under-developed” with the mad man, the medicine-man with the psychopathic. This isn’t a new problem, it has been proposed in regard to the shamans and it has been asserted that many are epileptics or psychopaths; as far as nearly all medicine-men are concerned, this affirmation has no validity whatsoever (Eliade, Pérez de Barradas, Koch-Grünberg, Nadel etc.). However many, like the Ngangas of the Congo, are at the same time doctors, chiefs, priests, judges and play a very important role in the social life of their country (Boyquet, Armand) which would not be possible if they were mentally ill!

I have assisted at some “therapeutic rites” where I received the impression that, both the principal performers, and the majority of the patients were completely normal individuals, and often the former had quite a high level of intelligence. But the audience was more than impressed by the performance and one could find subjects of interest for psychiatrics. Someone among the public had crisis of a hysterical or violent nature, or went into trances or on the contrary became depressed, cried etc. Among the patients, some of them were in a state of anguish because they were convinced they had violated a taboo or offended their ancestors, while the others were ordinary patients, who had gone thereby to be cured, e.g. for purulent otitis, for bruises which they have received from a tree, from malaria etc. Everyone was told would be “cured,” and if this weren’t so obviously these rites would never have survived through the centuries.

While I was interested myself in these “psychotherapies” in 1954 (*Empirismo e Scienza di fronte all’ipogalattia*. Milano, p. 239 e.g.), I underline the importance that sensorial stimulations could have during “curative rites:” melo-therapy (music,

songs, reciting of verses), chromo-therapy, osmatic-therapy, touch sensations, taste sensations, besides choreo-therapy, using biochemistry. This in fact has begun to explain to scientists how excitations of this kind, reverberate on certain organs such as the hypothalamus, the suprarenal bodies, etc., and produce particular substances such as hormones, catecholamine, etc., which can explain the mystery of certain miraculous recoveries. Transcultural psychiatry can certainly fill many gaps existing between scientific medicine and traditional medicine. The field is presenting itself as being very vast and very difficult.

Curare the title given to this journal seems very appropriate to me. *Curari* is very significant for ethnomedicine as a drug coming from the empirics of the forest to the scientific application in the operating room; what is more: its preparation reveals itself to be one of the most interesting and complex cultural manifestations of ethnic groups generally considered to be among the most backward in the whole world.

It is well known that drugs don’t exist in nature, already formed in the plants from which it is extracted. But it is the result of a true chemical reaction, so starting with different plants, according to the traditions of the tribes, “curare” is always obtained as the result. According to some scientists (Biocca and Lazzarine Peckolt), the activity of the drug is not related to the richness of the ingredients used in certain alkaloids, but to the technique, which is more or less perfect, used by the Indians.

Curare, the title of this new journal of ethnomedicine, which will certainly have much success, because of the specific preparation and the enthusiasm of the founders, should remind scientists and doctors of the existence of ethno-chemistry too.

ANTONIO SCARPA

Rapallo, Italy, 31st August 1978



Antonio Scarpa, Prof., surgeon and pediatrician (1903–2000). During numerous visits to many countries in all continents between 1938 and 1992, Scarpa collected materia medica and published approximately 200 articles and several books. He founded *Etnoiatria*, the first “ethno-medical” journal in the world (1967–68). Nowadays, his collections are managed by Antonio Guerri at the *Museo di Etnomedicina Antonio Scarpa*, an integrated part of the University. Author’s photo (1986 by E. Schröder). Main book: A.S. 1980. *Etnomedicina. Verità scientifiche, strane credenze e singolari terapie, meritevoli di verifica, delle medicine tradizionali dei popoli*. Milano (Milan): Franco Lucisano, see here the title. See: <http://www.etnomedicina.unige.it/> • <http://www.agem-ethnomedizin.de/index.php/ehrenmitglieder-honorary-members/31.html?task=view>



