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Unbefitting healing objects?

Relations to health and protection among young middle class adults, indigenous healers and religious leaders in Dodoma, Tanzania

Gitty Petit

Young adults belonging to the middle classes in Dodoma have access to various facilities: education, religion, and healthcare. These facilities all contribute to shaping the social imaginary of young adults regarding their health and that of their young children. As this thesis will demonstrate, multiple narratives emerge around health-related decisions from the perspectives of three focal groups: young adults, religious leaders, and indigenous healers.

While many young adults say they do not use protective or healing objects – such as *ilizi* – due to their religious convictions, higher education, and reliance on biomedical care, this research reveals a more complex reality. Despite their stated positions, some young adults do visit indigenous healers and use such objects. This disjuncture between what is professed and what is practiced forms a central point of contestation explored in this thesis.

By examining these narratives as windows into the everyday lives of young adults and their young children in relation to the issues of education and biomedical care, Islam and Christianity, and indigenous healers, but particularly in relation to health, and by focusing on the role of material objects, the contestation between aspects of disenchantment and enchantment becomes evident. These contestations surface in the narratives and offer an opportunity to reflect on the relations and contradictions between spoken convictions and observable practices, as well as the friction between religious and indigenous practices (the primary religions do not accept indigenous practices such as the use of an object like *ilizi* while knowing it exists). Both the young adults and religious leaders interviewed advocate for education and biomedical care while denouncing the use of objects from indigenous healers, reinforcing a narrative aligned with Weber's concept of disenchantment.

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