



Universiteit
Leiden

The Netherlands

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

Petit, G.

Citation

Petit, G. (2026, February 12). *Unbefitting healing objects?: Relations to health and protection among young middle class adults, indigenous healers and religious leaders in Dodoma, Tanzania*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/4290042>

Version: Publisher's Version

License: [Licence agreement concerning inclusion of doctoral thesis in the Institutional Repository of the University of Leiden](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/4290042>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Unbefitting healing objects?

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

Gitty Petit

Graphic design: Stephan van den Burg

Printed by: Proefschriftspecialist

Unbefitting healing objects?

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

Proefschrift

ter verkrijging van
de graad van doctor aan de Universiteit Leiden,
op gezag van rector magnificus prof.dr. S. de Rijcke,
volgens besluit van het college voor promoties
te verdedigen op
donderdag 12 februari 2026
klokke 13:00 uur

door

Gitty Petit

geboren te Heerlen
in 1977

Promotores: Prof.dr. R.A. van Dijk
Prof.dr. R. Reis (Universiteit van Amsterdam)

Co-promotor: Dr. C.L. Williams

Promotiecommissie: Prof.dr. B.A. Barendregt (voorzitter, Decaan Graduate School)
Prof.dr. M.E. de Bruijn
Prof.dr. K. Stroeken (Universiteit Gent)
Dr. L.H. Berckmoes
Dr. L.L. Kroeker (Universiteit Bayreuth)

The fieldwork in 2018 has been funded by the Leids Universiteits Fonds (LUF).





P. Petit
oct. '24

Table of Contents

List of map, figures, photos and painting	10
Acknowledgements	12
1. Introduction	14
1.1 Background	15
1.2 The topic: The relational triangle between the middle classes, health, and the use of objects	17
1.3 The middle classes and social narratives: Contradictions within modernity and healing	18
1.3.1 <i>Urban middle classes in Dodoma</i>	19
1.3.2 <i>Social narratives on the use of material objects for healing</i>	23
1.3.3 <i>Contradictions: Modernity and healing</i>	31
1.4 Research question	35
1.5 Methodological approach	36
1.5.1 <i>Demographic characteristics of the respondents</i>	40
1.5.2 <i>Fieldwork experiences and challenges</i>	42
1.5.3 <i>Ethics</i>	44
1.6 Outline of the thesis	46
2. Young adults in the urban environment of Dodoma	48
2.1 Introduction	49
2.2 The middle classes	51
2.3 Mobility and borders	56
2.3.1 Spatial mobility and borders	57
2.3.2 Social mobility and boundaries	61
2.3.3 Occupational mobility and borders	63
2.4 Dodoma	64
2.4.1 <i>Occupations</i>	68
2.4.2 <i>Religion</i>	69
2.4.3 <i>Education</i>	70
2.4.4 <i>Health</i>	72
2.5 Narratives on pregnancy and young children	76
2.5.1 <i>Becoming or staying pregnant</i>	77
2.5.2 <i>Miscarriage</i>	82
2.5.3 <i>Young children</i>	84
2.6 Conclusion	90
3. Dodoma and its medical plurality: The role of folk healers	94
3.1 Introduction	95
3.2 Health seeking and health systems in a medically pluralistic setting	97
3.3 Situating my study in the literature on the landscape of folk healing in Tanzania	102
3.3.1 <i>The landscape of folk healing in Dodoma</i>	107
3.4 Health options in Dodoma	109
3.4.1 <i>Tiba la dawa za asili</i>	109
3.4.2 <i>Maasai healer</i>	116

3.4.3	<i>Mkunga</i>	119
3.4.4	<i>Mganga wa kienyeji</i>	120
3.4.4.1	Indigenous spiritual healers	121
3.4.4.2	Indigenous herbal healers	127
3.5	Past and present	130
3.5.1	<i>Becoming a healer</i>	131
3.5.2	<i>Healer referrals to hospital or another healer</i>	136
3.6	Conclusion	139
4.	Protecting and healing with <i>ilizi</i>: The social imaginary based upon an object	142
4.1	Introduction	143
4.2	The social imaginary of the narratives on misfortunes, shame and secrecy, and witchcraft	146
4.2.1	<i>Misfortunes</i>	148
4.2.1.1	Failures of health and gender: Narratives of young adults	151
4.2.1.2	Failures of health and gender: Narratives of indigenous healers	155
4.2.1.3	Failures of health and gender: Narratives of religious leaders	157
4.2.2	<i>Shame and secrecy</i>	159
4.2.2.1	Shame and secrecy: Narratives of young adults	160
4.2.2.2	Shame and secrecy: Narratives of indigenous healers	163
4.2.2.3	Shame and secrecy: Narratives of religious leaders	165
4.2.3	<i>Witchcraft</i>	167
4.2.3.1	Witchcraft: Narratives of young adults	169
4.2.3.2	Witchcraft: Narratives of indigenous healers	172
4.2.3.3	Witchcraft: Narratives of religious leaders	173
4.3	Conclusion	175
5.	Young adults and the relation between education and biomedical care, the primary religions, and indigenous healing	180
5.1	Introduction	181
5.2	(Dis)enchantment, modernity, and religion	182
5.3	The relational triangle of education and biomedical care, primary religions, and indigenous healers	187
5.3.1	<i>The role of shame and secrecy in managing the relational triangle</i>	193
5.3.2	<i>The role of disenchantment in the relational triangle</i>	200
5.4	Conclusion	202
6.	Conclusion	206
6.1	Introduction	207
6.2	<i>Ilizi</i> as focal point	212
6.3	Common narratives, contradictions, and contestations: Developing the triangle	215
6.4	Challenges for further research	218
	References	220
	Annex A: Glossary	237
	Annex B: Overview objects used in health-related issues	240
	Summary	250
	Samenvatting	254
	Curriculum vitae	258

List of map, figures, photos and painting

Map

Map 1 Wards of Dodoma

Figures

- Figure 1** Simplified figure Local Healthcare System: Internal structure (based on Kleinman 1980: 50)
- Figure 2** Four areas of folk healing in Dodoma
- Figure 3** Relational triangle between education and biomedical care, indigenous healers, and Islam and Christianity
- Figure 4** Relation between education and biomedical care, and Islam and Christianity
- Figure 5** Relation between education and biomedical care and indigenous healers
- Figure 6** Relation between the indigenous healers and Islam and Christianity

Photos¹

- Photo 1.1** Small mosquito net for the baby (*photo by Gitty Petit*)
- Photo 2.1** *Muarubaini* tree (*photo by Gitty Petit*)
- Photo 2.2** Shop selling clothes (*photo by Stephan van den Burg*)
- Photo 2.3** Stalls selling electronics and educational books (photo by Stephan van den Burg)
- Photo 2.4** Fruit stands at Majengo market (*photo by Stephan van den Burg*)
- Photo 2.5** Fruit stands at Majengo market (*photo by Stephan van den Burg*)
- Photo 2.6** Sunni Mosque Nunge (*photo by Stephan van den Burg*)
- Photo 2.7** Institute of Rural Development Planning (*photo by Gitty Petit*)
- Photo 2.8** University of Dodoma (UDOM) (*photo by Gitty Petit*)
- Photo 2.9** DCMC Hospital (*photo by Stephan van den Burg*)
- Photo 2.10** Signpost at DCMC (*photo by Stephan van den Burg*)
- Photo 2.11** *Duka la dawa* (*photo by Gitty Petit*)
- Photo 2.12** Mobile clinic (*photo by research assistant*)
- Photo 2.13** Advertisement on an electricity pole (*photo by Gitty Petit*)
- Photo 2.14** *Tula tula* plant (*photo by interlocutor*)
- Photo 2.15** Super power medicine (*photo by Stephan van den Burg*)

¹ Author holds copyright to all photos. All photos were taken with permission of the interlocutors.

- Photo 2.16** Chamomile leaves (*photo by Stephan van den Burg*)
- Photo 2.17** Beads (*shanga*) in Majengo market (*photo by Gitty Petit*)
- Photo 3.1** *Duka la dawa za asili* (*photo by Gitty Petit*)
- Photo 3.2** Shop counter with herbal medicines (*photo by Gitty Petit*)
- Photo 3.3** Packages with *sanamaky*, *kamon aswad* and *har mali* (*photo by Stephan van den Burg*)
- Photo 3.4** Packages with *sanamaky*, *kamon aswad* and *har mali* (*photo by Stephan van den Burg*)
- Photo 3.5** Malaria medicine in shop selling branded medicines (*photo by Gitty Petit*)
- Photo 3.6** Shop selling branded medicines on street corner (*photo by Gitty Petit*)
- Photo 3.7** Medicine with herbs from 70 different plants (*photo by Gitty Petit*)
- Photo 3.8** Flyer indigenous healer working in city centre (*photo by Stephan van den Burg*)
- Photo 3.9** List of diseases for which the Maasai healer has medicines (*photo by Gitty Petit*)
- Photo 3.10** Medicinal roots (*photo by Gitty Petit*)
- Photo 3.11** Different kinds of medicines (*photo by Gitty Petit*)
- Photo 3.12** Medicine consisting of *utomvu* (*photo by Gitty Petit*)
- Photo 3.13** Mirror and stones used for detecting problems (*photo by Gitty Petit*)
- Photo 3.14** *Miti shamba* from the indigenous healer Hakeem (*photo by Gitty Petit*)
- Photo 3.15** Entrance office *mzee Ibrahim* (2014) (*photo by Gitty Petit*)
- Photo 3.16** Medicines in the shop of *mzee Ibrahim* (2014) (*photo by Gitty Petit*)
- Photo 3.17** Medicines in the office of the young indigenous healer (*photo by Gitty Petit*)
- Photo 3.18** Medicines in the office of the young indigenous healer (*photo by Gitty Petit*)
- Photo 3.19** Medicines in the shop of *mzee Ibrahim* (2014) (*photo by Gitty Petit*)
- Photo 3.20** Shop of *mzee Ibrahim* in 2018 (*photo by Gitty Petit*)
- Photo 4.1** *Ilizi* found in front of Miriam's house (*courtesy of interlocutor*)
- Photo 4.2** Video stills of burning the *ilizi* (*courtesy of son of interlocutor*)
- Photo 4.3** *Ilizi* on a young child (*photo by Gitty Petit*)
- Photo 4.4** Object of beads worn around the waist (*photo by Gitty Petit*)
- Photo 4.5** *Mvuje* (asafoetida) (*photo by Gitty Petit*)
- Photo 4.6** *Mvuje* (asafoetida) (*photo by Gitty Petit*)
- Photo 4.7** *Ilizi* on the wrist of Hakeem's son (*photo by Gitty Petit*)
- Photo 4.8** *Ndulele* (*photo by interlocutor*)
- Photo 4.9** *Miti shamba* from indigenous healer Tish (*photo by Gitty Petit*)
- Photo 4.10** *Kaniki* from indigenous healer Tish (*photo by Gitty Petit*)

Painting

- Painting 1** Mobile clinic (*painting by Pieter Petit, based on a sketch by Gitty Petit*)

Acknowledgements

One October afternoon in 2012, I sat in the cafeteria of the Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences at Leiden University, sharing a cup of tea with my friend Dr. Adalbertus Kamanzi, then a senior lecturer at IRDP in Dodoma, Tanzania. I told him about my idea of starting a PhD on objects used for healing purposes and my wish to conduct the research in Tanzania. He reacted with great enthusiasm. From there, my plan gradually took shape, and in 2013 I formally began my PhD trajectory by enrolling in the CERES PhD Course. It has been a long journey alongside my professional work, and I would like to express my gratitude to all those who have supported me throughout these years.

First, I would like to thank Adalbertus Kamanzi for his early encouragement and helping me establish my research in Dodoma, for welcoming me into his home and family, and for generously opening his network to me. My deepest thanks go as well to my two promotors, Rijk and Ria, who have stood by me all these years, continually inspiring me and challenging me to improve myself and my work. Our meetings were always a pleasure. Your long-standing collaboration and deep knowledge of each other's scholarship created a uniquely stimulating and dynamic environment. I am also grateful to Corey, who joined the team later in the process, but whose fresh perspective on the religious dimensions of my research, as well as his constructive feedback, proved invaluable. Although her guidance was brief, I would like to thank Karin van Bommel for her helpful input on my work. In addition, I thank Marloes and Loes for being my writing companions for a time; their questions, feedback, and encouragement helped me to strengthen my chapters.

During my stays in Dodoma, many people supported me in conducting my research. I am particularly indebted to Judith, Editha, Msuya, and Nyankweli, whose help through IRDP provided me with a workplace, access to the library, and introductions to key contacts.

The research itself would not have been possible without the tireless efforts of my research assistants in finding young adults, religious leaders and indigenous healers for me to interview. I would therefore like to thank Emmanuel, Laurencia, and especially Alex and Beda.

It was always a pleasure to stay at Camp Holland, founded and run by Robin van Donkersgoed, whose initiative supports the children at the Dodoma Deaf School which he founded. Over the years, I met many wonderful people at Camp Holland and among its friends nearby, with whom I shared great conversations, memorable meals, and lively market trips. My warm thanks go in particular to Naomi and Andrew, Mayumi and Kio, Ayaa and Nubia, Jessica, Seline, Singh, Veronica, Mathilde, and of course Robin himself. Around the compound, I also received much-appreciated help from Rebecca, Neema, Hawa, Mwendwa, the guards and workers at Camp Holland, each of whom made me feel welcome every time I returned to Dodoma.

I also wish to express my gratitude to the African Studies Centre Leiden (ASCL). Having easy access to the library, the PhD training programmes, and being part of the GPAS enriched my journey enormously. I also treasure the many informal conversations with ASCL researchers. I would like to thank Ton Dietz and the Executive Board of the institute for giving me the chance to pursue this path. I am also grateful to: Ann, Lenie, Maaïke, Marieke, and Mieke for their kind support in many different ways. Anna's language editing was excellent and highly appreciated. And finally, to the ASCL library staff: thank you for your knowledge, and your ever-present willingness to help during my research.

When I started a new position at the Leiden Academic Centre for Drug Research (LACDR), Leiden University, in December 2020, my thesis was not yet finished. I am therefore deeply grateful to Thomas Klompmaker and Hubertus Irth, who enabled me to complete my PhD trajectory alongside my new responsibilities.

Last, but not least, I would like to thank my family and friends for their unwavering support. In particular, my parents, for their support and encouragement in countless ways; my husband Stephan, for designing the layout of the thesis and taking the photos; Gerdine for keeping me grounded, and Jan Joost for helping me refine my research question. And lastly, Stephan, Stijn, and Lieke: thank you for accompanying me on this long journey, for your immense support, and for your words of encouragement.