

Chris Wright

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Agnes Odinga

**TECHNOLOGY AND THE
CHANGING ROLE OF
THERAPY MANAGERS IN
AFRICA**

Introduction

- ◎ African medical history:
 - Long history of a complex health care system based on herbal medicine, spiritual healing, which are communal in nature.
 - Late 19th century Africa experienced the introduction of western medicine which is based on science.
 - Result-a system of plural medicine. What Charles Good called “medical pluralism.”
 - Has been studied extensively—one scholar is John Janzen

Research: Therapy Managers

- ⦿ Janzen's Proposition : Therapy managers are local, close kin and they help manage patients in medical pluralistic landscape
- ⦿ Case Study: Lwezi
 - Chronic Abdominal Pains
 - Therapy Managers: Mother, Brothers, Maternal Uncles, Mama Marie (Local Prophet), and Proxy Clan Headman
 - Social Issue:
 - Belief that illness was caused by an unpaid Bride price
 - Case illustrates that managers consisted of local family, persons of authority and responsibility, and persons of knowledge
 - Brothers attempted to pay bride price
 - Mama Marie attempted to ease tensions between maternal and paternal clansmen

Research Questions

- What is the role of technology (cell phones, internet, e-banking, wire-transfers, etc.) in African health care systems?
- What is the therapeutic role and place of Africans' in Diaspora? Do they play a role in illness management? If so how?

Thesis

- ① The introduction and use of technology has significantly transformed the African therapeutic landscape.
- ① While therapy managers remain largely family members of patients, contrary to Janzen's proposition they now global and live in cities in Europe, North America, Asia, etc.

Thesis cont:

- Therefore, my research will build upon Janzen's conceptual and theoretical framework by examining the role of African therapy managers in the Diaspora.
- This research makes a contribution to our understanding of African health care practices, the complex medical pluralistic landscape, and the significance of technology in African health care practices.

Research Methods and Sources

- ◎ Secondary sources
- ◎ 15 Oral interviews (Africans in Minnesota)
- ◎ No archival sources (limited by time and money.

Approach to this Study

First Step:

- Record Oral History through interviews

Second Step:

- Read literature on technology and medical practices in Africa

Third Step:

- Analyze the results of the interviews

Findings:

- ◎ Traditional versus Western Medicine
 - Diseases of Man vs. Diseases of God
- ◎ Communal Living
- ◎ Colonialism
 - Missionaries sought to heal to gain support
 - Medical pluralistic practices emerge
 - African belief that strongest medicines come from far away
 - European belief that nature presents a remedy locally for local diseases

Results of the Interviews

- An in-depth study of the use of communication devices such as cell phones, email, and internet reveals that therapy managers are younger, closer kin and global. This is a departure from Janzen's view that they are older, extended relatives, and localized.

Specific Findings

⦿ Forms of communication:

- Cell phone
 - Penetration to 152 million users
- Internet (email, facebook, etc.)
 - Not widespread

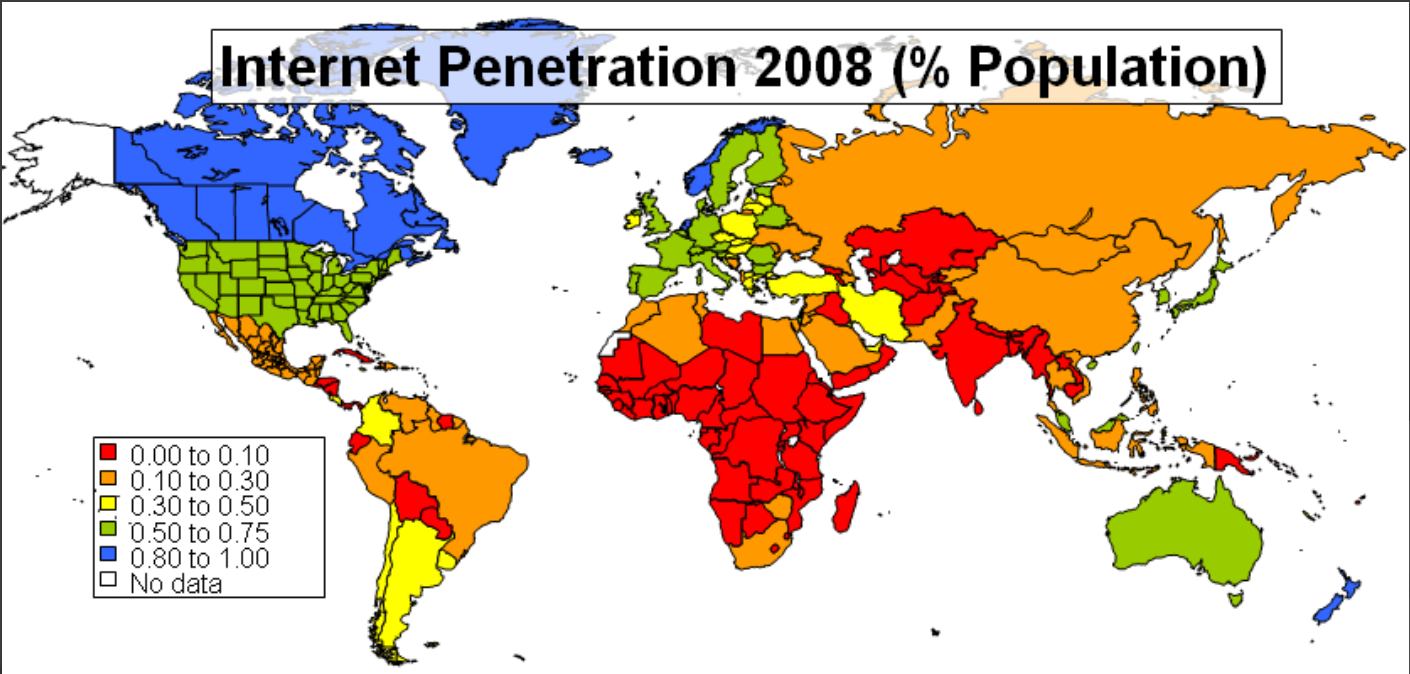
⦿ Interviewees Provided:

- Financial assistance
- Over-the-counter medications
- Knowledge
- Advice

Cell Phone Penetration



Total African Population: 680 million



Interviews

- ◎ “Subject A”
 - Sister in Kenya was very ill in hospital
 - Verge of Death
 - From U.S., made calls to friends in Kenya seeking advice
 - One friend knew a doctor that had knowledge of the illness
 - Sister began specialized care with doctor
 - Still needed blood transfusion
 - Again, “Subject A” made calls to find a blood bank
 - Lastly, “Subject A” wired money to help cover medical expenses

Interviews

● Findings:

- The case of “Subject A” illustrates the importance of the cell phone to therapy managers today
- Also, this case shows the functions that “Subject A” was able to perform from the United States
 - Provided financial support
 - Filtered the information
 - Performed the role of decision maker
 - Accessed a network of knowledge in Kenya from the United States

What Does This Mean?

- Globalization has transitioned the role of therapy managers from a local communal setting to a globalized setting while maintaining the communal aspect of African culture

Conclusion

- This research not only supports Janzen's theory, but it also builds upon his work to include advances in technology that have occurred in the last 30 years.
- Additionally, this research contributes to the ongoing discussion on globalization, technology, health and healing in Africa.

Sample References:

- Janzen, John M. *The Quest for Therapy in Lower Zaire*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978.
- Interviews by author, Mankato, MN, January-February 2009, Transcripts and Recordings in possession of Minnesota State University-Mankato.
- Entrepreneurial Programming and Research on Mobiles. "Why Africa." Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
<http://eprom.mit.edu/whyafrica.html> (accessed April 4, 2009).
- Imperato, Pascal. "Traditional African Approaches to Healing." *Caduceus: A Humanities Journal for Medicine and the Health Sciences* 9, No. 1 (1993): 17-36.
- Gumede, M.V. *Traditional Healers: A Medical Practitioner's Perspective*. Cape Town, South Africa: Skotaville Publishers, 1990.
- Good, Charles M. *Ethnomedical Systems in Africa: Patterns of Traditional Medicine In Rural and Urban Kenya*. New York: Guilford Press, 1987.
- Porter, R. (1985). "The Patients View: Doing Medical History From Below." *Theory and Society*, Volume 14, 175-98.
- Vaughan, Megan. "Healing and Curing: Issues in the Social History and Anthropology of Medicine in Africa." *Social History of Medicine*, [Great Britain], Vol. 7, No. 2, (1994): 283-95.

Acknowledgements

- Professor Agnes Odinga
- Professor Christopher Corley
- MSU History Department
- Memorial Library Staff
- All of the individuals that participated in this study
- Undergraduate Research Conference