

Contagious Modernity - The Rise of a Therapeutic Society in Urban Africa (Fellowship an der Washington University in St. Louis)

Initiative: Postdoctoral Fellowships in den Geisteswissenschaften an Universitäten und Forschungsinstituten
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Researching the ways a society talks about, and deals with, what is referred to as mental health or illness is a deeply anthropological endeavor. The way people give meaning to health and illness, normality and abnormality, sanity and madness tells us something profound about the society they live in, its norms and values and the various social, emotional and physical sufferings people face. Similarly, the institutions and practices that a society develops to foster health and sanity and to prevent, treat or otherwise deal with illness and abnormality reflect its understanding of individual selves, its power-structures and systems of governing. Taking these thoughts as a starting point, this research project seeks to study current discourses on mental health and illness and emerging forms of (psycho)therapy in Uganda in order to understand the deep transformations Ugandan society is currently undergoing and new forms of psycho-social suffering that are emerging as a result. It aims to analyze whether psychotherapeutic discourses and practices, which constituted a fundamental part of social, political and economic developments since the beginning of the 20th century in the West, are now taking root in urban Africa where especially members of the growing middle class are exposed to global psychological and medical discourses and have the financial means to seek psychotherapeutic treatment. Ongoing research in Kampala has shown that psychology and psychotherapy in their current form, both as discipline and profession, only started to evolve in Uganda in the early 2000s, but are currently undergoing rapid expansion and popularization. Overall, the project also relates to fundamental questions about systems of knowledge and expertise, conceptions of personhood and technologies of (self)governing.

Projektbeteiligte

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