

HEALTH, CULTURE and SOCIETY

STUDIES in MEDICAL ANTHROPOLOGY and SOCIOLOGY

ETHNOCENTRISM

Reflections on Medical Anthropology

Sjaak van der Geest & Ria Reis
(Editors)



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Preface

Medical Anthropology became a specialisation of cultural anthropology at the University of Amsterdam around 1977. Since then, the Medical Anthropology Unit has gradually grown to acquire a strong position both in the Netherlands and internationally.

Over the years the Medical Anthropology Unit has provided courses in several themes of medical anthropology, and since 1997, it offers an international Master's in Medical Anthropology (AMMA). Thirty candidates have written or are completing a PhD dissertation in the field of medical anthropology and around a hundred students have written a Master's thesis on a topic in the same field.

The research topics that were – and are – studied by members of the Medical Anthropology Unit and by affiliated researchers vary enormously, but a few themes can be marked as research foci. They include: perceptions of health and illness, social inequality and health, comparative studies of medicine use and immunization, reproductive health and gender, medical technology and innovation and chronicity and care for the elderly.

The Unit holds the editorial responsibility for a journal *Medische Antropologie*, which publishes articles in Dutch, English and French. It also issues three book series: "Health, Culture & Society: Studies in Medical Anthropology and Sociology", "Community Drug Use Studies" and "Current Reproductive Health Concerns."

In the wide variety of research interests in the Unit one could distinguish a few distinct *Leitmotivs*. One is the concern about ethnocentrism, which Sjaak van der Geest chose as the theme of his inaugural lecture in 1995. It would be hard to find any publication by researchers of the Unit, which does not – at least implicitly – deal with the problem of ethnocentrism. The work of the Unit can indeed be characterised as a persistent attempt to both overcome the hazards of ethnocentrism and to take advantage of its unexpected potentials.

This book brings together a number of contributions on ethnocentrism and medical anthropology to 'celebrate' 25 years of medical anthropology in Amsterdam. The authors have diverse connections with the research programme of the Medical Anthropology Unit. Els van Dongen, Sjaak van der Geest and Ria

Reis are faculty members, Chris de Beet is an affiliated colleague, Kojo Senah and Annette Drews wrote their PhD dissertations in Amsterdam and are now teaching elsewhere. Sonja Zweegers was a student in medical anthropology and completed her Master's thesis in 2002. Work of most other members and affiliated researchers over the years are discussed in the introduction. Sera Young and Sonja Zweegers edited the text.

I hope that this collection will contribute to a critical discussion on the role of ethnocentrism in anthropology and stimulate reflection on the purpose and practice of medical anthropology.

Amsterdam, October 2002

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