

RECENSIONI

Pino SCHIRRIPIA | *La vita sociale dei farmaci. Produzione, circolazione, consumo degli oggetti materiali della cura*, Lecce, Argo, 2015, pp. 206.

This book resumes the author's 20 years' experience in working about pharmaceutical products (traditional medicine and industrialized ones) in Ghana (since 1989), Ethiopia (since 2007) and Italy (2000-2003). Within eight chapters he shows developments in the health sector, involving pharmaceutical products, in these three regions, gives insights into their healing systems and the social relations involved in it and offers a new concept to interpret people's way to appropriate medicines for their needs and purposes.

Chapter 1 gives an introduction to the anthropological perspectives of material objects of healing, methodological considerations and an enlightening definition of such products on page 21:

Si può definire, in prima approssimazione, come farmaco una data sostanza, o meglio un insieme di sostanze, che vengono percepite – in una data comunità e in un momento storico preciso – come efficaci per contrastare, e spesso per risolvere, ciò che in quello specifico 'contesto è considerate come 'malattia' (published first in Schirripa, 2009).

This definition offers to everybody, who studies pharmaceutical products in a broad sense, the opportunity to analyze their production, their distribution and their use in a certain space at a certain time, including who produce them for whom with which goal.

Since 1989 the author spent many time doing fieldwork in different spaces and places about similar topics, but rejects to call it multi-sited ethnography as defined by Marcus (1986), because he changed his research interests within the broad field of the production, distribution and consumption of traditional and industrialized pharmaceutical products. He also never had the intention to compare his results to each other, which is also a goal of such ethnographies. Since 2007 the author does, involving Master's and PhD students from La Sapienza University Rome, research in the province of Tigray and its capital Mekelle to look at the formation of the knowledge about traditional medicines (made of plants, animals, metals) and the social relations that are involved with its dissemination.



Chapter 2 presents the global and local issues which are raised when healing, healing objects, healers, health systems and interests of the market come together.

Chapter 3 explains at the beginning shortly the history of Ethiopia, which is unique on the African continent as it was a colony of Italy for only for five years (1936 to 1941) and a free nation before and afterwards. Developments of state structures and society need to be seen under this light, which is different of other African states who remained colonies for a long time. It further more resumes the medical system in the state of Tigray, the characteristics of the field of traditional medicine and religious healing with different stakeholders and the division of “traditional/religious/modern” and “public/private/charitable”.

Chapter 4 presents the different ways pharmaceuticals and their actors interact in Tigray. The field of therapies needs to be seen within a historical perspective of the development of Ethiopia itself and the social relations and forms of actors. Schirripa presents three different types of healers/pharmaceutical sellers in the way that they are assigned to which type of products they sell (materia prima – plants, animals, minerals, self-produced pharmaceuticals for individuals and mass produced pharmaceuticals for an unknown public). This order focuses on the materiality of the healing products and interlinks them then with social relations of the therapy process. Schirripa presents the different groups of healers with some concrete examples, showing the specificity of each. The author draws furthermore the reader’s attention to the issue of the origin of production of pharmaceuticals, their prices and how these influence the market that is if people are able to afford the medication and where it is sold.

Chapter 5 presents the case of Melat as an example of how different strategies and tactics of using pharmaceutical products for healing processes are applied depending on the sickness (HIV and a physical/developmental handicap of her grandchildren) and the economic conditions of a family. This article was already published in 2012 in the *Archivio Antropologico Mediterraneo*.

Chapter 6 presents the pathways of pharmaceuticals in Ghana and addresses the different actors as well as the processes of the legitimization of medicine, critical notes about some development projects of “the white man”, the herb markets and illegal ways of selling pharmaceuticals and the semantical translation and the indigenization of practices. Schirripa shows findings from the period of multiple stays and researches 1992 to 2006 and since 2014, when he was appointed director of the Italian Ethnological Mission in Ghana and continued his work there. Italy also financed and still finances the so-called development projects in the country and the author accompanied interesting changes in their policies. Ghana is an interesting example for the application of WHO’s goals of primary health care and the involvement and development of traditional medicines and healers.

Chapter 7 sums the fieldwork experience within an Italian laboratory of a pharmaceutical company (2000 – 2002) to get known the process of the development of new products and its marketing. After general considerations about doing fieldwork in this

field the company is presented and the case of one product is used to show how an industrialized process develops a new pharmaceutical product.

To sum up, Schirripa shows the complexity of the “object pharmaceutical” in different contexts in order to make visible not only how these are produced and distributed, but also which significance these products have in three different spaces, influenced by local politics, financial resources, social relations, beliefs etc. in neoliberalist times. Inequality issues of access to healing (products, techniques, specialists) are addressed as well as they continue to be an important aspect which influences people’s chances to get help in cases of ill health. The current global challenges involving pharmaceutical products are, from the author’s perspective and the reviewer agrees the problem of competition at the market of therapies, the conquest of new spaces and not only the creation of new effective formulas for specific pathologies. All in all, the chapters about Ethiopia are longer and more detailed than the ones about Ghana and Italy, which is a pity. The author refers often to already published texts (articles and monographs) and generates curiosity, but also leaves it to the reader to look up these publications to get known more about the issues.

To finalize, the reviewer enjoyed the reading a lot and its content may serve well to educate health professionals about the importance of not only the pharmaceutical product as object in a process of treatment, but also the negotiation process between therapist and patient.

Margret JÄGER

Federal University of Rio Grande do Norte, Brazil
margretjaeger@yahoo.com