

SOME IDEAS HELD BY LOCAL BLACKS ABOUT MEDICINES AND REMEDIES

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Ideas about medicines and remedies form part of peoples' medical beliefs and are important to their health behaviour. For Black people the term 'medicine' has a much wider meaning than it has for White people. Medicines and remedies are used for non-medical purposes, such as for protection, to secure 'luck' or to facilitate employment, as well as for medical purposes. Black people also believe that modern medicines cannot be used for treating certain types of affliction, such as misfortune and malevolent poisoning. This belief is reflected in disease causation, in actual health behaviour and in perceptions of what comprises 'medicine'.

The notion of 'power' (*maatla*) in medicine is widespread. It is believed that the 'power' in medicine can be changed by human action and that it can either be increased or decreased. This happens when different medicines or remedies are mixed, or when the instructions of the therapist or manufacturer are not followed when the medicine is used. Its 'power' decreases when a specific medicine or remedy is too old or if the user is promiscuous when using the medicine. Some medicines such as herbal medicines are believed to possess 'power' by their very nature, whereas patent medicines obtain their 'power' in the manufacturing process. Some animal-derived medicines have 'power' because the animals themselves are perceived as 'powerful', 'strong', 'brave', 'cunning' or 'fast'. Some of these properties ascribed to animals are based on people's observations and interpretations of animal behaviour. The origin of the 'power' in medicines and remedies is variously attributed to nature, God (*Modimo*), the Holy Spirit (*Moya o Halalelang*) or the ancestral spirits (*badimo*). Those who attribute the 'power' to the *Moya o Halalelang*, perceive the essence of this 'power' as 'faith' (*tumelo*). One explanation for using alternative medicines is that people believe that the medicine which they have been using lacks 'power'.

Symbolism plays an important role in Black people's ideas about medicines and remedies



*For treating cases of prolonged pregnancy the fat of the Python (*Python sebae*) is mixed with other herbal remedies as the physical appearance of a woman suffering from this condition is said to resemble that of a coiled up Python.*

(Photo W R Branch)

and functions at different levels. Due to personal beliefs, different levels of education, various church affiliations and different occupations, not everybody recognizes the symbolic meaning of medicines at all these levels.

The reason for using a specific medicine or remedy may be symbolic. It can relate to the meaning of the name of the particular medicine, or when the physical appearance of the sick person is seen as resembling that of the animal or plant which is used medicinally. For some people the colour of medicines and remedies has symbolic meaning and may even possess 'power'. These people relate the symbolic meaning of the colour to the specific uses of the particular medicine. Thus white medicines are often used to remove 'bad luck' as well as to induce vomiting, red ones are used to purify the blood, and dull-coloured ones to strengthen a person's *seriti* ('dignity'). Black patent medicines are considered 'safe', but black creams, fats or powders can be 'dangerous' because they are often mixed with other medicines and remedies and used maliciously.

The related words *pula* (rain) and *letsididi* (coolness) epitomize the Sotho peoples' perceptions about man's physical and spiritual well-being. The Sotho peoples connect the

coolness of rain and the coolness of health. To them, to be 'cool' is to be healthy. Living in harmony with the norms of society creates a state of 'coolness'. An infringement of behavioural norms may cause the ancestral spirits to react, which may result in a state of 'heat'. The Sotho peoples regard it as insufficient merely to supplicate the ancestral spirits. They also believe that 'cooling' medicines have to be applied to whoever or whatever is responsible for the 'heat'. It is therefore not surprising that plants which grow in or near water, animals which are associated with 'coolness', such as water snakes, water itself and ash are widely regarded as good medicines for removing 'heat'.



The Nile Monitor, also called Water Leguaan, (Varanus niloticus) is associated with "coolness" and its skin and fat are used medicinally.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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MUURPAPIER IN FRESHFORD-HUISMUSEUM

Freshford is 'n Eduardiaanse woonhuis te Kellnerstraat 31. Die woonhuis, wat in 1897 opgerig is, word op die oomblik deur die Nasionale Museum gerestoureer en sal teen die einde van die jaar aan die publiek vir besigtiging oopgestel word.

Muurpapier het 'n baie belangrike rol gespeel in die interieurontwerp van wonings uit die laat-negentiende eeu. In Freshford is daar voorbeelde van die oorspronklike muurpapier en fries op die oorspronklike grondpleister in die portaal gevind. Daar is uit mondelinge inligting van vroeëre inwoners van Freshford vasgestel dat daar ook in die sit-, eet- en studeerkamer muurpapier was, maar aangesien die oorspronklike grondpleister verwyder is, kon daar nie vasgestel word hoe die papier gelyk het nie. Vir dié vertrekke is voorbeelde van laat-negentiende-eeuse muurpapier gebruik, maar aangesien dit bekend is hoe die papier in die portaal gelyk het, is daar besluit om dit te reproduseer.

Om dit moontlik te maak, is die oorspronklike ontwerp nageteken om die herhaalpatroon vas te stel.

Die nuwe papier waarop die ontwerp gedruk word, is effens smaller as die oorspronklike papier

en die ontwerp is dus met 5% verklein. Die muurpapier is reeds van 'n basiskleur voorsien waarop die ontwerp deur syskermdruk aangebring word. Elke kleur word afsonderlik gedruk. Sommige ontwerpe bestaan uit tot nege kleure wat die drukproses baie ingewikkeld maak.



Die kleurreproduksies het heelwat probleme veroorsaak, aangesien die oorspronklike kleure van die muurpapier baie verbleik het. Die kleure is vasgestel deur die muurpapierkleure waar die lae oorfleuel het en waar dit minder verbleik was, asook die oorspronklike verfkleure, in ag te neem.