

CALL FOR PAPERS

Decolonizing Medicine in Africa and its Diaspora

A Hybrid Online/In Person International Conference

(History and Related Disciplines)

Hosted by
Mount Saint Vincent University, Halifax, Canada
Towson University, Maryland, USA

September 21 to 24, 2023.

Medicine in Africa and the diaspora continues to be dominated by theories, narratives, and archives that reinforce the belief that modern medicine is external to Africa. A legacy of Eurocentric scholarship has generated the misconception that medicine was gifted to Africans by pious missionaries, granted to Africans in the form of colonial medicine, and sustained through the benefaction of foreign agencies like Médecins Sans Frontières, UNICEF, the Red Cross and the Gates Foundation. There is not a single modern African medical professional mentioned in the major contemporary accounts of the history of medicine (Porter, 1997; Gonzalez-Crussi, 2007; Bynum, 2008; Duffin, 2008; Manger & Kim, 2018). Worse still, many histories of tropical medicine, which are mostly about campaigns in Africa, also exclude mention of black medical expertise (Delaporte, 1991; Goerg 1997; Cook, 2007). The imbalance of this narrative is so severe that it delegitimizes medical practice as an acceptable form of healing and care in Africa, and disables the future work of Africans in the global field of medicine (Fanon 1961; Farmer 2008). As a type of discursive violence, European claims to medical heritage silence the roles, agency and contributions of Africans who have produced, and continue to produce, research on key medical problems.

This conference aims to redress this inequity by recovering the roles that Africans played in the field of medicine during the modern era and into the 21st century. For centuries, Africans have been conducting research on ailments using innovative tools and techniques to produce data on illnesses, and they have also managed medical health care systems and institutions under racialized colonial conditions, and equally challenging neo-colonial situations (Patton, 1996; Oduntan, 2018; Roberts 2021).

We invite all scholars from any career stage, from around the world, interested in speaking to these questions to participate in this conference. We are particularly interested in scholarship that explores interdisciplinary/ methodological approaches that overcome the dominance of Eurocentrism in

modern medicine, and can thereby recover the roles that Africans played in medical sciences, practice, technology, education, policy, and public health.

Questions that participants may pose include:

- What roles did people of African descent play in the transition toward modern medicine, in particular the 19th century transition to laboratory and scientific medicine?
- What barriers did people of African descent face when participating in fields of tropical and modern medicine, and how did African and African Diaspora medical professionals overcome them?
- What might be learned from the biographies of African medical personnel as they responded to racialist exclusion and medical inequalities, and as they developed national health care systems?
- What medical ideas and innovations can be credited to people of African descent?
- What are the potentials and constraints of decolonizing the history of modern medicine?
- How did modern professional medicine become distinct from other healing practices in Africa, and how did it maintain connections to previous healing traditions?
- Did modern medicine evolve differently in the Diaspora than it did on the continent of Africa? What connections did medical professionals maintain between Africa and the African Diaspora as they evolved, survived and thrived as medical practitioners?
- In sum, how might medicine deracialized and decolonized?

Please send a 200-word abstract of your proposed paper with a brief biography to jonathan.roberts@msvu.ca and ooduntan@towson.edu by June 15th, 2023. Presentation slots are 15 minutes long, followed by discussion.

A conference volume with selected papers is planned.

Organizers:

Jonathan Roberts (Associate Professor, Mount Saint Vincent University, Canada)
Oluwatoyin Oduntan (Associate Professor, Towson University, USA)