

Questions of Health and Healing

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As a philosopher, Tulane University French professor Jean-Godefroy Bidima has been pondering for a very long time questions concerning medical ethics and people's views of the concepts of health and healing. His research into these hefty questions will get a boost with a coveted fellowship for the coming academic year.



French professor Jean-Godefroy Bidima is one of 10 senior scholars selected for an international fellowship from the European Institutes for Advanced Study. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

The European Institutes for Advanced Study awarded [Bidima](#) the international fellowship. Of the 700 academics worldwide who applied for the [EURIAS Fellowships](#), he is one of 10 senior scholars selected.

Beginning with the fall semester, Bidima will be in residency for 10 months at the Institut d'Études avancées in Nantes, France, as part of a multidisciplinary group of fellows conducting research at 14 institutes across Europe.

Bidima chose Nantes because of its proximity to Paris, with its wealth of resource material. His research project, "Care and Fragility: Narrative Ethics in Africa," will

focus on people of African descent who are immigrants to France, specifically those who have suffered amputations.

He plans to scrutinize their thoughts and beliefs about health, healing and healthcare providers by examining their narratives ? first in literature and later through interviews.

“There are multiplicities of narratives and memories of the body, just as there are multiple parts of the body,” says Bidima, who holds the Yvonne Arnoult Chair in Francophone Studies. “We have a duty of tolerance: my own perspective is not absolute.”

He believes that his research will provide important guidance for public health and medical professionals who work with African natives. For example, because of cultural differences, someone of African descent would assent to orders from a healthcare authority, while possibly consulting a native practitioner and pursuing treatment in opposition to the traditional Western medical advice.

“When an African says 'yes,' what does that mean?” Bidima wonders. “They don't forget who they are when they immigrate.”

Bidima's many questions also may provide guidelines for medical ethics.