

38. Healing and sacral communication in the context of cosmologies of suffering in societies in transition

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The workshop proposes to deal with multiple realities of human suffering in context of different cosmologies, with special focus on healing and diverse forms of sacral communication. Our aim is to explore the dynamics of religious, spiritual and sacral representations including the metaphors and explanatory models that concern health and illness. We suggest that attention be paid to diverse semantic networks of suffering and the embodied experience of psychosocial distress in the context of different (religious, quasi-religious or secularised) worldviews.

Changes of human suffering can be discussed in the perspective of the individual body, the social body and the body politic (Lock & Scheper-Hughes 1987). Institutional, technological and conceptual changes regarding physical and emotional pain are to be interpreted in the framework of social and cultural anthropology.

Ideological changes, multicultural pluralisation of attitudes toward the world, the new interest in spiritualist healing practices and sacral communication (charismatic churches, New Age practices, urban shamanism etc) will be discussed with reference to key texts of medical anthropology. The multicultural diversity of perception and embodiment of physical and emotional suffering and pain offers a comparative framework to discuss fieldwork findings in changing societies, such as the post-communist Latvia and Hungary, as well as in Western countries where social and cultural changes have been brought about by post-industrialisation and globalisation.

Ritual enactment of suffering

Talking with the departing ones: shamanic death ritual in a post-socialist society

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Bereavement is perhaps the most universal form of existential suffering, yet cultural responses to death are extremely diverse. Rituals surrounding death can tell us much about local cosmologies of suffering, as well as about forms of coping, the ways of healing body social, and finding the meaning of suffering. These questions are explored on the example of the ritual complex surrounding death in Tuva, a small autonomous republic within the Russian Federation in Southern Siberia. In Tuva, social calamities of post-socialism have brought about dramatically increased mortality, especially among the young people who fall victims to crime, alcoholism, drug abuse and road accidents. The ritual of seeing off the dead on the seventh, and then again on the forty ninth day after their death is central to Tuvan social life, performed by people irrespective of educational, social and economic status, ideological persuasions and ways of life. This is also a ritual where the role of the shaman becomes crucial, and where people can put their shamans' abilities to an ultimate test. The paper describes Tuvan ritual of sending sunezin, the soul of the dead, to its final journey, and analyses its underlying cosmologies of suffering, responsibility, and redemption.

Narratives of the Body: The Expression of Traumatic War Experiences in Women's Religious Practices in Contemporary Croatia

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My paper centres on the analysis of gender-related politics of representation regarding experiences of war and violence in contemporary Croatia. I intend to explore how women remember, interpret and deal with traumatic encounters through mimetic accounts and bodily expressions of the violence they have experienced since 1991.

Beyond the extensively scrutinised phenomena "religious nationalism" and "new fundamentalism," a hardly recognised folk spirituality has developed in Croatia on a local level that is most prominently expressed in popular cultic practices, such as ecstatic forms of Marian and saints worship. I examine these popular cults and their constitutive ritualised practices (processions, visions, states of trance, the application of amulets and spells, miracle cures, etc.) as narratives of the body through which the violently shattered notions of national, religious and gendered identity are symbolically voiced and potentially reconfigured.

Arguing that memories and expressions of war experiences in Croatia are mainly transported by images of the mutilated and incomplete body, the magical invocation and attempted embodiment of unassailable Catholic saints can be understood as providing visions of healing and completeness.

Metaphors of suffering and strategies of healing

HIV/AIDS-Metaphors, and spiritual healing in Urban Zimbabwe

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Urban Zimbabweans blame the genesis and the extent of the HIV/AIDS epidemic to some extent to their perception that their society is undergoing rapid change. My paper will examine some of the metaphors for HIV/AIDS which express this sentiment and which are produced in various religious settings. These metaphors will then be related to others referring to healing strategies. A special emphasis is given to metaphors ascribing supernatural causation to HIV/AIDS as well as spiritual healing. The religious groups covered by my paper include local versions of traditional religion (1), western mainstream churches (2), indigenous Christian Churches (3), as well as pentecostal and fundamentalist churches (4). The Metaphors are then analyzed and situated within concepts for health, illness, and healing. These concepts are finally compared and contrasted.

Passages through multiple cosmologies: addictions and trances

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Social and political transitions are frequently accompanied by loss of control, social insecurity, anxiety and fear among the victims of changes. The post-socialist and post-modern emergence of free-market Hungary opened niches for spiritual practices and created a new millennial cultic milieu (Kürti 2001). Losses, anxiety and anomy accompanying rapid social change provoked dysfunctional behaviours like distorted coping, alcoholic and drug addictions. Medical anthropological field work was made among those addict patients who were given support of unconventional medicine, like NADA ear acupuncture, urban shamanism by followers of Felicitas Goodman and

faith healing. The passages through distinct terrains of altered realities of these people was mapped to gain insight to the hidden cosmologies of suffering and transformation. Our aim was to explore how new religious and/or spiritual beliefs and embodied experience of controlled trance, gained from these alternative therapeutic encounters, helped to “substitute” and cease the addict behaviour. Showing the role of unconventional therapy in treatment of the victims of a society in transition we uncovered changes in semantic networks and explanatory models regarding cosmologies of suffering.

Breaking the silence within. New vocabularies of the self and emotion in post-socialist Latvia

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My paper will explore the ways in which Latvian women aged between thirty and fifty attempt to master new emotional vocabularies while coping with mental distress. I distinguish three contexts in which they endeavour to initiate and maintain a dialogue with the self: the *social/ interpersonal context* (with confidants or practitioners and in groups), the *textual context* (reading other life-stories, writing journals, letters, autobiographies, genealogies), and *the context of interiorised dialogue* (prayers and dreams). My discussion is based upon thirty-six interviews and life stories collected between August 2002 and September 2003.

Novel ways of articulating experience are informed by discourses promulgated by psychologists and psychotherapists as well as by some folk healers. Recourse to the psy-disciplines can be explained in pragmatic terms, as a means to enhance one's employability in a society increasingly dominated by the rules and values of the free-market economy. I will argue, however, that there is a deeper motivation behind these practices. As they retell or rewrite their lives in the language of psy-vocabularies, Latvian women attempt to transfer their agency from the margins to the centre of their life-scripts.

The symbolic nature of alternative medicine

Broadcasting sacral reality: media cosmologies in transition

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Duna Television is a product of post-communist transition, starting its regular broadcasting on December 24, 1992, as Hungary's first satellite television provider. It received the 1999 award for the world's best cultural television station from the Camera Society, which operates within the framework of UNESCO. The Duna Television has a special place in the Hungarian media ecosystem, as it serves a "celestial umbilical cord" for those Hungarians living outside the borders aiming to create virtual "cultural nest" for them. With the strong claim to mediate cultural values like health consciousness and revival of traditions, the Duna Television offers a sort of renovation of sacral reality destroyed by the hegemony of Marxism.

In our social analysis of media construction of sacral realities and health consciousness we compare the reception of these programmes with sociological data of alternative medicine consumption. In the focus group of program-makers we explore the changes in their life-world regarding the spiritual and health behaviour mediated towards their audience. We explore the web of meanings, and the symbolic social reality in terms of multiple cosmologies of alternative medicine and the plural sacral reality offered by the postmodern syncretism.

Metaphors of the New Age Cleaning Practices

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The paper addresses the issue of cleaning processes broadly spread in the New Age circles. It recalls examples of breatharianism, Reiki healing and sudharshan kriya on the basis of my fieldwork realized among the Polish New Age adherents.

Generally, New Agers draw aside the ideas of sinfulness, or suffering. They substitute for them the concept of blockades (that exist on the level of body and thought patterns) that one should clean, clear out to gain the sacral reality. The ideas of blockades and cleaning reduce various dimensions of human existence to the level of body and medical discourse. However, the processes of cleaning postulated are entangled in broader cultural and religious contexts. On the one hand, they recall both: long tradition of cleaning interventions performed for curing the body, and the symbolically fixed concept of the ritual cleaning understood as preparation for the contact with sacrum. On the other hand, the holistic and, at the same time, objective approach to body that the cleaning practices provoke mirrors series of contradictions in the contemporary culture. The specific tension that emerges allows me to associate the New Age cleaning practices with boulimic attitudes.

Diverse Ways. The provision and use of 'traditional Chinese medicine' (TCM), among Chinese groups in urban U.K.

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The provision and use of TCM among Chinese migrant groups is a significant, yet less explored in anthropology of traditional, complementary, and alternative medicine. This paper situates the immigrant Chinese as a society in transition in urban U.K, and explores the plural meaning of TCM use among Chinese user and practitioner groups. Exploratory ethnographic fieldwork is presented, proposing further examination of cultural processes, and the communication of distress and suffering between Chinese users and practitioners. The meaning of migrant group identity, in both formal and informal access to traditional Chinese medicine, will be explored from organisational, practitioner and user perspectives.

This paper suggests that socio-cultural conflicts, opportunities and resolution are potentially mirrored, inscribed and communicated during the inter-active TCM encounter. A focus upon perspectives of therapeutic effectiveness, as expressed and embodied across diverse settings, includes the domestic family home. However, perspectives of effectiveness may change over the course of time. A longitudinal study is suggested, to better understand how transitional cultural boundaries are

negotiated, mobilising healthcare resources and agency, towards the healing process. In this way, 'culturally competent' dichotomies in healthcare provision are re-presented, as relevant to diverse means of access and use of TCM, across urban U.K.

