

“RELIGION AND HEALING”

REL 3938 (SECT. 4B02)/ANT3930 (SECT 4C06)

SUMMER 2012

Dr. Robin M. Wright (Dept. of Religion/Dept. of Anthropology/ Latin American Studies/Native American Studies). www.robinmwright.com

Email: rowrightrobin@yahoo.com or clas-fwd-baniwa05@ufl.edu

Office: Anderson Hall 107C. Office Hours: MW 10-12

MTWRF2 MAT 18

Preliminaries:

The focus of the course will be on 'non-conventional' healers and healing practices in various religious traditions around the globe. The most important themes we shall discuss are: cross-cultural notions of the body, of pain, and healing; embodiment of healing powers by religious specialists; ritual performances in healing; the importance of sound, sonic imagery, and music to healing processes; and the relations of healing practices to cosmology and sacred narratives. We shall discuss the notion of the 'efficacy of symbols' in each case; the cosmo-logic supporting the diagnosis; and the transformations of self and meaning that emerge during or from a cure. The healing traditions we shall include, by ethnic groups or geographical regions, are : (1) indigenous peoples of the Americas and urban mestizos of Latin America; (2) African and African-derived traditions; (3) charismatic Christianity and Pentecostalism; (4) Asian and Southeast Asian. How does each contrast with 'Western' bio-medicine ? What relations does each maintain with conventional western bio-medical systems ? Is our current national health system capable of incorporating, or at least collaborating with non-conventional forms of spiritual healing into its practice ?

Themes to be covered in the Readings:

- Anthropologist T. Csordas' idea of 'embodiment' of the sacred, discussing a variety of ways this occurs in cultures such as the Navajo and Western Pentecostal Christianity, and its relevance to healing;
- Phenomenological (study of experiences) approaches to sickness and healing, among traditional peoples of the Himalayas;
- 'Aesthetic' aspects of healing: the importance of the religious imagination in representing pain, 'soul- loss'; synaesthesia, ethnopoetics, sonic imagery; relations of the fields of ethnomusicology and medical anthropology; traditional healers of Malaysia;
- 'Performance': traditional healing relies on a wide variety of performative aspects (e.g., dance and induction of altered states of consciousness) that must be mastered

by the healer during his/her training; these aspects are crucial for establishing the 'framework' in which healing takes place; example: Kung people of the Kalahari Desert;

- Cultural meanings of sickness and healing (in cosmology, cosmogony, relationality, eschatology); the category of the 'unknown', reversible 'deaths', and levels of 'knowledge' in curing; sources of and access to, spiritual 'power';

- Plant spirit shamanism, 'ayahuasca' curanderos or 'vegetalistas' of urban South America who seek through visionary experience a cure for their clients; importance of sacred plants in healing rites;

- Healing as a process consisting of distinct phases; the relations between categories of illness and modes of healing; ritual forms, dietary restrictions, and preventive modes of protection against illness;

- The relevance of the socio-political contexts of healing; 'community healing' through collective ritual, and the lived experiences of healing among peoples from various religious traditions of the world;

Required Readings:

1. Csordas, Thomas. **The Sacred Self: A Cultural Phenomenology of Charismatic Healing**. UC Press. LA 0-520-20884-6. Paperback; On Amazon.com, used, paperback copies sell for 21.89. This is a key book for the course; we will read it in entirety, or as much as possible within a week.

2- Robert Desjarlais, *Body and Emotion: the aesthetics of illness and healing in the Nepal Himalayas*. 1992. University of Pennsylvania press. Paperback. Isbn 0-8122-1434-x; an outstanding ethnography of the native peoples in the Himalayas and their forms of curing. We will read the whole book. Used Amazon.com copies sell for \$2.24 – 10.00.

3- Carol Laderman & Marina Roseman, eds. *The Performance of Healing*, Routledge, NY 1996; this collection presents a wide diversity of healing practices throughout the world. Used Amazon copy is \$6.80. BUT I may be scanning a selection of articles and putting them up on the Sakai site for the course;

4- Richard Katz. *Boiling Energy: Community Healing among the Kalahari Kung*. Harvard U. Press, Cambridge. 1982 ISBN 0-674-07736-9. About the Kung people of the Kalahari Desert of Africa. Used at Amazon: \$.10 (cents); new, 15.00. Read the whole book; a classic in ethnographies of healing among traditional peoples. Ancestral energy becomes embodied during altered states of consciousness; transference of healing energy through community ritual to the sick;

5 – Stephen Beyer, *Singing to the Plants. A Guide to Mestizo Shamanism in the Upper Amazon*. University of New Mexico Press. Albuquerque. 2009. ISBN: 978-0-8263-4729-9 , available as e-book on Amazon Kindle. We will read selected but lengthy parts of it. Peruvian curanderos, and ‘ayahuasca’ shamanism of South America. Modes of healing with plants, importance of poetics, sonic imagery. Used or New is \$20.00

6- Marina Roseman, *Healing Sounds from the Malaysian Rainforest*. UC Press, 1993. ISBN 0-520-08281-8. Kindle is \$14.55; used is \$13.99.

Total for ALL BOOKS used: \$65.00 (less the chapters I will have scanned)

Web Resources:

www.newstudiesonshamanism.com

Course Requirements

The course requirements are:

- 1) Reading one book a week, according to the course schedule (to be established by the last week of June);
- 2) A mid-term take-home exam, worth 35% of the final grade;
- 3) A final paper, 8 pp., worth 35% of the final grade;
- 4) Three (3) ‘reaction papers’ (500 words apiece) to audio-visual material (videos), worth 30% of final grade.

Course Regulations:

1. Plagiarism or cheating: Students are expected to uphold the highest standards of academic honesty and integrity. Students caught plagiarizing or cheating will automatically receive a grade of zero on the assignment in question and will fail the course. In addition, they will be reported to the appropriate university authorities. Please keep in mind that plagiarism does not consist only in copying verbatim

someone else's material and presenting it as if it were yours. It also includes taking ideas (even paraphrased!) from an author without according him/her proper recognition (through a footnote, for instance). Other forms of cheating (particularly downloading material from the Internet and presenting as if it were yours) will also be subject to the same action. See

<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/judicial/honestybrochure.htm><http://www.dso.ufl.edu/judicial/academic.htm> for more information on UF policies.

2. **Incompletes are strongly discouraged** and will be given only when students who have finished most of the assignments satisfactorily cannot complete the final requirements due to unforeseen events. If this is the case, students must arrange for the incomplete **before** the end of the semester.

3. **Make-up exams and quizzes** will be given only under very special circumstances, such as a medical emergency. In that case, students must bring a doctor's note.

4. Students engaging in disruptive behavior will be asked to leave the classroom. Please turn phones and pagers off during class.

5. **Students with Disabilities.** Students requesting classroom accommodation or special consideration must first register with the Dean of Students Office. The Dean of Students Office will provide documentation to the student who must then provide this documentation to the instructor when requesting accommodation or special consideration.