Annotated Bibliography: Folk Medicine

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Part 1: Texts


A large, edited collection of newspaper articles regarding health, published in Africa in the 1960s-70s. This is independently published by the author. The articles seem to be scanned as-is, with original layout – many on magic and witchcraft as they relate to medicine, but these beliefs and practices are usually framed in a derogatory way by the original authors, making this a good study of media, language and power. Context for articles and their authors is limited.


Encyclopedia-like text by the director of the New York Botanic Garden on the relationship between plants and culture. Topics are broad, including medicinal plants, hunting-gathering societies, and biological conservation. Flipping through, images are as varied as a Diego Rivera painting in which an Aztec woman prepares medicine from plants (from his History of Medicine series), a portrait of an 18th century English physician, a candid photograph of Andean women in the highlands, and a head-shot of Albert Hoffman who synthesized LSD in 1953. Sources for images are not given, and I couldn’t find them in the bibliography either. Reads as a text book that conveys a broad, basic knowledge – not an in-depth ethnography.


The author describes a method for teaching “traditional/folk” concepts of health and illness to biomedical practitioners in the West. His idea is that practitioners would workshop practical ideas for adapting and integrating “traditional/folk” medicine within the dominant system. Bastien argues that some Andean myths, which he derives from his ethnographic fieldwork, can be used in teaching biomedical practitioners how to treat their patients.


The author contrasts Andean folk medical models in Bolivia (Qollahuaya communities) with biomedicine. The region of Kaata specializes in curing by divination and ritual; in
Curva & Chajaya, the specialty is herbal curing. Biomedicine assumes mechanistic model, chemical-based cure and technology that functions with an “urban-industrial framework”. Andean folk medicine assumed an “synchronistic” model, natural-based cures and personal skills like reciprocity that function within a mountainous rural region of Bolivia. He looks at how Andeans cultivate and collect medicinal plants and food crops on small scales in their own regions, and then trade these items across vast space (“principles of verticality”). The final section deals with concrete suggestions of how certain features of biomedicine can functionally fit Andean economic and social structures.


Extensive but broad work on mestizo shamanism in the Peruvian Amazon, with four parts, many that emphasize various topics around Ayahuasca use. Chapters are called: healers, performance, plants, sounds, phlegm and darts, imitation, sucking and blowing, spirits, sex, harming, healing, magic stones, herbalism, etc. Practices are primarily framed as “shamanism”, and the concluding section is titled “Meeting Modernity” in which Beyer looks at Ayahuasca tourism, what it means to be mestizo in the Amazon, and influences of Catholicism on folk/traditional therapeutic practice.

Bletzer, Keith V. *Selected References in Medical Anthropology*. Monticello: Vance Bibliographies, 1980.


Paper that argues for medical-related studies with a folkloristic perspective. He gives a history of studies of folk medicine, and suggestions for future studies.


Text on “traditional” forms of surgery, including chapters on trepanation – the drilling of holes in the skull for health and religious purposes – and a chapter on “spiritual surgery” of “medicine men”.

The authors examine the traditional use of medicinal plants in Northern Peru, with a focus on the departments of Piura, Lambayeque, Cajamarca and San Martin. Northern Peru represents the center of the old Andean “Health Axis”, stretching from Ecuador to Bolivia. Although about 50% of the plants in use reported in the colonial period have disappeared from the popular pharmacopoeia, the plant knowledge of the population is more extensive in these regions than others, the authors argue. They collected 510 plant species, identified them by scientific and folk/common names, and recorded their uses. The highest number of species was used to treat “magical/ritual” ailments (207 plant species), followed by respiratory disorders, urinary tract issues, “female infections”, live ailments, inflammations, digestive problems and rheumatism.


Transcripts of conversations with a folk healer whom anthropologist Douglas Sharon worked with in the highlands of Peru. Transcription is in English and Spanish, with black and white photographs. Eduardo, the healer, speaks about his history, his profession and concepts of illness in his culture.


Argues for the co-existence of biomedicine and folk medicine (“local medicinal knowledge” or ethnomedicine), and the complexity of their merging. The authors conduct observations, interviews, free-listing and pile-sorting to assess whether the indigenous Amazonian Tsimane integrate local medicine and biomedicine into their conceptual knowledge and practice. It also discusses a “participatory workshop to assess the willingness of Tsimane and Western medical specialists to cooperate with each other.”


The author is trained in medicine and literary studies, and the text is generated from a confluence of sources from medical humanities, primary care medicine, narratology, and bioethics. Charon argues for greater use of “narrative medicine” by contemporary physicians, “medicine practiced with the competence to recognize, absorb, interpret, and be moved by the stories of illness (4). For example, instead of using questionaries that are linear in style, she argues for open-ended conversations between patients and physicians. Her emphasis on narrative means that this text is relevant to both the folkloristics of medical care, and to folk/traditional medicine.

Large encyclopedia-like text with information about an array of topics: concepts of ethnomedicine, Linnaean classification in the scientific method of botany, the regulation of plants (“drugs”) used as spiritual aids, actions of medicinal plants on the nervous system, the future of medicinal plants, and chapters on specific plants, such as poppy, coca, peyote, wormwood, hemp, coffee, tea, cacao, tobacco and other popular herbs.


The author is a scholar of the political economy of health, having focused on traditional cultures (Aymara, but also mestizo) in the Andean highlands of Bolivia, including their medicine, diet, economy, etc. Here she looks at the ways in which aspects of political and economic realities, as well as ethnic identity, are embedded in discussions surrounding health and illness in her field site.


A beautiful and concise text on the life history of a Moroccan tile-maker who is married to a female demon. His relationship with her and other spirits whom he seeks liberation from are expounded on. I see this text as connected to folk medicine in that, 1) Crapanzano was practicing interpretive anthropology, which seems to overlap with the methods of folklore, especially in its use of the subject’s narrative, 2) Tuhami could be seen as possessing some sort of illness, as well attempting to provide a cure for himself, and 3) spiritual contact and other altered states of consciousness share territory with ‘medicine’.


A great text on postcards with medical content from across cultures and times; Sioux spiritual healers holding plants, as well as an image of a modern 20th century homeopathic hospital. The post cards are a fascinating collection of materials to view, but the text is a historical look at the different ‘truths’ that were constructed, visually depicted and circulated regarding health and illness with these cards. The author considers who bought and sent them, who received them, and who the subjects depicted in the post cards were.


Great book by anthropologist who studied in the urban Amazon of Peru for many decades. She gives a history of the urban Peruvian Amazon, healing practices found in rural and urban regions, a practice called Septrionism, and a focus on the healer Don Hilde. She describes the demographics of his clients, the plants and techniques he employs, and a concluding chapter on the role of emotional or internal states of mind in folk healing.

A study of urban Mestizo spiritualist healers in the Peruvian Amazon, with attention to a culture-bound disorder called *Saladerra*. Characterized by an acute anxiety reaction with somatization, the syndrome is characterized by patients as receiving constant and continuing misfortune and bad luck. The paper presents a clinical description of the illness, examines the folkloric references to its origin, discusses the epidemiological significance, and places its occurrence within the context of evolving urbanization.


Simple and fascinating ethnography of Iquitos, Peru, and what the author calls “folk psychiatry” – the practice of curing psychosomatic illness with a psychoactive plant mixture, Ayahuasca. Chapters are on healing sessions, witchcraft and sorcery, healer and patient relationships, the visionary component of the plants, and mechanisms of healing.


Encyclopedia-like text on universal traits of shamanism, drawing on Asia, South America and Europe. Includes information on initiation, obtaining shamanic powers, myths, costume, drumming, cosmology, and symbolism. Very dense, uninviting text, yet it is often cited in works on shamanism.


The author argues that social control is primary in relationships of folk medicine and biomedicine. He offers a political-economic perspective on pluralism, proposing that when elements of modern and traditional medicine are integrated, their availability and use is related to a particular culture’s economic system, whether they are socialist or capitalist-oriented, and class inequality.


A look at contact between folk and modern medicine as a process of acculturation in Latin America, with attention to conflicts within the polarity of *magic* and *science*. He discusses rationality, absolute truth, and the scientific method as related to medicine and healing. He summarizes data on folk medicine in Quito, Ecuador, based on interviews and observations of curing procedures with folk practitioners. There is also a statistical study of the sale of remedial herbs in the central public market of Quito, and he describes evolution of medicine in this region, according to public opinion surveys.

Small textbook on ethnomedicine, a branch of medical anthropology. Includes chapters on definition, historical origins in the field, theories of disease causality across cultures, and the implications of ethnomedicine in biomedical education – namely, in programs of “cultural competency."


Text on the history of food as medicine, with chapters on animal foods, spices, fermentations, the “lives of social plants”, health in the marketplace, complementary and alternative medicine, and functional foods. She covers metaphors and meanings of medicinal-foods, and her chapter on food in biomedicine covers early Greek medicine, Hippocrates and humoral theory, the Middle Ages, Arabic medical philosophies, renaissance medicine, medical culture in the 1700s, and lay healthcare.


Case study of a newly opened hospital in highland Ecuador, which provides biomedical and preventative care education to indigenous communities. She documents opposition to the facility as families express dissatisfaction with hospital policies. Through surveys and in-depth interviews with families and hospital staff between 1977-1982, she outlines problems encountered in the administration of biomedical care. Specifically, the hospital is seen by some residents as a threat to Quichua women’s authority as herbalists and family curers.


Qualitative and quantitative data are collected over an 11-year period, and indicate that communities in the Southern Ecuadorian highlands rely almost exclusively on mothers as family healers despite access to a range of specialized folk and biomedical services. The home-based care system has begun to change around the time of publication as mothers decreasingly integrate selected features of biomedicine into family curing. She suggests that the tenacity of home-based therapy is a product of its receptivity to innovations that complement it.


The author studied 350 indigenous households in Saraguro, Ecuador over a 25-year period beginning in the late 1970s. Her methods are structured questionnaires, unstructured interviews, free-listing, mapping and participant observation. She finds that home gardens are an important feature of Andean agricultural systems. The primary products of home gardens are medicinal plants, which women healers use to treat family illness without the utilization of biomedicine. Finerman’s results suggest that Andean home gardens can be examined to understand both the economic and health status of families.

This text is a sociocultural history of the Opelousas region of southwest Louisiana, and the development of medical practices there. The author argues that African-American folk medicine has served as an important survival strategy in a society that has historically restricted or denied access to biomedicine. The nature of biomedicine, too, has failed to address many of the problems that African Americans have encountered in a racist, capitalist society.


A long bibliography and short discussion on traditional medicine as primary health care, from various studies. It addresses the benefits, the problems, etc.


A look at the customs (“accepted practices”), rituals, and beliefs of modern medicine - specifically of hospitals. He argues that traditions of modern medicine must be studied within a fokloristic context because, 1) modern medicine evolved out of folk practice, and 2) its professionals and patients continue to be involved with folk culture on a daily basis.


The author explores beliefs about nocturnal encounters with malicious entities during episodes of sleep paralysis around the world. He argues that the global spread of “old-hag” legends and myths are connected to past and contemporary experiences of sleep paralysis. He uses what he calls the “experiential source hypothesis,” which attempts to trace the origins of beliefs that arise from cross-cultural, supernatural and health-related phenomena.

Discussion of a group of plants used by healers in the initiation process and apprenticeship of folk medicine in Amazonian Peru, based on a study of 29 healers, 3 apprentices and 4 herbalists from 2003-2008. These plants guide initiates in the process of seeking knowledge, learning about plant usage, and understanding folk medical practices. The authors illustrate the plants, their corresponding practices, and explanations used by indigenous healers. 55 plant species were collected.


Beautiful journalistic piece on the work of an ethnobotanist based at Emory University who is looking for botanical sources of new antibiotics, and the antibiotic resistance problem more generally. A story of an integration of ‘tradition’ and ‘modernity’; the botanist values the whole plants and their corresponding folk knowledge, to an extent, as well as the scientific value of developing drugs from their active components.


An ethnography conducted on shamanism in the Peruvian highlands. He focuses on healers’ mesas [tables] – collections of objects that healers set up on textiles or altars in preparation for, and use during, San Pedro (mescaline containing cactus) ceremonies with clients. Different healers have different mesas that contain different power objects, and power is embedded in objects like stones, pieces of metal, plants, ceramic figures, religious charms, talons, etc. The text includes descriptions of these arrangements and photographs, and also a discussion of Andean conceptions of space and time, as related to ceremonial practices.


Kleinman, a psychiatrist and anthropologist, argues that paying attention to the stories that patients tell about their illnesses is the key to understanding their suffering and providing a diagnosis. Illness, he writes, is bound up with cultural factors such as family dynamics, other social relationships, and internal conflicts. His underlying premise is that meaning is created by those individuals in dialogue with each other – a central theme in studies of folklore, therefore useful to studies of folk medicine.


Collection of 13 articles inspired by the work of Libbet Crandon-Malamud, who studied the relationship between illness and economic inequality in Bolivian mestizo and Aymara communities for many decades. Chapters include a summary of medical anthropology in the Andes, ethnographic studies of how healers choose healing modalities based on economic resources, rejections of biomedicine, and other articles that complicate the dichotomy of traditional/modern regarding medicine.

A review of a conference on traditional medicine held at an Amazonian health center, Takiwasi, in which integrative medicine is practiced. She puts forth potential concepts and projects for future research, especially related to medicinal plants.


A text that follows the author’s study that began in 1938, of ritual use of the peyote cactus by Mexican and American groups. He draws on over 400 published sources and firsthand observations to summarize all that has been discovered about the plant and its use over time. For social scientists and folklorists, the most interesting aspect is the section that compares the “ancient” rites in Mexico with more contemporary practices near the border.


Researchers from South America, Europe, and the United States examine shamanism in twelve South American societies. In considering aspects like visionary experience, native conceptions of power, ritual efficacy, expressive culture, and response to change, contributors to this volume present shamanism as a dynamic, enduring cultural form – not an archaic religion.


The author looks at air or wind-borne illness in the Andean highlands (Cuyo Cuyo, Peru), which enter through vulnerable body openings such as the head, lower back, or feet. The author argues that negative views of women, which are expressed through illness metaphors and etiologies – such as the view that women are more vulnerable to these illnesses which enter their bodies through the vagina – reinforce gender and economic inequalities.


A study of urban folk healers in Iquitos, a city of half a million in Peru. The author interviews four healers about the nature and identity of “magic plants”, including their dietary prescriptions to follow when ingesting these plants, how the transmission of shamanic power takes places, the nature of the shamans’ helping spirits, and how to use medicinal plants generally. Healers are vegetalistas, or plant specialists, as opposed to espiritistas, who work solely with spirits. There are four types: purgueueros who utilize ayahuasca, tabaqueros who use tabacco, camalongueros who use the seeds of camalonga of the Andes, and tragueros who use cañaza, an alcoholic beverage distilled from sugar cane and flower essences.

This paper looks at a contemporary drug addiction treatment center in the Peruvian Amazon called Takiwasi. The therapeutic protocol at the center focuses on physical, psychological and spiritual dimensions of health and illness. The primary medicinal plant of interest in this paper is Ayahuasca, however, in a film I included below (listed under “media”), the creators include documentation of many other plants used at the center, and is much more interesting for that reason.


This is a collection of essays on mushrooms. Since Amanita is the red and white-spotted mushroom whose image circulates widely in fairy tales and even video games, and since it has a long history of shamanic use in Siberia, I consider this text as dealing with folk medicine. It contains chapters on the religious rituals surrounding mushrooms, their toxicity, and other topics related to cooking and wild foraging. The most interesting is a chapter that posits the origin of modern Christmas within Siberian traditions of the Amanita mushroom.


This paper examines the ongoing transformations of knowledge about natural remedies for both the human body (medical knowledge) and the land (ecological knowledge). Data is collected in two rural villages of Peru and Bolivia, and 36 households were interviewed. The authors find that participants of the younger generation possess just as much knowledge as elders, except for a slight difference in the knowledge of medicinal plant use, for which elders knew significantly more. They acknowledge transformations in knowledge of healing, and call for a deeper understanding of these processes in order to better conserve land and promote human health.


This paper compares the health-seeking behavior of households from rural Andean communities at Peruvian and Bolivian sites. The main research question was whether the increased presence of biomedicine has led to a displacement of Andean indigenous medical practices, or whether it has led to integration or co-existence of the traditions. Open-ended interviews and free listing exercises were conducted between 2006-2008 with 18 households at each study site. Authors find that greater access to biomedicine does not lead to less use of indigenous medical knowledge.

A great magazine publication of historical, botanical, cultural, medical and chemical
information related to medicinal plants in the world, but mainly of Latin America. In
Spanish with beautiful design. I found four volumes in the anthropology library at
Berkeley, each with different themes:
--Vol. II #5; 1978; Imeplam y el estudio científico de plantas medicinales
--Año 1 #2; 1977; Bibliografía de la Medicina Tradicional Mexicana
--Año 1 #4; 1978; El problema de la diabetes y las plantas medicinales
--Vol. III #10; 1980


A text on folk theories of illness causation. He reviews developments in behavioral science
and comparative ethnography, and summarizes natural and supernatural causes of illness.
He pays most of his attention to mystical, religious, and animistic categories of illness, with
an entire chapter devoted to witchcraft. There are also chapters on the relationship of guilt
and aggression to illness.

Nall, Frank C. II and Joseph Speilberg, “Social and Cultural Factors in the Responses of Mexican-

This paper explores the cultural and social factors related to the acceptance or rejection of
a modern medical treatment regime for tuberculosis, by Mexican-Americans in the lower
Rio Grande Valley of Texas. They argue that commitment to folk medicine and the use of
folk curers are not related to the acceptance or rejection of biomedical TB treatment. They
reject the notion that folk and biomedicine can only exist in competition, or that
biomedicine automatically replaces folk systems when made available to communities.

Pereyra de Pribyl, Rosario Jessica Quevedo, *The Long Way Home: The Integration of Traditional

A dissertation on, among several topics, the integration of folk and modern medicine in
Peruvian state health care. The first part is on her methods and data analysis; the second
about specific state agencies and clinical settings that are developing and pursuing
integrative medicine; the third is about different types of practitioners in Peru, and includes
mystical tourism, chiropractic, (Ivan Reyna Mercado, the Inca Chiropractor), bioenergetic
chiromagnetism, etc.

Press, Irwin, “Urban Illness: Physicians, Curers and Dual use in Bogota,” in *Journal of Health and

A pilot study of urban curers in Bogota in 1967, in which roughly 100 patients from a
hospital and outpatient clinic, as well as folk healers, were interviewed. The researchers
are after “dual use phenomenon,” or the use of components from various medical systems
at once. They relate “dual use” in Bogota to processes of acculturation.

Although ritual and folk plant use is recognized for its cultural importance and environmental conservation, the authors argue that ritual use has important ties to pharmacological effects, which is often overlooked. They wanted to find whether ritual components of plant usage could have effects on the physical level of the body and brain. They identified 537 commercially and culturally important species with 667 corresponding rituals, and compared their ritual uses with the documented biological activity of plants found in scientific literature.


Large book with essays and 140 black and white photographs, chronicling the use of plants by indigenous Colombian groups of the Amazon. He begins with histories of these groups, descriptions of their land, their religious and shamanic rituals, their worldviews generally, and their relationships to plants.


This rare magazine includes a chapter on Turmeric (Paik, 88) – an essay about the discovery of its medicinal properties, and the failed attempt by a pharmaceutical company to patent these. The US patent office ruled that the plant’s properties were an “Indian discovery and therefore unpatentable.” The author writes, “what makes this ruling significant is that it was the first known case where the patenting in the US of the use of the traditional knowledge of a third world country had been successfully challenged.”


This edited volume includes chapters on: medicinal plants of Fiji, Australia, Papua New Guinea, and Africa; Aztec sources of Mexican folk medicine; Garlic as an Antithrombotic agent; the scientific basis of the therapeutic effects of ginseng; Anticancer Chinese drugs; and recent biochemical characterizations of Chinese herbal preparations.


Text on Spruce’s travels in the Amazon, as he was one of the first Western botanists to explore this region. He describes the ritual uses of plants by indigenous groups that he encounters.

The author examines how biomedical physicians in the urban Amazon draw on either scientific or folk knowledge of plants depending on whether their expertise and authority will be maintained. In discussing medicinal plants, physicians repeatedly mention three themes in an effort to maintain power: science, superstition, and biopiracy. This analysis finds that context is key to understanding whether, when, and why physicians value certain bodies of knowledge. In clinics, scientific plant knowledge is constructed as superior, but in a “global” context, local or “traditional” plant knowledge is valued. This situational valuation/devaluation of plant knowledge relates to the positions of power physicians occupy in each context, Wayland argues.


The author argues that there is a lack of attention paid to the gendered nature of local medical knowledge. She looks at women's knowledge and use of medicinal plants in a low-income community in the Brazilian Amazon, to illustrate the links among authority, knowledge, and gender. Women's roles as managers of household health, she argues, are a source of authority for them, and the ways in which local knowledge is incorporated into primary health care programs can have a significant impact on women's authority.

Young, Allan, “The Relevance of Traditional Medical Cultures to Modern Primary Health Care,” in Social Science and Medicine 17.16 (1981: 1205-1211).

The paper attempt to identify forms of folk medicine which have the greatest potential for advancing primary health care goals. The author looks at the different ways in which folk beliefs and practices are embedded within modern medicine, and the final section deals with types of healers – herbalists, midwives, bonesetters, etc. – and their technologies.


A text about plants and politics that includes chapters on biological conservation projects, contemporary images of Amazonia (Slater), and several on specific plants and the political-economic worlds that shape how they are approached. Although these chapters do not deal with techniques of folk medicine, it provides a framework for understanding how resource extraction, profit, international trade and other power dynamics relate to traditional plants and their local systems of knowledge.
Part 2: Media


Color film about the Balinese healer Jero Tapakan, who attempts to determine the cause of the death of a couple’s son in her home. She offers rice, flowers, coconut leaves, incense, holy water and mantras while preparing to enter into a trance state. Several ancestors and finally the young son speak through her voice, revealing that the son’s death was due to witchcraft and that he wishes for cremation of his body. Accompanied by a book by the same authors, Jero Tapakan: Balinese Healer. An Ethnographic Film Monograph (1986).


In the Bolivian highlands an English doctor is setting up a network of health care for remote mountain villages. While teaching the inhabitants the essentials of Western medicine the doctor is confronted with and tries to learn the methods of the local curandero’s methods of healing. The film is a highly revealing document of the encounter of different approaches to illness.
*Don Emilio and His Little Doctors.* Directed by Luis Eduardo Luna, 1982.  
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2NJBnCKSjmM

This is an ethnographic film about practices with many plants, including the psychoactive plant mixture Ayahuasca. It follows Don Emilio, an urban mestizo (mixed race) healer in the Peruvian Amazon, as he sources, prepares and administers Ayahuasca. The film is very simple, yet the content is engaging; the “little doctors” refer to the spirits that diagnose illness for Don Emilio’s patients, through Don Emilio when he takes the preparation. The content also focuses on sorcery and techniques of ‘sucking’ (to remove illness from the body).

*Eduardo the Healer.* Written and produced by Douglas Sharon; Directed by Sharon and Richard Cowan. 1978.

55 minute film of a healer (Eduardo Calderon Palomino) in Trujillo, northern Peru. Sharon also produced written account of Eduardo in *Wizard of the Four Winds: A Shaman’s Story*, 1978. His story is of his personal history with fishing, bricklaying, seminary and art school, archaeology, apprenticeship, reading and travel. He discusses herbal purchases for cures, and performs a cure near film’s end. According to review by Irwin Press, the film does not address cultural context, the population, the kinds of health problems treated, the official/unofficial facilities available, the role of illness in society, or sociocultural function of folk healing. The focus is on the healer, not healing. “Sharon, in his book, views the healer’s role as that of buffer, between modern & traditional, an adaptive mechanism within the process of culture change” (Press 1980).  
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NVS7oSxuBts

Part 1 is a 20 minute Hi-8 color video, which explores knowledge and use of mushrooms by Tzeltal and Tzotzil Mayan Indians of Chiapas in Southern Mexico. It includes participation by Californian mycologist David Arora, author of Mushrooms Demystified. It is not specifically about healing, but contains an interesting moment of a man explaining that hallucinogenic mushrooms are poisonous. An artifact of colonization? That may in part 2? Great shots of the foraging, preparation & selling/purchasing mushrooms in market stalls.

https://vimeo.com/24319613


This is a visual portrait (77 minutes) about the life and work of herbalist Juliette de Bairacli Levy. It opens with a shot of the subject swimming the backstroke in the Grecian sea, and proceeds with very simple interviews, documentation of her collecting plants, images of Juliette’s old photographs, and footage of Gypsies (Roma?) and Bedouins dancing with their herds. For many decades, the subject lived with these cultures and learned their medical techniques; she has also sought knowledge on the natural and holistic care of animals in veterinary medicine, as she was a breeder of Afghan hounds. She was the first to publish texts on veterinary herbalism.

This is a 28 minute ethnographic film about contemporary folk healing in Tonga – an island between Hawaii and Australia. It illustrates a culture of healers, many female, who are collecting, preparing and administering herbal medicines. Healers discuss where, why and how they have gained their knowledge and why they have chosen to carry on folk practices despite the encroaching modernization in Tonga, documented throughout the film. Overall, the work is a nice visual depiction of the tensions between ‘tradition’ and ‘modernity’. It also shows the preparation of specific plants – chopping, pounding, boiling, and straining plants with their hands – as well as midwifery/fertility practices.

![Image](image1.jpg)

*Why can't some people have children?*

**La Curación.** Directed by Yoni Goldstein and Meredith Zielke, 2008.

An ethnographic film set in Quito, Ecuador, that examines narratives about health and healing in urban, coastal and rural communities. Curanderos, an epileptic revolutionary and a poet physician discuss embodiment through the prism of poetry and folk history, and the film depicts ideas of the body as a porous and permeable subject.

![Image](image2.jpg)

*Our organism is a sieve, a filter.*

This is a 28 minute ethnographic film shot in the Venezuelan Amazon with the Yanomamo. Participants experience a kind of death through an altered state of consciousness. The film does not depict the techniques that produced the altered state – which could likely be ingestion of plants – but instead jumps to the drama of the ceremony in which men move about chaotically, chanting and yelling. While the topic may not be easily seen as ‘folk medicine’ and more as ‘shamanism’, this shamanic practice is the intersection of healing with spiritual contact. For that reason, a review of ‘folk medicine’ must include studies of mediumship and spirituality – not just herbalism (which itself is often bound up with magic or spirituality).

“Rocio Alarcon Interview with Rosemary Gladstar.” Herb TV. August 30 2012. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MHmBvRWkYZQ

This is footage of an interview between the American herbalist Rosemary Gladstar and Ecuadorian herbalist Rocio Alarcon, who is somewhat known in the West. Alarcon speaks about many topics of herbalism and shamanism; what is especially striking is their discussion of herbal baths that rid the body of ‘bad energy,’ and the project of solving physical problems through a mental (emotional) part of a person. She tells Gladstar that with illness, “we should first clean the emotional or spiritual bodies…after that, things will adjust in the physical level.”
https://vimeo.com/146340483

This film documents a therapy center called Takiwasi in the Peruvian Amazon. Founded in 1986 by French physician Jacque Mabit, the center utilizes folk Amazonian medicine with Western biomedicine, including psychotherapy, for the treatment of addiction and depression. International and Peruvian male patients stay at the center for extended periods of time. One scene that sticks with me is a group of men ingesting certain purgative plants (yawar panga, etc), and drinking gallons of water after ingestion in order to vomit harmful substances from the liver. It also shows research conducted at the center with medicinal plants in laboratory settings, operated by Peruvian women.


This ethnographic film documents practices of the Balinese healer and spirit medium Jero Tapakan, who works as a masseuse when she has not scheduled clients for mediumship. The film focuses on her treatment of a member of the nobility for sterility and seizures, and she administers a massage, eye drops, an infusion, and a paste for the client’s chest. A dialogue between anthropologist Linda Connor, the client and Jero touches on the nature and treatment of the illness, and the informal conversation between Jero and her patients. The client is also interviewed about the history of his ten-year illness and the variety of diagnoses that he has received.

The film, 77 minutes, documents eight Western patients who undergo traditional medical treatment in the Peruvian Amazon for Parkinson’s disease, cancer, alcoholism, diabetes, and other illnesses. The film is interesting because it documents the preparation and administration of particular herbal medicines and remedies by a very skilled father and son team of healers, and also because it depicts modern, Western individuals as uncomfortable in their surroundings and challenged in their beliefs about illness. It depicts tension between the ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’, and the messy project of bringing Western patients into the Amazon for medical treatment.


This 65 min. 16mm black & white film is about a pivotal event in the religious and ritual life of the Huichol Indians of Mexico. In a pilgrimage led by a healer to obtain the peyote cactus for religious use, the participants symbolically return to their origins and play the parts of their own ancestors. The quest for peyote is equated with a deer hunt and the cactus is hunted with bow and arrow. The narration of the film is adapted from a text dictated by the healer who leads the pilgrimage.


This is 46 minutes; the story of a female Peruvian Shipibo healer, Herlinda Augustin; the history of her as a healer, her practices with the psychoactive plant mixture Ayahuasca, the centrality of song in healing, and her struggle with illness. It juxtaposes folk healing with biomedicine in an interesting way, with one scene of an individual wearing a shirt embroidered with Shipibo imagery while he aids Herlinda in a wheelchair at a hospital. The contrast of the ‘traditional’ garment of colorful embroidery with the bland, institutionalized aesthetic of the modern hospital is striking. But the film is also quite disjointed or incoherent overall, in terms of the production.