

David Parkin

RAI President's Lifetime Achievement Award

Part II: Medical Anthropology

19.3.2019

David Parkin: trail blazer and path finder

- 1968 Medicines and men of influence. *Man* 3:424-39
- 1970(a) Politics of ritual syncretism. *Africa* 40:217-33
- 1979(c) Straightening the paths from wilderness. *Journal of the anthropological society of Oxford* 10:147-60
- 1982 Straightening the paths from wilderness: simultaneity and sequencing in divinatory speech. (see 1979c). *Paideuma* 28:71-83.
- 1985(f) Reason, emotion and the embodiment of power. In J. Overing (ed) *Reason and morality* ASA Monograph No. 24. Tavistock. London.
- 1986(b) Towards an apprehension of fear. In D. Scruton (ed) *Sociophobics: the anthropology of fear* Westview Press. USA.
- 1991(a) Simultaneity and sequencing in the oracular speech of Kenyan diviners. In P. Peek (ed) *African divination systems* Indiana University Press. Bloomington.
- 1992(b) Ritual as spatial direction and bodily division. In D.de Coppet (ed) *Understanding Ritual* Routledge. London.
- 1993 Nemi in the modern world: return of the exotic? *Man* 28 (1):79-99 (Frazer Lecture, delivered at the University of Oxford, November 1991).
- 1994(a) Maulidi: Wahabism, bida and other mind-body divisions in Islam. In S. Heald and A. Deluz (eds) *Anthropology and Psychoanalysis* Routledge. London.
- 1995(b) Latticed knowledge: elimination and the dispersal of the unpalatable in Islam, medicine and anthropological theory. In R. Fardon (ed) *Counterwork: managing knowledge in its diversity* Routledge. London and New York.
- 1999 (b) Suffer many healers. Conclusion to J.Hinnells and R. Porter (eds.) *Religion, Health and Suffering* Kegan Paul. London.
- 2000 (a) Islam among the humors: destiny and agency among the Swahili. In I. Karp and D. Masolo (eds) *African philosophy as cultural enquiry*. Indiana UP: Bloomington.
- 2003 The commercialisation of biomedicine and the politics of flight in Zanzibar, Tanzania. In R. Cohen (ed). *Migration and health in southern Africa*. Capetown. Van Shaik Publications. (see also below 2005)
- 2005 The commercialisation of biomedicine and the politics of flight in Zanzibar.. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*. (Reprinted from Parkin 2003 above).
- 2007(a).The visceral in the social: the crowd as paradigmatic type. In D. Parkin & S. Ulijaszek (eds) *Holistic Anthropology: Emergence and Convergence*. Berghahn: Oxford and New York.
- 2007(b). In touch without touching: Islam and healing. In R. Littlewood (ed.). *On knowing and not knowing in the anthropology of medicine*. Left Coast Press. Walnut Creek. CA. pp. 194 - 219.
- 2007(c): Wafting on the wind: smell and the cycle of spirit and matter. In *Wind, Life, Health, The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, SI ,no 2*.
- 2011 Trust talk and alienable talk in healing: a problem of medical diversity. MMG Working Paper 11-11. ISSN 2192-2357. Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity. Goettingen.
- 2013 Balancing diversity and well-being: words, concepts and practice in eastern Africa. In P. Horden and Hsu E. (eds). *The body in balance: humoral medicines in practice*. Berghahn. Oxford and New York.
- 2013 Medical crises and therapeutic talk. *Anthropology and Medicine*. Special Issue. Pp 124-41. Editors K. Krause, Parkin D, Alex G. (with joint Introduction),
- 2014 Pathways to healing: Curative Travel among Muslims and Non-Muslims in Eastern East Africa. *Medical Anthropology*. Special Issue. Pp 21-36. Vol. 33. Issue 1. *Turning Therapies – Placing Medical Diversity*. Editors. K. Krause, Parkin D, Alex G. (With joint Introduction).
- 2017 Loud ethics and quiet morality among Muslim healers in Eastern Africa. *Africa* 87 (3): 537-53.



Methodology & History in Anthropology (35, 2 forthcoming)



**Fertility,
Reproduction and
Sexuality: Social
and Cultural
Perspectives
(42)**

FIERCE MEDICINES, FRAGILE SOCIALITIES

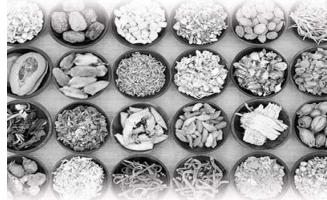
Grounding Global HIV Treatment in Tanzania



Dominik **MATTES**

CAPTURING QUICKSILVER

The Position, Power, and Plasticity of Chinese Medicine in Singapore



Arielle A. **SMITH**

RITUAL RETELLINGS

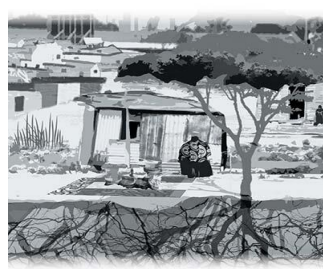
Luangan Healing Performances through Practice



Isabel **HERRMANS**

HEALING ROOTS

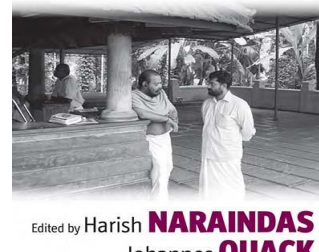
Anthropology in Life and Medicine



Julie **LAPLANTE**

ASYMMETRICAL CONVERSATIONS

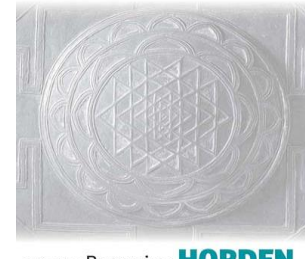
Contestations, Circumventions, and the Blurring of Therapeutic Boundaries



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Johannes **QUACK**
and William S. **SAX**

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Humoral Medicines in Practice



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The Creation of an Industry and the Moral Economy of Tibetanness



Martin **SAXER**

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The Sliding Scale of Time in Mongolian Divination



Katherine **SWANCUTT**

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Mona **SCHREMPF**
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Koen **STROEKEN**

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Paul Wenzel **GEISSLER**
and Ruth Jane **PRINCE**

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Crisis, Celebrity and Celebration in Southern Italy



Karen **LÜDTKE**

WORKING WITH SPIRIT

Experiencing *Izangoma* Healing in Contemporary South Africa



Jo Thobeka **WREFORD**

PRECIOUS PILLS

Medicine and Social Change among Tibetan Refugees in India



Audrey **PROST**

CONJURING HOPE

Healing and Magic in Contemporary Russia



Galina **LINDQUIST**

Epistemologies of Healing

(18)

2 medical anthropology masters programmes ...

SOAS

- Richard Burghart (lectured at SOAS from 1979-1988)
- *The Conditions of Listening: Essays on Religion, History and Politics in South Asia*. [CJ Fuller](#) & [J Spencer](#) (eds) 2008.
- David Parkin (lectured 1964-1996)
- Audrey Cantlie (lectured 1967-20[13])
- Christopher Davis

Oxford

- David Parkin (based partly on early conversations with Peter Riviere)
- Ryk Ward: biological anthropology
- Stanley Ulijaszek: nutritional anthropology, medical ecology
- Soraya Tremayne: Fertility and Reproduction Studies Group (FRSG)
- E Hsu: medical anthropology, history of science, technology and medicine in China
- The Medical anthropology MSc and MPhil courses are unique worldwide in that the social and biological anthropological contributions are 50%:50%.

And a “medical diversity working group”
at MPI Goettingen for religious and ethnic diversity

With:

Gaby Alex

(now at: Asien-Orient-Institut,
Abteilung für Ethnologie,
Universität Tübingen)

Kristine Krause

(now at: Department of Anthropology
UVA; member of the Health, Care and
the Body Research Group and part of
the Long Term Care Partnership team,
University of Amsterdam)

The Pathfinder : orchestrating social relations

kile path, road (Jackson 1983:
“Thinking through the body”)

“nyendan bin to kile”

- A species of grass that bends one way when you go along a path, and the other when you return along the same path: social reciprocity.

“kile ka nafaga”

- So that the path does not die.

Dao 道 (Chinese)

The way, the morally right way.

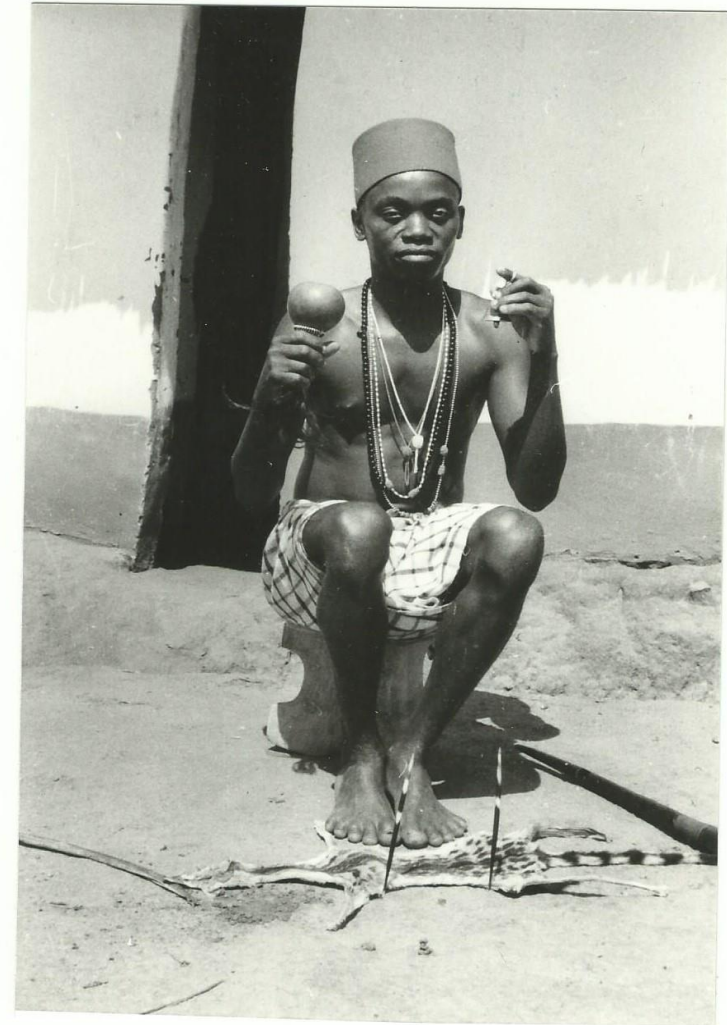
Nong “Jungle paths and spirit songs”, a metaphor that conjoins travelling, knowing, singing and healing.

(Roseman 1991 on Temiar music and medicine in SE Asia)

A mistake is “Losing the path”;
Treatment involves “singing a way”

I. Medicines and Men of Influence (1968)

- S. Whyte (1988): The Power of Medicines in East Africa. In S. van der Geest & S. Whyte (eds) *The Context of Medicines in the Developing World*.
- S. van der Geest & S. Reynolds Whyte (1989). The Charm of Medicines: Metaphors and Metonyms. *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*.
- R. Marsland (2007). The Modern Traditional Healer: Locating 'Hybridity' in Southern Tanzania, *Journal of Southern African Studies*.
- E. Hsu (2008). Wonders of the Exotic: Chinese Formula Medicines on the East African Coast. In K. Larsen (ed) *Knowledge, Renewal and Religion*.
- C. Meier zu Biesen (2017). From Coastal to Global: the transnational flow of Ayurveda and its relevance for Indo-African linkages. *Global Public Health*.



David Parkin on the political anthropology of anti-witchcraft movements, and its relevance for medical anthropology

- Emphasizes tensions contained in the social structure, structural changes from *gumsa* to *gumlao*, and vice-versa. See E. Leach (1954): *Political Systems of Highland Burma*.
- Generational tensions in the world of East Africa in the 1960s carried out in the idiom of “medicines” (compare with the generational tensions in Mao’s Cultural Revolution, 1966-76: not in idiom of meds)
- From a redistributive economy to a capitalist economy: each requires a specific materiality of medicine: the fermented sap/fresh juice versus the dry copra, that can be accumulated and transported far away.

Moving to the Luo in rural Kenya

“Balancing diversity
and well-being:
words, concepts
and practice in
eastern Africa.”

In *The body in
balance*:

*humoral medicines in
practice*. Berghahn,
2013.

Epistemologies of
healing monograph
series co-founded by
David Parkin.

On chjira / kirwa / kir
a “mystical affliction”





II. *Chira, kirwa, kir*

- Bantu root: *-kira* 'to pass over'
- A delict ranging from incest, breach of seniority rules and 'mixing bloods' in an improper manner.
- Chira causes fatal bodily wasting infertility and the death of a descent line.
- Parkin (2013) discusses *chira* as an example for the Bantu oral traditions as a 'Great Tradition'.
- Parkin notes earlier descriptions of *chira* are uncannily similar to those of AIDS today (but in 1960s men were more blamed, nowadays women).
- Wenzel Geissler & Ruth Prince (2012): *riwo* 'mixing-through-sharing'.
- Hans-jörg Dilger (2006) reports ambivalence to 'ritual widow cleansing'.

Local 'positive knowledge' of disorders predating their 'discovery' as disease: e.g. malaria

- Murray Last on good and bad death: the pious die on a Friday, except in late summer, when malaria is rampant.

- Eva Gillies in a footnote on a footnote by Richard Burton (in 1856, well in advance of Ross and Manson 1897):

“The superstition probably arises from the fact because mosquitoes and fevers become formidable at about the same time.”

From the Luo to the
Giriama on the Swahili-
speaking coast:

Suffering many healers,
Latticed knowledge,
Islam among the
humours,
Trust talk and alienable
talk,
Medical crisis and
therapeutic talk,
Pathways to healing.



From the Giriama to Zanzibar island

Maulidi, Wahabism, bida and other mind-body divisions in Islam,

Ritual as spatial direction,

Nemi in the modern world r (Frazer lecture),

The commercialisation of biomedicine and the politics of flight in Zanzibar,

etc.



III. Phenomenology

Psychiatrists of the early 20th century, e.g.:

- F. Basaglia (1924-1980) in Italy (see Pandolfi and Bibeau [2005] 2007)
- J.H. van der Berg/ F.J.J. Buitendijk (1887-1974) in the Netherlands (see van der Geest [2012] 2015)

Relevant in medical anthropology:

- Alfred Schütz (1899-1959): on intersubjectivity and social time.
(Harvard: Byron Good, Arthur Kleinman, Cheryl Mattingley)
- Ernesto de Martino (1908-1965): on redemption through presence.
(Europe: Tullio Sepilli, Marja-liisa Honkasalo)
- Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961): on the self moving through *space*.
(Thomas Csordas, Tim Ingold; ?Oxford on sensory anthropology)

Moving East: attending to the visceral in the social, and turning to the senses

2007: The Visceral in the Social: the Crowd as Paradigmatic Type.

In *Holistic Anthropology: Emergence and Convergence*. D. Parkin & S. Ulijaszek (eds).

In the Berghahn series: "Methodology and history in anthropology". David Parkin, sole founder and series editor.

2007: In touch without touching: Islam and healing. In R. Littlewood (ed). *On knowing and not knowing in the anthropology of medicine*.

2007: Wafting on the wind: smell and the cycle of spirit and matter. In *Wind, life, health*, C. Low & EH (eds) a special issue of the *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*.

Unspeakable taste (co-authored with Xiao Kunbing, under review).



David Parkin: trail blazer and path finder:

Slide 2: Among the articles/book chapters that David Parkin listed on his web page, those are the ones that might pertain to medical anthropology. Apart from those self-authored writings, David Parkin also enabled a wide range of other authors to publish their work in the three Berghahn book series he founded (see three next slides), of which two are book series in medical anthropology.

Slide 6: David Parkin helped save the discipline from being merged with sociology during the Thatcherite years, so I was told during a summer day's walk with a colleague and friend only very recently. How was this possible? It was when, as the sole representative of social anthropology, in 1985, David Parkin was on the University Grants Committee for the social sciences (precursor of the RAE and REF), and he evaluated each and every social anthropology department reviewed with a distinction (as he explained in an interview held in preparation of this event). This demonstrates not only great foresight but also his generosity and care. David Parkin has an ability to genuinely see value in the research and teaching that his students and colleagues do. This rare quality of character has been most enabling not only for the individuals who benefitted from it but also for the discipline of social anthropology as a whole.

Meanwhile, David Parkin did not only operate in the stratosphere of University politics, he quite pragmatically worked towards social anthropology seeking allies with other sub-disciplines of anthropology - to survive harsh times. One of his strategies was to found medical anthropology masters programmes, of which he founded two that kept the respective social anthropology departments in the black numbers (as he would assure me throughout the seven first years of the 2000s) and once he retired, he founded yet another medical anthropology group at the MPI in Goettingen (which suggests that medical anthropology meant more to him than merely strategy) As we will see on slide 9, his interest in the tensions between the social collective and individual creativity goes back a very far way.

Slide 8: I experienced David as an HoD very much as a 'path finder', where the notion of 'path' is the one commonly found in African anthropology, meaning the path to the social other and to social reciprocity. If students found the course contents difficult to take on or if colleagues who pulled hard on the same cart, but occasionally not exactly in the same direction, or if one's own persona in academia was about to turn into a problem, David Parkin would be there to orchestrate social relations. Incidentally, finding the path, or straightening it, was one of the earliest themes relevant to medical anthropology that David Parkin published on: "Straightening the paths from wilderness: simultaneity and sequencing in divinatory speech" (Parkin 1979, 1982, 1991).

Slide 9: This leads on to the second part of the presentation: the intellectual contributions to medical anthropology that I found in David Parkin's research. I can impossibly account for them all but will, hodologic-ally, trace the way in which I got to know about them after 2001, when I started my research on Chinese medicine in East Africa shortly before I started teaching at Oxford in the same year. I will also try to highlight how our paths crossed as his fieldwork localities went from West to East.

An early question in fieldwork was why are these Chinese offering their medicines to us? A good answer to it could be found in Susan Reynolds Whyte's articles, which pragmatically highlighted basically two strategies: a quick fix with a thingy medicine that contains compactly all efficacy or a prolonged, possibly expensive, and certainly embarrassing, counsel with the elders. Meanwhile David Parkin's (1968) article on "Medicines and men of influence" added further dimensions. Despite the word 'medicine' in its title, it was not an article in medical anthropology but I found the way in which it foregrounded history, religion and politics specific to East Africa most illuminating:

Slide 10: Parkin's (1968) political anthropology article proposed that the anti-witchcraft movements advertised a new economic order; this was at the time 'the cash crop economy.' The medicines had been extracted from the social relations of which they were previously part of; they were now free floating, to be purchased by whoever had the purchase power, i.e. the cash to buy them (Accordingly, today perhaps, the new Chinese medicines might be advertising a new economic order, namely the JP Morgan financial sort of criminality that enables credit taking for activities promising a future at a breath taking scale of enabling global educational mobility, hedge funds, new technologies, etc.). Parkin's (1968) analysis can be read to have hinted at a) a fluidity towards changes in the social order a la Leach (the second most important book according to his 2018 JRAI interview with L Martinez); b) to have reflected on generational tensions – and the idioms in which they are played out; and c) in his later 1972 book on *Palms, wine and witnesses*, his analysis can be read to have highlighted that the materiality of the 'medicines' or 'goods traded' changed as the economy changed. All this was relevant to the above medical anthropology question.

Slide 11: The second important theme I wish to discuss is "*chira*", as it repeatedly emerges throughout David Parkin's work. It designates a complex of cultural practices that like that of *Ngoma* (the drum, drumming), described by John Janzen, can be interpreted - as Parkin argued in 2013 - as a Great Tradition of the Bantu, ranging from Central to East to South Africa, although these societies are non-literate. ...

Slide 13: Furthermore, David Parkin noted that the descriptions of *chira* in the 1960s are uncannily similar to those of the AIDS symptoms of the 1980s and 1990s. Might he here, in the main text, in large script, be making an observation that otherwise is relegated into the footnote on a footnote by social anthropologists (see next slide)?; namely, the possibility that local perceptions of disorders –a local awareness that need not be lexicalized - predates the modern scientific discovery of them? It would appear that the history of malaria contains some examples to make this claim too, see next slide.

Slide 15: As David Parkin's fieldwork localities moved eastward, he wrote more and more articles contributing to medical anthropology (see above) and the involvement of the body in ritual performance (see next slide).

Slide 17: Phenomenology somehow plays into most of the above mentioned articles by Parkin. There are of course many different phenomenologies that in particular different psychiatrists of the early 20th century formulated and embraced. In medical anthropology one might single out three authors as particularly influential: Schuetz, de Martino and MP. Csordas brought MP, in combination with Bourdieu's habitus, into medical anthropology, Ingold emphasized Gibsonian ecological psychology, meanwhile we at Oxford are engaging with the sensory dimension by exploring healing techniques that intensify sensory experiences. These sensory modalities can be researched and understood as straddling the interface between the social and neurological/endocrinal aspects of the biological body ... When starting to teach these course contents in 2001, there was hardly any literature in medical anthropology from this sensory perspective, but nowadays every year there is so much to digest, and the reading list is constantly expanding. ...

Slide 18: Meanwhile, David Parkin has been writing one trail blazing piece after the other: on the visceral, sensory and affective dimensions of healing and well-being ... and there is more to come in the pipeline.