

21A.460
April 7, 2005

End of Janzen

- Last two chapters: more explicit to show cultural institutions versus political institutions, such as legal or political systems, and their effects on illness
- How aspects of family get involved in issues of illness
- How social structures can cause people to get sick – how everything is linked to either the manifestation, interpretation, or healing of sickness

Do you think that certain social structures can cause illness?

- There are certain contradictions in every social system, i.e. matrilineal components within a patrilineal society. However, dominant system (i.e. patrilineal system) has the power to control and define identity.
- The only way a person can resolve tensions in identity and to resolve contradictions is to go and train with another cult to gain status and power from affiliation with another social system. This serves as a means to gain power by escaping from the tensions of one particular social system

Are problems problematic?

- For example, women's bodies, eating disorders, social conflicts, social flux (i.e. Zaire), religious tension. Why are these issues problematic? What is implicated in considering a particular issue a 'social problem'?

Chapter 9

- Traditional sources and the authority of lineage
- Describes historical and political shifts and how they impinged upon the body, causing conflicts manifested as illness

Chapter 10

- Idea of person (nganga) and ideas about cosmology
- What perspective of person is presented in this narrative, and how is it related to/different from other cultural perspectives?
 - In the bio-medical West, individual is idealized as an autonomous person. Notions of body end with physical self, does not extend to beyond the strictly biological (corporal)
 - In this account, the person is perceived to be an individual, but not as much as in Western traditions
 - For example, a mother is not just a designation of a single individual, but rather the notion of motherhood/parenthood is expanded to reflect throughout lineage, including notions of ancestors and the dead.
- What is a person vulnerable to? What can cause a person to become sick?
 - Related to perceptions of body, health
 - Organs in body are not strictly biological entities entirely separate from social context or meaning; rather, the function of organs and the body are considered to be linked to relationships between people as well as the will of the ancestors. In essence, social interactions can actively influence person's health and wellbeing.

- Organs and the body also linked to physical environment. For example, how trees are planted in yard can have an effect on the health of the body, in particular the heart and the head.

To what extent are the boundaries of 'person' permeable in this conception? Do you think witchcraft 'exists'? How would people in the Congo define 'witchcraft'? How would Westerners evaluate it?

- When desired, human emotions are channeled to have effects on people. Substances in body are seen to have a corporal reality, upon which thought, emotion, and intentions can have a physical influence.
- How conscious is witchcraft?
 - pg. 145 – Conscious or unconscious witchcraft is conflict, but not all conflict is witchcraft.
- Definitions of illness and witchcraft sometimes suggest and challenge Western ideas about mental illness.
 - For example, the progression of afflictions that can lead to the heart beating hard, palpitations can be seen as correlating to anxiety
 - Fear is seen to be located in the heart, as well as madness
 - Using witchcraft is a way to look for solutions for problems that involve manipulating external conditions. Practice of witchcraft investigates possible sources of the problem by examining social structures, relationships of the afflicted.
 - Process through which witchcraft is carried very 'scientific' in method and intent, with the same goal – to cure the afflicted
 - Question: *to what extent is witchcraft simply a different interpretation of the same phenomena described by biomedicine?*
 - Head afflictions are interpreted to be due to a curse, or the displeasure of the ancestors
 - Haitian case study: the woman whose husband died, but could not afford proper burial. Later she was afflicted with nightmares and a head affliction that she saw to have been the spirit of her dead husband psychically afflicting her head/body/organ system.
 - Illness is seen to concern the individual's body, but also is interpreted through family/kinship/national/political terms that reflect the tensions and concerns of each.
 - pg. 182 – madness
 - performing actions that are seen as taboo can also cause bodily affliction as a form of punishment
 - ex., men and women who played with or stepped on a *nkisi* were afflicted with madness
 - Madness as described by these men and women strongly resemble biomedical definitions of schizophrenia (hallucinations, disorganization of thought processes – the start of 'madness' is like psychotic illness with incoherent speech, hearing voices inside head, paranoia)
 - Interesting to note that these categories and definitions may be universal – even in Western contexts, schizophrenics are often linked to magical activities geared

towards increasing their power.

- Alien abduction often cited by schizophrenics – is there a correlation with spiritual possession, perhaps the same experience, only described through a Western analogue?
- *To what extent are experiences universal, that is, common to all human beings? Or are all phenomena dependent upon culturally specific perceptions?*
- Threat of being afflicted with madness a form of disciplinary control and power over citizens.
- The practice of witchcraft can be seen as a form of resistance to social norms or as a means of controlling external factors. Likewise, the use of witchcraft deeply implicates notions of guilt as a major factor in maintaining social order
- How to interpret reality – what is the purpose of labeling them as ill if they don't feel as if they are ill?
 - Those defined as 'ill' by society are seen to pose some kind of harm to society

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21A.460J / WGS.620J Medicine, Religion and Politics in Africa and the African Diaspora
Spring 2005

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