

<http://somatosphere.net/2010/09/medical-anthropology-films.html>

Medical anthropology films

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By Rebecca Prentice

This list of medical anthropology films was contributed by Rebecca Prentice (Goldsmiths College, University of London). Please feel free to add suggestions.

There are a number of websites worth looking at for excellent health-related films that are available online for free (but may not be accessible in all countries):

- Frontline: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/>
- Independent Lens: <http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/>
- Neuroanthropology: A collection of films on cross cultural healing, sickness and more:
<http://neuroanthropology.net/2009/06/15/videotheque-videos-on-cross-cultural-health-sickness-and-healing/>
- Neuroanthropology: A collection of video/films on trance: <http://neuroanthropology.net/2009/06/15/trance-captured-on-video/>
- POV: <http://www.pbs.org/pov/>
- Women Make Movies: <http://www.wmm.com/>
- Youtube: <http://youtube.com> (Recommended from youtube: “Vulvagraphics” and “Big Bucks, Big Pharma: Marketing Disease and Pushing Drugs”)

One contributor recommended three films that have been used together for a talk on Anthropology, Death and Dying and Medicine:

- *My Life without Me* (Isabel Coixet): <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0314412>
- *Red Beard* (Akira Kurosawa) <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0058888>
- *In America* (Jim Sheridan) <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0298845>

- “I used these films to show the different points of view from the dying person, the doctor and the surviving family after the death of a son.”

AIDS in the Pacific: A Cause for Concern (Director: Dale Hermanson Producer: Steven Vet Distributor: Pasifika Library 1997, 38 mins)

- <http://www.pasifika.com/xcart/home.php?cat=251>
- Tonga; Samoa; Papua New Guinea; Marhsall Islands; and Fiji AIDS
- Takes a regional look at efforts to educate the public of the Pacific about the disease AIDS. The main message is that it is everyone’s responsibility – not just the government’s – to fight the battle against AIDS.

A Balinese Trance Séance, Jero on Jero, The Medium is the Masseuse, Jero Tapakan

(all four by Timothy Asch and Linda Connor, early 1980s, about a Balinese healer)

- <http://www.der.org/films/jero-tapakan-series.html>
- They are accompanied by a book: Linda Conner, Patsy Asch & Timothy Asch 1986. *Jero Tapakan: Balinese Gealer. An Ethnographic Film Monograph*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

The Business of Being Born (dir. Abby Epstein, 2005, 87 mins)

- Birth is a miracle, a rite of passage, a natural part of life. But birth is also big business. Compelled to explore the subject after the delivery of her first child, actress Ricki Lake recruits filmmaker Abby Epstein to question the way American women have babies. The film interlaces intimate birth stories with surprising historical, political and scientific insights and shocking statistics about the current maternity care system. When director Epstein discovers she is pregnant during the making of the film, the journey becomes even more personal. Should most births be viewed as a natural life process, or should every delivery be treated as a potentially catastrophic medical emergency?

Days of the Dead: A Living Tradition (2005, 53 mins)

- http://ffh.films.com/id/13994/Days_of_the_Dead_A_Living_Tradition.htm
- A Purépecha family struggles to survive on what they earn selling crafts to tourists. A young woman visits a candle-maker who makes traditional candles for Days of the Dead celebrations.

The Deadly Deception (1993)

- <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/listseason/20.html>
- “This is getting a bit old now, but this NOVA documentary on the Tuskegee syphilis study is so important in illuminating the gross tragedy of the state upon minority populations in the name of ‘science’ re: healthcare, the construction of medical knowledge, bioethics, protection of human subjects in research, sedimenting black American’s fear of the white biomedical establishment that even echoed unto the fears of testing for HIV-AIDS in the early 90s. In my opinion, the best documentary out there on this historical event.”

Disordered States (Tape 8 from PBS’s “Medicine at the Crossroads” Series, 1993, 56 mins)

Doctors of Two Worlds (Natasha Solomons, 1989, 55 mins)

- Location Bolivia / America
- 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 and is particularly suited for the teaching of Medical Anthropology.

Donka: X-Ray of an African Hospital/Radioscopie d'un Hopital Africain (1996, Michel Thierry, English subtitles, 85 mins)

- http://icarusfilms.com/new97/donka_x.html
- Donka Hospital in Conakry, Guinea – the largest public hospital in the country – is similar to many African hospitals. Built in 1959 just before independence, it was designed based on a European model, with little consideration for the realities of Africa. The most important hospital in the country, its plight typifies the crisis affecting the entire African health sector.
- “I use it to understand biomedicine in impoverished countries. It’s devastating.”

Eduardo the Healer (1978, 55 mins)

- An old favorite of medical anthropology courses; deals with traditional subjects.

The Fight Against Infectious Disease: From Yellow Fever to AIDS (Blackwell Corporation, 1987, 60 mins)

4 Months, 3 Weeks & 2 Days (2007)

- On illegal abortion in Romania’s pre-democracy period.

Frontline’s The Suicide Tourist

- http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/suicidetourist/view/?utm_campaign=homepage&utm_medium=proglis&utm_source=proglis

Frozen Angels (Frauke Sandig and Eric Black, 2005)

- On the modern reproductive technologies in California and its booming egg donor-sperm donor surrogate mother industry – the movie, too, is very good for a course about kinship.

Gift of a Girl (Mayyasa Al-Malazi, 1997)

- “The positive message of *Gift of a Girl* video was a nice antidote to the angst-driven writings of Nancy Scheper-Hughes – I encouraged students to explore the contrast between the viewpoint of this film and the theoretical writings of Scheper-Hughes on Brazil shantytowns.”

The Greatest Silence: Rape in the Congo

- <http://www.wmm.lfchosting.com/filmcatalog/pages/c709.shtml>

The Horse Boy

- <http://horseboymovie.com>
- “The Horse Boy is a movie/book by Rupert Isaacson about his Autistic Son Rowan. Rowan was non-verbal until the very first time he sat on their neighbours’ horse – a mare called Betsy. The story follows the family’s journey to Mongolia to the Shaman on horseback in search of help for Rowan.”

Initiation Kut for a Korean Shaman (1991, VHS, 26 mins, Korean with English subtitles)

- In Korea, when things go wrong in the household, the housewife may consult a shaman to determine if the problem is caused by an angry god or ancestor. The occupation of shaman is female dominated and hold a dual reputation in today’s

society. In one respect, they are considered lewd women who promote superstition; in another, they are seen as keeping alive the religious ideals of the past. Follows one woman's trials from when she felt destined to be a shaman through her two-day initiation ceremony. The emotional impact of the ceremony is apparent throughout.

- Deals with traditional subjects in medical anthropology.

Is it a Boy or a Girl? (Discovery Channel Cable Broadcast, 2000)

- This one-hour documentary was nominated for a GLAAD award for Outstanding TV Journalism. From the moment of birth, everybody wants to know is it a boy or a girl? This question can be complicated when a third option is introduced; one out of every two thousand children in America is born intersexual. Sometimes biology malfunctions and children are born with mixed sexual characteristics, in what is called an intersexual birth. Many argue that the standard practice of sexual assignment by surgery in infancy should be discontinued giving the intersexual the right to choose or not to choose surgery once that person reaches adolescence. But whatever the surgical choice, intersexuals show us that gender is infinitely more complex than shape of our genitals.

Journeys with Tibetan Medicine: How Tibetan Medicine Came to the West, The Story of the Badmayev Family (Martin Saxer, 76 mins.)

- <http://www.anyma.ch/journeys/>

Latah: A Culture-Specific Elaboration of the Startle Reflex (Ronald Simons)

- It's a relatively nuanced account of a so-called culture-bound syndrome.

Men with Guns (John Sayles, 1997, 127 mins)

- "May be an odd choice, and is a bit long, but I find is a good starting point for addressing violence and structural inequalities and their relationship to health in a

way that students find accessible.”

The Moon Inside You (Diana Fabianova, 2009, 75 mins)

La Curacion (dir. Yoni Goldstein, Meredith Zielke 2008)

- *La Curación* is an experimental ethnographic film sited in the volatile beauty of Ecuador’s volcanic capital, Quito, a nearby cluster of healing villages, and a fisherman’s wharf near the Colombian border. Told through a series of musings and personal narratives (an epileptic revolutionary, a fire-breathing shaman, a poet-physician, a *campesino* visionary), the film reveals deeply layered understandings of health, healing, and the body as a porous membrane.
- Here is the website with a bit more information on the film: <http://www.standingpoint.org/The%20Healing.html>

N'ai, Story of a !Kung Woman (dir. John Marshall and Adrienne Miesmer, PBS, 1980, 59 mins)

- <http://www.der.org/films/nai-kung-woman.html>
- “I use it for both ethnomedicine and as an illustration of how a social transition affects health.”

Selling Sickness (dir. Catherine Scott, prod. Pat Fiske, First Run Icarus, 2004, 52 mins)

- <http://icarusfilms.com/new2005/sell.html>
- An ill for every pill.

Sicko (dir. Michael Moore, 2007)

- <http://sickothemovie.com/index.html>
- “From the US documentarist Michael Moore, is an obvious suggestion on the US health system.”

The Spirit Possession of Alejandro Mamani (1974, 28 mins)

- An old favorite of medical anthropology courses.

The Split Horn: The Life of a Hmong Shaman in America (dir. Taggart Siegel, Alchemy Films, 2001)

- Hmong refugees in the midwestern U.S., shamanic father experiences bodily turmoil as family undergoes cultural and generational changes, told through the perspective of his adolescent daughter; features soul-calling, soul-loss, psychosocial well being and transition.
- <http://www.pbs.org/splithorn/> (great resource of associated articles, etc.)
- For teaching can accompany the book, *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*

Taboo Series (National Geographic)

- “I found that National Geographic’s *Taboo* Series, Season 1 and Season 2 are worth purchasing bc they have several segments that I’ve shown in Cultural Anthro courses, Med Anthro courses, and even Research Methods and Health courses.”
- <http://channel.nationalgeographic.com/series/taboo/all/Overview>

Temple of Science (Tape 1 from PBS’s “Medicine at the Crossroads” Series,

1993, 57 mins)

Unnatural Causes (PBS documentary)

- <http://www.unnaturalcauses.org/>
- “I have used the “Unnatural Causes” series in my US Med Anth course. It’s a great way to talk about health disparities issues and I’ve found that students have found the series very engaging. It covers a wide range of topics related to health disparities: from safe neighborhoods and access to healthy/fresh food, to the connection between poverty, low birth weight, and chronic disease later in life.”

A Walk to Beautiful (NOVA, 52 mins)

- http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/programs/int_heal.html
- A powerful story of healing and hope for women in Ethiopia devastated by childbirth injuries.

Worlds Apart (Fanlight Productions, 2003, 47 mins)

- <http://medethicsfilms.stanford.edu/worldsapart/>
- Four part, 2 DVD series on health and healthcare disparities in the US engendered by structural inequalities, racism, historical influences on Latino and black American communities; women’s health issues, pregnancy and childbirth, immigrant health and refugee issues, barriers in patient-provider interactions; interviews with policy makers, sociologists, physicians, Harvard research associates, public health care specialists

Yesterday (HBO Film, 2004, Zulu with English subtitles)

- <http://store.hbo.com/detail.php?p=100613>

· Award-winning fictional film following a woman and her daughter in the rural KwaZulu-Natal countryside as they experience bodily afflictions and social stigma from HIV-AIDS, industrial/structural effects of healthcare re: mining, gender disparities and dimensions of health and healing, “traditional” versus biomedical establishments, issues with understaffed and underfinanced rural medical establishments; this is my geographic and linguistic area of expertise and can attest that this is a sensitive, nuanced, timely and provocative production

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