

## Chapter 2

# Healing Conflict With *Grigri*

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### ABSTRACT

*Hoodoo is an ethnomedical, natural healing method of magical rituals derived from West and Central African traditions, elements of Christianity, Native American folklore and African-American slavery. Rootlore applies herbs, roots, minerals, implements and animal part charms for ritual and personal use as intercessory curios that petition supernatural help and flaunt superstition. Grigri is a hoodoo object believed to protect the wearer from evil. Belief and protection associated with personal hoodoo may be appreciated with concepts in ritual healing, rootlore and meaningful experiences with respect to placebo effects. The study provides a narrative analysis of elements of ritual preparation of a chicken feet Grigri within a shared space with extended family members. In a personal account, a successful attempt of curing a conflict by unconventional means is reported. Ideas about extraordinary experiences outside traditional western medicine arise. Thoughts about the efficacy of taboo ritual material as complementary to western medicine speak to needing more innovative directions in psychotherapy.*

### INTRODUCTION

*Hoodoo lady, you can turn water to wine  
I been wondering where have you been all this time  
I'm setting here, broke, and I ain't got a dime  
You ought to put something in these dukes of mine  
But don't put that thing on me  
Don't put that thing on me*

...

*'Cause I'm going back to Tennessee –Hoodoo Lady by Memphis Minnie<sup>1</sup>*

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## Grigri in the Bones

While living in Boulder, Colorado, I went to Hanna's Herb Shop<sup>2</sup> looking for answers to my feeling that a "curse" was in the family and haunting me. The clerk handed me Hanna's book *The Seven Spiritual Causes for Ill Health* (1988). Her ideas seemed overwhelmingly convincing, even without reading the word "curse" in the text. She wrote that inherited diseases, trauma or leech-like spirits of emotional imbalance stay in families for generations. "Miasmas" are an example of Hanna's ideas that diseases leave a polluted quality among families as unpleasant effects lived in a person's life. For instance, alcoholism as a medical model, is a disease. Condemning thoughts contribute to unidentifiable problems; Hanna's model considers "dark forces" perpetuate within these conditions. Her philosophy says that these conditions get repaired or restored to health through comprehensive physical and spiritual detoxing<sup>3</sup>.

Grigri in the "bones" is the deep "urge" for something that brings help and avoids the worst if it does not arrive. The worst is that the personal trouble one carries will never end. One may intuit a direction for help. One could happen upon this help through a special experience but, for certain, by the time it speaks to one's bones, finding the right relief is a big motivator to happiness. The "urge" leads to receptivity to unforeseen change. It ushers in private meaning and personalized opportunities of uncustomary intervention. Through the itch of contradictions within one's own upbringing and expected ways of dealing with things, buried traditions, ancestral and other unseen healing practices of personal and social history seem to surface. They circulate in the mind of society through metaphysical bookstores, bible scripture, herbal teas, psychic fairs, secrets within familial lineages, witchcraft and a whole modern-day mix of spiritual and indigenous notions untidily tucked inside generations of folk stories (Chireau, 1997).

Anomalous psychology and the female shaman, creative processes of PTSD, birth events in the work of female healers and, how women shared the secrets of heinous acts toward them are my research areas and social interest. Anomalous experiences are unmistakably uncommon occurrences with an in-the-moment personal or sometimes group impact that are exceptional and may bring forth a life-changing mindset that influences identity, values, relationships and more (Cardena, Krippner & Lynn, 2014).

The Ritual Healing Theory says that shamanism is biological. Its endurance rather selects – through a process mixing history, ancestry and heritage – the evolution of natural activities and psychological states that make shamanism recognizable. This familiarity, stimulating unusual experiences, shaped beliefs in supernatural phenomena and their abilities. Shamanism, ritual and extraordinary situations of giving birth explained complications and hazards and, addressed indications of delivery. This appears relatively significant for pre-modern and contemporary women (McClenon, 2005).

Preparing a ritual for Grigri, there is not much community-wide acceptance for generally unpopular and stereotyped approaches to "things that are beyond powers of human understanding," (Taşcioğlu & Taşcioğlu, 2002 p.1) capable of returning the individual to natural abilities for meaningful living on personal terms. It is for this reason that I mingle superstition, religion and ritual (perhaps not a new formula) to introspectively deal with the deeply unnerving conflict-bound stress.

## Finding the Recipe

Grigri, in this paper, is one of many "objects of spiritual efficacy", easy for an individual to transport and make especially his or her own, juju<sup>4</sup> (Chireau, 1997, p. 228). It is spelled differently, grigri, gris-gris, greegree, Gris gris, and other ways (Anderson, 2007; Chireau, 1997; McClenon, 2005a) The same word, Grigri, represents something different depending on its business. Maybe even who is doing the

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