VISITING DEAD ANCESTORS: SHAMANS AS INTERPRETERS OF RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS

by Lyle B. Steadman and Craig T. Palmer

Abstract. Religious traditions enable ancestors to encourage proper social behavior in their distant descendants. Although traditional myths and rituals can provide basic values, these values must be interpreted in light of the specific circumstances encountered by later generations. In tribal societies the task of interpreting religious traditions falls upon religious leaders known as shamans. Shamans, perhaps universally, are claimed to obtain instructions from dead ancestors on how to deal with social disruptions. This paper argues that a focus on the more exotic aspects of shamanism has kept previous studies from realizing the crucial role of shamans as interpreters of religious traditions.

Keywords: cooperation; evolution; religious traditions; shamans.

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shamans . . . see all the gods, the first human beings, . . . and come to understand the establishment of their social order. (Shultes and Hofmann 1992, 123)

the shaman . . . has the power not only to diagnose the source of trouble or disease, but to cure it. He [or she] is doctor as well as priest, psychologist as well as magician, the repository of tradition, the source of sacred knowledge. (Von Furer-Haimendorf 1993, 81)

From our ancestors we inherit both our genes and our traditions. Although the exact mechanisms involved in the "dual inheritance" of genes and traditions is quite complex and controversial (see Boyd and Richerson 1985; Campbell 1975; Cavalli-Sforza and Feldman 1981; Cloak 1975; Daly 1982; Durham 1979, 1982, 1991; Flinn and Alexander 1982; Lumsden and Wilson 1981; Tooby and Cosmides 1989), traditions can be seen as "a system of information, support, and guidance" which serve as "cultural supplements" (Hefner 1991, 123) to genetic inheritance. This view holds that traditions, which are those aspects of culture inherited "vertically" from ancestors to

Lyle B. Steadman is Assistant Professor of Anthropology at Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ 85281. Craig T. Palmer is Instructor of Anthropology at the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs, Colorado Springs, CO 80903.

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descendants (see Boyd and Richerson 1985), continue to be passed down from ancestors to succeeding generations because they tend to influence the behavior of descendants in ways that increase their inclusive fitness and, hence, the descendant-leaving success of their ancestors. Several authors have pointed out that the dependence on learning makes the inheritance and replication of traditions in each generation more uncertain than genetic inheritance (see Daly 1982; Tooby and Cosmides 1989). In some situations, however, a tradition, in contrast to a gene, can be acquired by all offspring and descendants, not just a few of them, and therefore can respond rapidly to a process very analogous to natural selection. Indeed, the use of the term "natural selection" to apply to nongenetic inheritance would appear to be consistent with Darwin's original conception of natural selection because Darwin was, of course, ignorant of genes.

Several authors have suggested that the inheritance of religious traditions is the basis for the cooperative behavior of humans which is so fundamental to human descendant-leaving success. Burhoe (1979 and 1986) argues that religion is the key to "trans-kin" cooperation, and Hefner states that "altruism beyond kin is transmitted culturally, not genetically, and . . . religious traditions are the chief carriers of this value" (Hefner 1991, 132; see also Alexander 1986). Indeed, the proximate mechanism producing cooperation between even close "familial" human kin is primarily parental encouragement (see Alexander 1979). Hence, although the ultimate basis of altruism among close kin probably lies in the high frequency of shared genes (see Hamilton 1964), in a proximate sense even altruism among close human kin is "transmitted culturally" from one generation to the next. As the Lugbara of sub-Saharan Africa state, "the rules of social behavior are 'the words of our ancestors'" (Middleton 1960, 27).

Myths seem to be a crucial way that "the words of our ancestors" are transmitted to distant generations. Myths are an integral part of the human supplemental information and guidance system because myths "shape the most fundamental or ultimate values" (Burhoe 1979, 156; see also d'Aquili 1983, 1984) by providing each generation with "rules laying down what ought to be done or what ought not to be done" (Hefner 1991, 115). Hence, myths and accompanying traditional religious rituals (see Kluckhohn 1942) are major ways ancestors provide "the rules and constraints which make social life possible." (Leach 1966, 406).

Traditional myths and rituals are, however, subject to certain limitations as guides for behavior. First, there is the possibility of losing cultural information through the improper copying of myths

and rituals. Such "cultural drift" can occur because "transmission from elder to junior is in perpetual danger of being lost" (Barth 1987, 27; see also Diamond 1978). This is why Barth (1987) emphasizes the importance of having specialists to remember certain elaborate myths and rituals. Balicki also states that "although the knowledge of myths was not limited to shamans, it is probable that they knew more traditions than the simpler folk" (Balicki 1967, 205).

Second, myths and rituals deal with fundamental and ultimate values that lay down only *general* rules about what ought to be done in situations experienced or anticipated by long-deceased ancestors. Myths do this by telling a specific story that illustrates basic values, but the details of the story will not be the same as the actual situations encountered by the descendants. The inheritors of these myths will, therefore, be constantly forced to make decisions about how to behave in *novel* situations, the details of which differ from the mythological stories and could not have been anticipated by ancestors. This means there will be a constant need for the general rules and values of myths and rituals to be *interpreted* in light of specific circumstances. If such interpretation was casually left to those involved in a conflict, self-interest and a possible lack of knowledge about tradition would likely lead to disagreement, social chaos, and the deterioration of the traditional values.

Further evidence for the importance of religious specialists to maintain and interpret ancestral traditions comes from traditional societies where shamans appear to be functioning in a less than optimal manner. For example, Knauft suggests that the failure of Gebusi "spirit mediums" to maintain peaceful relations within Gebusi villages is contributing to depopulation and the systematic encroachment of the neighboring Bedamini (Knauft 1985). This might be an example of the kind of evolutionary process that selected for effective shamanic traditions.

We suggest that the importance of religious specialists in maintaining and interpreting the traditions that encourage cooperation is why ancestors throughout the world initiated traditions of designating and training certain individuals to be both the guardians and interpreters of the religious traditions that make social life possible. In primitive religions, these religious leaders are known as shamans.

Previous Approaches to Shamanism

The role of shamans as the custodians and interpreters of religious traditions has not been fully appreciated largely because attention has focused on the more "exotic" and "bizarre" behavior that is

often part of a shamanistic performance. This includes trances, sleight-of-hand trickery, ventriloquism, and the ingestion of hallucinogenic drugs (Maddox 1923; Furst 1972; Harner 1973; Douglas 1978). Scholars have debated whether the trancelike states of shamans were an indication of psychosis (see Kroeber 1952). After reviewing the evidence from different parts of the world, Eliade states that shamans, "for all their apparent likeness to epileptics and hysterics, show proof of a more than normal nervous constitution" (Eliade 1964, 29). Nadel also observes that "no shaman is, in everyday life, an 'abnormal' individual, a neurotic, or a paranoic; if he were, he would be classed as a lunatic, not respected as a priest" (Nadel 1946, 36; see also Torrey 1972; Shweder 1979).

A related area of interest has concerned the role of hallucinogenic drugs in explaining the behavior of the shaman. Several authors have asserted that the ingestion of hallucinogenic drugs is the very basis of shamanism. For example, Harner (1973) not only states that the use of hallucinogenic drugs "strongly reinforces a belief" in the alleged supernatural experiences of shamans, but such experiences "may have also played a role in the innovation of such beliefs" (Harner 1973, xiv). La Barre (1972) argues that the drug-induced hallucinations of shamans are the origin of all religious beliefs (see also Shultes and Hofmann 1992).

Such arguments neglect the fact that shamans continue to behave in traditional ways even when intoxicated. As Crapanzano and Garrison point out, "even the aspiring Yanomamo shaman, functioning under drug-induced trances, must be able to exercise control over himself, and present stereotyped 'proper' possessed behavior; otherwise he will not be permitted to continue his shamanistic apprenticeship" (Crapanzano and Garrison 1977, 77).

Much attention has also been given to the use of sleight-of-hand trickery by shamans during their performances or séances. Such discussion often focuses on the question of whether shamans are sincere believers in their powers or charlatans exploiting their followers (see Boas 1930; Lévi-Strauss 1963).

The question of whether shamans or the other members of society actually believe in the shaman's claims is perhaps as difficult to verify as whether the shaman's soul actually performs the tasks attributed to it during trances. What can be identified is that ethnographic data do not support Frazer's view that shamans arise because they "perceive how easy it is to dupe their weaker brother and to play on his superstition for their own advantage" (Frazer 1979, 350). Shamans are almost invariably reported to be self-sacrificing and concerned for the well-being of their followers. Becoming a shaman nearly always

involves sacrifice, often in the form of rigorous training and/or sexual and dietary taboos, while the actual performance of shamanistic duties often entails arduous work (see Chagnon 1983; Brown 1993; Maddox 1923; Eliade 1964; Grim 1983; Turner 1972). Perhaps most important, shamanic activities are almost always done for the good of other individuals. As Howells states, "Actually, shamans are among the most intelligent and earnest people of the community, and their position is one of leadership" (Howells 1993, 88).

Although the various debates over shamanism have left some questions unanswered, they have demonstrated certain general findings. First, shamans are intelligent and socially adept individuals. Second, they are usually in control of their social behavior and behave in traditionally prescribed ways even during trances and drug-induced states. Third, far from being exploitive charlatans who take advantage of other people for their own gain, they are leaders who gain their position through self-sacrifice for others. A final characteristic of shamans that is often reported, but usually treated as being of only secondary importance, is the claim that shamans visit and communicate with dead ancestors.

Visiting Dead Ancestors

Talk about communicating with dead ancestors is so common in descriptions of shamanism that it is possible to speak of the "*classical* shamanistic voyage to nether regions for purposes of communication with the dead or the ancestors, to bring back divinatory messages, or to seek the cause of illness or misfortune" (De Rios 1984, 111, emphasis added). In addition to fascination with the more striking activities of trance, trickery, and drug use, the key reason for the lack of attention this aspect of shamanism has received is failure to appreciate fully the role of ancestors in traditional religions throughout the world. It may be true that "many societies at the hunting-and-gathering level do not practice ancestor worship" per se (Lehmann and Myers 1993, 284; see also Swanson 1963). But the role of dead ancestors need not be limited to those societies where the dead are formally "worshipped" and explicitly called "ancestors." In many societies, the religion lacks specific reference to ancestors, but does deal with ghosts, shades, spirits, souls, totemic plants and animals, or a cult of the dead (see Lehmann and Myers 1993). Furthermore, dead ancestors in traditional religions are not typically objects of *worship*; as Abraham points out, rites accorded them "are not rites of worship but methods of communication" (Abraham 1966, 63). Third, as Lehmann and Myers state, "although the worship of ancestors is not

universal, a belief in the immortality of the dead occurs in all cultures" (1993, 283; see also Lessa and Vogt 1979). If one accepts a more expanded approach, then the ubiquity of claims about communication with the dead in traditional religions becomes clear.

However, there has been a lack of attention given to the possibility that communication with dead ancestors may be a fundamental and universal aspect of shamanism. For example, even though Eliade reports that "the role of the souls of the dead in choosing the future shaman is important [in Siberia and] in places outside Siberia as well" (Eliade 1964, 82), he rejects the claim that "shamanic election was connected with the ancestor cult" on the questionable assertion that the ancestors had to be chosen by a divine being (Eliade 1964, 67). Although acknowledging the frequent role of dead ancestors in many examples of shamanism throughout the world, Lewis also refers to a category of nonancestral shamanism where there are "more autonomous deities which are not simply sacralized versions of the living" (Lewis 1971, 34). This also appears to be a questionable distinction because the shamans in this nonancestral category are said to communicate with "clan spirits" (Lewis 1971, 149–77). Indeed, Lewis includes the Tungus in the nonancestral category despite stating that a Tungus shaman "controls the clan's own ancestral spirits" (Lewis 1971, 51, 157).

Perhaps the clearest example of an intimate relationship between shamanism and dead ancestors, in a society where dead ancestors are not usually considered to even play a role in religion, is the Yanomamo. Yanomamo religion centers on shamans ingesting hallucinogenic drugs and controlling *hekura* "spirits." Chagnon, however, reports that "when the original people (the *no badabo*) died, they turned into spirits: *hekura*" (Chagnon 1983, 92). The relation between shamans and these spirits of the original people (that is, the dead ancestors) called *hekura* is clearly demonstrated by the fact that Yanomamo shamans are also called *hekura* (Chagnon 1983, 107).

Although it remains to be demonstrated that shamanic activity always involves claims of communication with dead ancestors, the frequency with which this occurs suggests that it may be crucial to the role of shamans. To further elucidate this role, we will now look at how shamans use their alleged ability to communicate with dead ancestors to influence the living.

Shamans as Interpreters of Tradition

Despite various cultural and geographic differences, shamanism has certain nearly universal characteristics. First, "shamanistic rites are

'non-calendrical,' or contingent upon occasions of mishap and illness" (Turner 1993, 73). This means shamans are most frequently involved in curing physical illnesses, supernaturally attacking other villages, settling disputes, and divining the cause of deaths or other misfortunes (see Eliade 1964). Grim also points out that, regardless of its specific manifest function, "shamanic activity is generally a public function. The tribal community witnesses the dramatic encounter with the spirits and benefits from the ritual communications" (Grim 1983, 11). Hence, the shaman's performance has effects on other members of the community that should be identifiable. Reports from various parts of the world indicate that the clearest and most common of these effects is the encouragement of social behavior and the repair or maintenance of social relationships, especially between kin. Bichmann states that for shamans "illness does not mean so much an individual event but a disturbance of social relations" (Bichmann 1979, 177; see also Chagnon 1983; Rasmussen 1979; Grim 1983; Edgerton 1993; Howells 1993; Eliade 1964; Brown 1993; Middleton 1960; Lewis 1971; Siskind 1973; Turner 1972).

The shaman's ability to reduce social tensions and uphold tribal morality depends on the ability to master and integrate two sources of knowledge: the general values of the particular religious tradition and the nature of the social relationships that form the context of the specific event he or she is dealing with. First and foremost, shamans are guided "by an intuition into what is just and fitting in terms of . . . [the local] moral values" (Turner 1979, 374). This intuition comes from "a period of instruction, during which the neophyte is duly initiated by an old shaman . . . to learn the religious and mythological traditions of the tribe" (Eliade 1964, 110–11). These moral values are, however, quite general, such as the Ndembu "concept of the 'good man' . . . who bears no grudges, who is without jealousy, envy, pride, anger, covetousness, lust, greed, etc., and who honours his kinship obligations . . . [and] respects and remembers his ancestors" (Turner 1979, 374), or the Lugbara's statement that to sin is to offend kin (Middleton 1960, 22). Although this knowledge enables the shaman to perform ceremonies where "the possessed shaman exhorts the people of his neighborhood to shun such evils as incest, adultery, sorcery, and homicide, and emphasizes the value of harmony in social relations" (Lewis 1971, 137), it is insufficient for dealing with specific social problems.

Knowledge of moral values can direct a shaman to certain basic questions in the attempt to divine the cause of some misfortune. For example, Edgerton reports that in any case of illness, a Hehe shaman "asks five preliminary questions: Did the patient commit adultery?

Did he steal? Did he borrow money and refuse to repay it? Did he quarrel with someone? Did he actually have a fight with someone?" (Edgerton 1993, 161). Although such questions can serve as a starting point, they are not sufficient for determining a successful solution to the particular situation. This is because, unlike the grand visions of prophets, the divinations of shamans are "mechanical and of a case-to-case kind" (Nadel 1954, 64). That is, "the diviner clearly knows that he is investigating within a social context of a particular type" (Turner 1979, 374). This need to know the structure of the social relationships of the members of the community can account for why the traditional training of shamans often includes the memorization of not only the mythology of the tribe but also the genealogy of its members (Eliade 1964, 13).

Turner states that the interaction between the general religious values and the specific social context is "represented in the symbolism of divination . . . mnemonics, reminders of certain general rubrics of . . . [the local] culture, within which the diviner can classify the specific instance of behaviour that he is considering" (Turner 1979, 375). The key point is that the symbols are general, while the situation is specific: "Here the vagueness and flexibility of the series of referents of each symbol leave him [the shaman] free to make a detailed interpretation of the configuration of symbols corresponding to the diagnosis he is making of the state of [social] relationships . . ." (Turner 1979, 375).

This observation is relevant to the discussion concerning whether shamans control the spirits they encounter or are controlled by these spirits (see Firth 1964; Turner 1993; Bourguignon 1976; Howells 1993; Evans-Pritchard 1937; Von Furer-Haimendorf 1993). This article's approach supports Crapanzano and Garrison's (1977) conclusion that this is too rigid a distinction. On the one hand, the shaman, unlike the prophet, "is not a radical or a reformer" (Turner 1993, 73). The shaman's behavior and divinatory decisions are clearly guided by religious tradition; indeed, credibility as a leader depends on adherence to these values. On the other hand, the vagueness of traditional values and the symbols that represent them give the shaman freedom and power of interpretation, which metaphorically entail some limited control over the will of the ancestors. This situation is clearly seen in Siskind's description of the limited freedom of Sharanahua shamans: "dream and vision symbolism among the Sharanahua does not involve a one-to-one relationship of meaning and symbol, but neither is there complete free rein for idiosyncratic dreaming or hallucinating" (Siskind 1973, 37). This limited freedom of shamans, instead of being a hindrance to the

smooth inheritance of traditions, is better seen as an ancestral strategy that allows traditional values to be properly applied to novel and unique events (see Rogers 1983). At least, that is what the traditional selection, training, and performance requirements of shamans are designed to ensure.

The Role of Trance, Trickery, and Drugs

If the social effect of shamanism is actually its function, why are there the nearly universal acts of trance, drug use, and trickery? All of these aspects of shamanism are closely related to the supernatural claim that shamans visit the land of the dead and converse with dead ancestors. Hence, the first question to be asked is, Why are shamans claimed to have supernatural power instead of simply being seen as nonreligious sociopolitical leaders? The key may be that the shamanic role is one of influencing the other members of the society, and therefore the shaman has to be "an expert at the art of intense direct communication" (Siskind 1973, 36). Rappaport points out that "communication is effective only if the recipients of messages are willing to accept, as being in at least some minimum degree reliable, the messages which they receive" (Rappaport 1979, 261); adding that people must often accept statements when "there may be no known operations of verification" (Rappaport 1979, 261). Therefore, he proposes that the traditional encouragement of accepting unverifiable supernatural claims, such as the typical shamanic statement that "the ancestors are alive and well in the other world" (Rappaport 1979, 262), establishes the "sanctity" of the shaman's statements. This sanctity, defined as "the quality of unquestionable truthfulness" (Rappaport 1979, 262), obviously increases the ability of shamans to influence their followers.

The next question is, Why do the supernatural claims of shamans so often involve traveling to the land of the dead, communicating with dead ancestors, and returning with instructions? In addition to establishing the "sanctity" of the shaman's pronouncements, this particular supernatural claim further increases the shaman's ability to influence followers. The claim directs attention to the shaman's traditional nature, knowledge, and role in society. To reject a shaman's influence, therefore, is not just to reject one individual, but to reject tradition, which is so crucial to kinship relations and social life in general. This greatly increases the "unquestionable truthfulness" of the shaman's instructions because "although one can argue to a point with an elder, no one questions the wisdom and authority of an ancestor" (Lehmann and Myers 1993, 285; see also Fortes 1976, 2).

The use of drugs, trancelike states, and trickery can all be seen as behavior supporting and elaborating the supernatural claims made by and about shamans. In regard to trancelike states, Lewis states that "religious leaders turn to ecstacy when they seek to strengthen and legitimize their authority" (Lewis 1971, 34). There are several possible reasons why entering such states should increase the influence of the shaman. First of all, such states appear to be distinguished by a loss of control over one's own body. Because this loss of control occurs as part of an attempt to help others in the community, it is one of the ways the shaman communicates a willingness to sacrifice for his or her followers. Claims that the shaman, or the shaman's soul, is partaking in dangerous activities during the trancelike state also communicates this willingness to sacrifice. They are an appropriate symbol that reinforces the verbal claim.

Although debates over whether shamanic tricks cause supporters to believe in the supernatural powers of shamans are probably fruitless, sleight-of-hand tricks and ventriloquism are also appropriate symbols that elaborate the shaman's supernatural claims. That is, they make the performance more interesting and dramatic. This may lead to an increased arousal level among the participants, which has been shown to increase the effectiveness of communication (see Nuttin 1975). Further, the shaman speaks for the dead ancestors. That is a supernatural event. Acceptance of all of the other supernatural claims, concerning sleight-of-hand tricks and other dramatic acts, implies acceptance of the fundamental claim that the shaman is speaking for dead ancestors.

The role of hallucinogenic drugs is less clear. In addition to the hallucinations themselves, other relevant psychological effects may include increased suggestibility and a focusing of concentration on relevant stimuli (Harner 1973; Slotkin 1955). There are, however, social effects of drug use that may account for its widespread use in shamanic activities. Drug use often increases the communication of sacrifice inherent in the trancelike state by increasing the shaman's loss of control over his or her body. This may help communicate that the shaman can be trusted because the loss of bodily control makes the shaman appear incapable of manipulating followers for his or her personal gain. To the extent the drug is considered dangerous, simply ingesting it also communicates a willingness to sacrifice. Brown reports an Aguaruna shaman in Peru who "took pains to emphasize the intensity of his intoxication . . . [because] willingness to endure the rigors of a large dose of *ayahaysca* is a sign of his good faith as a healer." (Brown 1993, 94; see also Chagnon 1983).

Drug use, however, is not universal among shamans (Harner

1973), and may play primarily a symbolic role in any case. For example, Chagnon states that Yanomamo "shamans have to take hallucinogenic snuff—*ebene*—to contact the spirits, but adept shamans with great experience need very little" (Chagnon 1983, 108). Hence, drug-induced hallucinations may best be seen as another appropriate symbol to reinforce and communicate claims of visiting the land of the dead. Indeed, this symbolism is often very explicit, as when there is a close association between dead ancestors and the hallucinogen itself. For example, not only do some West African shamans use the hallucinogenic plant *Tabernanthe iboga* "to make contact with the spirits of their ancestors, and thus preserve a direct relationship with their own cultural origins" (Shultes and Hofmann 1992, 115), the plant itself "is frequently anthropomorphized as a supernatural being, a 'generic ancestor'" (Shultes and Hofmann 1992, 112; see also Fernandez 1972).

SHAMANISM: AN EXAMPLE

As a concrete example, a curing ceremony described by Victor Turner makes clear not only the duties of a shaman but also the impact of his or her behavior. Turner's description demonstrates the influence of a shaman—here called "doctor" or ritual specialist—on the social relationships of individuals living in an Ndembu community in Zaire, Africa. The shaman, speaking for dead ancestors—here called "shades"—uses a curing ceremony to adjust a complex web of strained social relationships. He thereby produces behavior that is both cooperative and in accordance with the basic traditional values of Ndembu culture.

Although the Ndembu say that every disease is caused by supernatural forces, a curing ceremony is performed only, according to Turner, when there is some disturbance in the patient's network of social relationships (1964, 231). Although the doctor's purpose in performing the curing ritual is ostensibly to rid the patient of physical symptoms, doctors "are well aware of the benefits of their procedures for group relationships, and they go to endless trouble to make sure that they have brought into the open the main sources of latent hostility in group life" (Turner 1964, 237).

Doctors are trained by means of initiation into various special cults (see Turner 1964, 232–33) and are said to have mystical powers. The doctor in our example was not only well known but, like most Ndembu curers, was "capable, charismatic, [and] authoritative" (Turner 1964, 241). He was called in at the request of a number of relatives and neighbors of his patient. The doctor first diagnosed the

supernatural cause of the illness, but during the process of divination he questioned the relatives until he had "a complete picture of the contemporaneous structure of the village, and of the position in its relational network occupied by the victim" (Turner 1964, 243). The doctor examined the "social relationships in order to diagnose the incidence and pattern of tensions and to attempt to reduce them in his handling of the rites" (Turner 1964, 242).

The patient in this case was Kamahasanyi, who in addition to his various aches and pains—including fatigue, heart palpitations, and failure in hunting—was having serious difficulties with certain individuals in his village. In this village there was considerable conflict between two opposed factions. The old Headman had died a few years before, but his brother, who should have inherited his position, left the village. Kachimba, the uncle of the patient Kamahasanyi, was acting Headman. Opposed to Kachimba's leadership was Makayi and his family, who felt that the old Headman's brother should have taken over the position—resenting both his departure and Kachimba for taking over. Relations were so bad between Makayi and Kachimba that they refused to even sit down together at the same gathering. The patient Kamahasanyi was related through his father to one faction and through his mother to the other and, thus, was not clearly allied to either one; he heard grumblings and complaints from both sides.

Kamahasanyi had further problems with his personal relationships. He had not lived in the village all of his life and personally was not a very likeable fellow. In addition, he was married to his cousin Maria, the daughter of Kachimba, the present Headman. Maria was strong-minded and independent and was carrying on a rather open love affair with Jackson, the son of Makayi. The curing ceremony was attended by all of the villagers discussed. The problem had been diagnosed during the divination, which involved communication with ancestral spirits, to be due to an "incisor tooth" of a dead "hunter" which was inserted by the hunter's "shade" (ancestral spirit) because there had been a transgression of moral rules or customs (see Turner 1964, 234–35). The ritual revolved around the shaman's attempt to extract the alleged tooth from the patient's body. Cuts were made in the skin, and horns were attached which were then sucked and examined to see if the tooth had been extracted. While this was going on, all of the participants were involved in singing, drumming, and praying in the attempt to facilitate the removal of the tooth.

The doctor assigned particular individuals (various relatives of Kamahasanyi) special roles in the ceremony. His errant wife Maria

was asked to collect some special leaves, which she then chewed, spitting the juice on her husband's body while tapping him with a rattle. Wilson, the son of the late village Headman, was asked to place a piece of white clay on the fork of a tree as a token of his friendly intentions. The dead Headman's brother was asked to invoke the shade (ancestral spirit) who was afflicting the patient. In assigning these tasks, the doctor encouraged everyone to work together " 'to please the shade and thus to cure the patient' " (Turner 1964, 260).

When the tooth was not found in any of the horns, the doctor explained the cause to the congregation in a statement following a conventional form "which usually entails a fairly detailed account of the patient's life story and of the group's interrelations" (Turner 1964, 258). He then encouraged everyone to confess any ill feelings they had against the patient, as the shade would not be placated unless all such disturbances were eliminated. A number of people admitted to having borne bad feelings against Kamahasanyi or to having neglected him, and he confessed his resentment toward those he felt showed little concern for him (Turner 1964, 260). Finally, in a dramatic moment the doctor succeeded in discovering and extracting the tooth from one of the bloody horns. Turner describes the effects of the ritual:

> the women . . . all trilled with joy. Men and women who had been on cool terms with one another until recently, shook hands warmly and beamed with happiness. Kachimba even smiled at Makayi, who smiled back. Several hours later a mood of quiet satisfaction seemed to emanate from the villagers. (Turner 1964, 261)

When Turner returned over a year later, the patient "was enjoying life, was accepted by his fellow villagers, and was liked by his wife" (Turner 1964, 261).

It is precisely this effect on the social relationships of the participants, we suggest, that can account for the behavior and the ancestral encouragement of shamans. The essential job of the shaman is to encourage cooperation. Both the community's acceptance of the "supernatural" shaman and his acceptance of the ancestors' traditions promotes this cooperation.

CONCLUSION

This article asserts that the claim that shamans obtain advice from dead ancestors on how to deal with current problems is, in a sense, "true." The identifiable communication between dead ancestors and shamans, however, takes place in ways other than visitations to the land of the dead during shamanic performances. Instead, it takes

place over many generations in the perpetuation of certain shamanic traditions. First, there are traditions about the criteria for selecting potential shamans, which often include the demonstration of a willingness to sacrifice for others. Then there is traditional training that includes the memorization of the traditional secret languages, rituals, and myths of the religion. The shaman is also required to attain an intimate knowledge of the social relationships of his or her followers, which often entails the memorization of genealogies. Perhaps most important, the shaman must meet traditional standards in the performance of the role. Although this often entails mastering various traditional tricks that make the performances more dramatic and effective, the shaman's most important task is to be able to apply general religious values to specific events in a way that both solves the current problem and preserves the essence of the religious values. It is in this sense that shamans really are "mediums who act as the vehicles of . . . ancestors and express their wishes" (Lewis 1971, 140).

Eliade claims that during their trancelike performances shamans "can abolish time and re-establish the primordial condition of which the myths tell" (1964, 171). Indeed, the voyages to the land of the dead that shamans are said to make during their trancelike performances are most accurately conceptualized as trips, not through supernatural space, but back through time to when their dead ancestors were alive. Whether or not this voyage actually takes place during the séance, the words of dead ancestors do identifiably travel through time to living shamans via the medium of tradition. By influencing shamans in this way, dead ancestors are able to influence their descendants for many generations. The extent of this influence is considerable because "significant tribal activities . . . are often undertaken only with the guidance and support of the spirits communicating through the shaman" (Grim 1983, 11). Therefore, the shamanic tradition can be seen as not only a major part of religion, but a major aspect of the human descendant-leaving strategy.

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