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Being changed : the
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BEING CHANGED

*The Anthropology of
Extraordinary Experience*

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Dene, then they would have to be told in English. The essential would still be there . . . or would it?

EDITH TURNER

*A Visible Spirit Form in Zambia*¹

INTRODUCTION

Africans are acutely conscious of spirits. Anthropologists have long been interested in what Africans believe about spirits and the ritual events which surround spirit encounters. But it is the Africans' reports of experiences with spirits that are regarded as appropriate anthropological material, not the experiences themselves. It is the same with religious studies. Scholars of religion tend to explain accounts of spirit encounters in terms of metaphor. The issue of whether or not spirits actually exist has not been faced.

When an anthropologist has an unusual experience, this is even more difficult to handle because the essence of anthropology, according to some, lies in its impartial observation and the search for objectivity. An unusual experience may take the form of a hexing, seeing a mysterious light (as with Evans-Pritchard 1976 [1937]:11, among the Azande), encountering a ghost, and so on. These episodes have a variety of fates. Some are recorded but are mentioned only in passing or become the climax in a book which is published as a novel, such as *Return to Laughter* (Bowen 1964 [1954]). By far the majority go unrecorded. One may hear anecdotes brought up in informal conversation, at par-

ties, in students' kitchens, and in other non-structured contexts. But writers (and publishers) usually feel that this material is not suitable for inclusion in a serious anthropological publication.

Favret-Saada, the author of *Deadly Words* (1980), an account of the central role of witchcraft in Bocage culture, maintains that it is necessary for the ethnographer to undergo the experience he/she is attempting to understand. Favret-Saada experienced being the object of witchcraft and learned how to resist it. She says (1980:22) that to understand the meaning of "un-witching": "there is no other solution but to practice it oneself, to become one's own informant, to penetrate one's own amnesia, and to try and make explicit what one finds unstateable in oneself." She produced a good ethnography. Paul Stoller experienced witchcraft among the Songhay of Niger and found himself to be changed as a result. He says (1984:110), "all my assumptions about the world were uprooted from their foundation on the plain of Western metaphysics . . . my view of Songhay culture could no longer be one of a structuralist, a symbolist, or a Marxist."

What are the implications of the kinds of statements made by anthropologists such as Favret-Saada and Stoller? This article is an attempt on my part to deal as honestly as possible with my own experience of a spirit form among the Ndembu of Zambia. An experience such as this, as in the case of Carl Jung's mystical experiences, takes one into the realm of existential religion and what Paul Tillich (1959) called matters of ultimate concern. In the face of such experiences, academic anthropology seems to fall away and become of lesser concern.

Nevertheless, the ethnographer's own experience of spirits and witches should be treated as anthropological data. Is it correct for our discipline to close itself off from what is of major concern to its field people? I am afraid there is a realm ahead for some of us — a rather frightening one — into which we must pass if we are to hold up our heads as anthropologists: the realm of spiritual experience.

MY UNUSUAL EXPERIENCE

I had returned to Zambia in 1985 to do four months' fieldwork in my old field area among the Ndembu, known through the publications of my husband Victor Turner (1957, 1967, 1968, 1975) who died in 1983. The Ndembu are a matrilineal people living in what was once high savanna forest. Their homes are

circular clusters of huts, each circle housing an extended family, grouped in larger townships or vicinages. They grow cassava and vegetables, keep a few cattle, and also occasionally hunt for antelope. In our early fieldwork in the 1950s, Vic and I had become very interested in the elaborate ritual system, by means of which a situation of conflict or disease could be turned around in the course of a performance into one of relief and amity. At that time, we looked at ritual from the point of view of culture. We believed that symbolism has the power to change the human heart. The strength and sensory richness of a symbol, when linked to some ideological message (see V. Turner on polarization of a symbol 1967:54-55), could effect a transfer of energy and heal the patient. Vic's analysis of the curative ritual of Ihamba² (1968) was strongly empiricist and psychologically based.

Thus I was not prepared in any way for a spirit experience on my return visit, though through the years Vic and I had become closer to "the anthropology of experience" (Turner and Bruner 1986). In 1980 Vic argued that lived experience in anthropology is primary; thought is its interpreter. My own anthropological writing has attempted to put the reader wholeheartedly into a specific cultural context. I was anti-ethnocentric, allowing the religions of the field people full place in my respect, very much desiring that they be understood, but with little regard to the possibility of encountering an unusual experience myself. I didn't know what I was in for. It was a small experience, but one which demanded a reorganization of the way I did anthropology.

It was curious to be back in Mukanza Village after thirty-one years. The changes were great. The widespread deforestation made me feel cold as if I were walking into a tragedy. All one could do was not to think about it. The complex and beautiful initiation celebrations had been marred and often obliterated by Christianity. I began to hate my own religion. It was a matter all over again of "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

But curative rituals were on the upgrade. Almost at once opportunities for participation came my way. The African doctors were businessmen and there were advantages in having my support. Also, as with business enterprises, the rituals were popular because they worked. I began to perceive that through the decades African curing has been passing through an exploratory, experimental stage, in an environment where it was impossible for official medical authorities to hamper and limit it, simply

because there was no economic base for licensing and control, and few funds for "health education."

In the field with me was Bill Blodgett, the undergraduate son of a friend, who obtained tape recordings of the rituals and discussions, and also took many photographs. Owing to Bill's social activities, we made acquaintance with a couple of Ihamba doctors, those who treat a sick person by removing from his/her body a dead hunter's tooth (ihamba) which has been wandering around inside, giving the patient severe pain.³ The ritual of extraction was the subject of an important part of the fieldwork. Vic and I had done three decades earlier, so I had in hand our own publication on Ihamba (*The Drums of Affliction* 1968) which proved to be of great interest to the Ihamba doctors Bill and I met — Singleton and Fideli, the latter of whom remembered playing with my son Freddie when both were youngsters. Singleton and Fideli invited us to an Ihamba curing session and appointed me as one of the doctors — something I had not really bargained for. Nevertheless I accepted at once. How, I wondered, would this experiment in the anthropology of experience turn out?

Singleton and Fideli first decided to schedule the ritual on Thursday, November 28, 1985, and began to send out messages to participants. Then the news came through that Princess Anne of England was to visit the Ndembu on that day on behalf of Save the Children Fund (the children were indeed growing up stunted because of lack of food). So the date for the Ihamba was rescheduled earlier, for Wednesday the 27th, thus adding an irregularity which became important to the event itself, as we shall see.

Imagine Kahona, a circular village on rough common ground. Eight thatch-roofed houses with mud brick walls rise under the spreading arms of banana trees. Bill and I were walking up a little path of red dirt leading from the motor road to the village. It was 7:00 a.m. and the sun was not yet up. All was damp with a hint of rain. In the dim light we peered about. Was anything going to happen? At last Vesa, an apprentice, approached, followed by Fideli, and they gave us their courteous greeting, "Shikenu mwani" ("Welcome, come in"). Vesa initiated the ritual by bringing out the drum, a tall African bongo, on which he placed a flat basket containing various items of equipment: a musical rasp, an ax, and two small bags, one made of mongoose skin. The basket's contact with the drum dedicated it to ritual, for the word *ngoma* (drum) also means ritual. Vesa and Fideli then raised the basket between them high into the air, thereby honoring it.

We left Kahona Village and went off single file to collect Singleton at his hut. He came forth sleepily at our call. He was a tall man with a long, lined face — a face capable of unearthly flashes of irony and mischief. He was a man who said what he thought, an elder. Singleton wore old blue overalls. He carried himself with ease even though he was thin and must have been nearly seventy. Fideli was his nephew. Fideli's face shone with the health of early middle age, an able man, a thinker with a knowledge of science. He carried himself this morning with the buoyant air of one looking forward to a procedure in which he was well-versed. His faith was Baha'i, which is tolerant toward other religions.

With Singleton in the lead, we set off into the low scrub to look for *yitumbu* (medicines) — bits of a special tree and plants. None of the plants, as far as I could ascertain, were mind-altering drugs. But they had power, as will be demonstrated as the story unfolds. We soon reached an area wasted with overcropping. Vesa followed after Singleton, carrying the basket that contained the ritual equipment. Then came Fideli with the ax. I came next, followed by Bill with his long legs and youthful goodness of expression. As we walked, Singleton played rhythmically on the wooden rasp, singing a plaintive phrase in which we all joined:

Mukongu, katu-ka-tu-ye.

Mukongu, katu-ka-tu-ye.

Hunter spirit of the medicine tree, let us go.

Hunter spirit of the medicine tree, let us go.

We sang the second line a note below the first, in falling tones, with Fideli's light bass continually sounding a fourth below. Singleton walked swiftly now, weaving toward a bush he had spotted among the mounds. It was *mufungu*, the African oak, and was called *ishikenu* or "welcome" or "first" tree, the greeting tree. *Mufungu* means "the gathering together of a herd of animals." Singleton hunkered down before the base of the tree and took his mongoose skin bag from which he drew a lump of red clay which he rubbed in a broad line down the west side of the trunk, then in a line from the foot of the tree to himself, and finally down the east side of the tree. He drew the lines to call ihamba (the tooth spirit) to come soon — to direct ihamba along the lines. Singleton told us, "Ihamba knows 'I am soon going to

be out of the patient.” (Singleton saw the tooth-spirit as a conscious being.) Then Singleton took a cup of beer and poured it out at the foot of the tree, on both sides, saying loudly and abruptly, “Maheza!”

“Maheza!” we shouted back.

“Ngambu!”

“Yafwa!” we returned, with special emphasis on the last word. I remembered this chant from the old days (Turner 1968:167). It means, “Friend! Sudden death! It is dead!”

Singleton addressed the tree, his tone urgent and harsh: “This medicine was brought by Kamawu; it came down from him to Koshita, and from him to Sambumba, and from him to Chisanji, then to Muhelewa Benwa. Today it is in my hands. True! This red clay of yours has reached us. It’s bad that we have often lacked the tooth-removing ritual. We put this red clay of yours on the western side of the tree. You deserve one cup of honey beer; you will be blessed. Give us the power to cure this woman well. You others who made things hard for us, you who were altogether bad, have a drink of beer on the other side. They really fucked up; besides, they failed to shoot animals” (he used the pejorative word for having sex, *kusunja*).

In this conjuration, Singleton emphasized each name of his ihamba doctor ancestors who had handed down the ritual in a kind of apostolic succession. He was talking to those old healers, even including the bad ones, the *ayikodjikodji* as they used to be called in the old days (Turner 1967:138). I watched seriously, trying to connect with the spirits, although I was not a member of the family to which the doctors belonged.

Following his appeal to the ancestral line, Singleton was told what to do by the spirit of his father, Sambumba, and the others. Fideli explained that we were not going to take any medicine from this tree because it was the mother tree. “You don’t cut the mother.” We soon came across another mufungu, and this one supplied the necessary bark and leaves which would call a large gathering of people. Singing our song to the gentle rasp of the reed as it swished over the musical bar, we went on to a *musengu* tree (which means “blowing on the food and blessing it for the ancestors,” from *kusengula*, to bless), from which we took some bark to make drinking medicine. We also picked some leaves for washing the patient’s body. Then we continued the search.

We stopped and looked around. We were on a path above a long derelict garden without a bush in it. “It’s all been dug,” said Singleton to Vesa with disgust. “Search carefully in this area.

We may never find the tree I’ve been telling you about. We’re back where we started, at the first mufungu. I think I saw the tree I’m after when we passed before. I don’t want to go all the way over to Mindolu Village for it.”

“Look! Over there!” said Vesa.

It was a small tree called *mukosu* (soap root, derived from *kukosa*, to wash; when well infused, this medicine becomes a lotion to wash all the bad things out of the body) which needed extra care in the cutting. Singleton took the ax while Fideli held the basket beside the trunk. Singleton very neatly cut grooves in the bark outlining a 4 x 6 inch vertical rectangle, with Fideli squatting beside him to catch the chips in the basket, careful not to touch any. “If any of them fall to earth you can’t have Ihamba,” said Fideli. Singleton then levered off the rectangle of bark with his ax and let it drop safely into the basket. “Ihamba permits us to catch it without running away – just as the piece of bark is caught in the basket. Ihamba might fly away so we must be careful to make ihamba honest. Mukosu has a strong smell; the piece of bark is used as a lid when the ihamba tooth is brought out of the patient’s body and put into a tin can. Ihamba doesn’t like the strong smell and will not try to come out of the can and escape.”

Then we took bark and leaf medicine from the *mucha* tree (the coco plum), often used for ancestor rituals because its pit is very durable and resists decay. It resists time. The wood is hard and the fruit is sweet. It too wants people to gather. We went to a *mututambulolu* shrub (the Congo pepper, which expels stomach gas and reduces fever; the name means “to swarm”, as bees do around flowers) where Vesa squatted down and proceeded to tear open the whole root, while Singleton addressed the spirits in a throaty voice, “You are my elders, those that are underground, really underground.” He was speaking to those old hunters, wild man Chisanji, his father, his hunter uncles. Then he said to Vesa, “Chop some medicine.” The root was large and plump. He took the entire system, then replanted the top and filled up the hole again afterwards until the dirt was level with the surrounding surface. The root is bright orange inside; when mixed with beer it makes ihamba obey. As Fideli the scientist explained it, “The medicine passes into the bloodstream, goes throughout the body, and kills the germs troubling the patient.”

We took from the *muhotuhotu* some of its long sensitive leaves. Singleton said muhotuhotu was gathered because its leaves fall all at once; every bad thing will come out of the patient with

this medicine, including the ihamba inside her. We also took musesi, a very strong tree with hard wood that could even take away the evils of unmotivated witchcraft.

Now Singleton spotted a *kapepi* sapling. He set himself beside it and with rapid deft strokes of his ax, cut it down and made it into a *chishinga* (forked shrine pole), sharpening the branches into tines exactly as Mundoyi had done in 1951. Kapepi sets your teeth on edge with its bitterness. As a result bad teeth drop out – a major desideratum in the case of the ihamba tooth. Its name derives from *mpepela*, the wind, which is ubiquitous and invisible, a quality desired by all hunters (V. Turner 1967:290).

Then Singleton circled around a bed of what looked like bracken with broad double leaves which I recognized as the stems of the bright red tuber, *nshindwa*. The above-ground knobs are like fruit, thirst quenching with a very tart lemony flavor. The plant itself (*mutungulu*) is used as a medicine. The rest of the underground system was a fine wandering mass of black roots. Singleton sometimes cured malaria with these roots by running them into cuts on the left shoulder of the patient, or used them infused in cold water as a poultice. I wondered if they contained bitter quinine. Mutungulu has other uses as well. Singleton told us that ihamba may have little children inside the patient's body. The drum ritual may successfully bring out the mother ihamba, but her children may remain inside, as indeed the afterbirth may. However, scraped mutungulu roots, put into a cupping horn with other ingredients – a mixture called *nsomu* – can kill the afterbirth inside the body and make the entire ihamba brood come out. So the doctors took several tangles of the long roots.

Singleton circled around another shrub with fixed attention. "This is the tree which I didn't think anyone could find. Go easy on the leaves. Take them from the eastern side, not the west. It is *musoli*." He explained that with musoli the ihamba would appear quickly and would not be able to hide. It was the tree of revelation, from *kusolola*, to reveal, but it was now rare. We took a few of the big leaves and some bark from the east side, the side of the sun's revealing, and went on singing – "Mukongu, kaatu-ka-tu-ye."

We continued on our way, now searching for an ironwood tree to provide fuel for the ritual fire. Meanwhile we passed among young trees and found a termitary made by a species which produces small mud towers eight inches or so across and about a foot high.

"We are lucky," said Vesa. "Here's a big small anthill."

"Let me see it," said Singleton. "Yes, that's it. We won't find another one like this."

"We should take it out whole, right from the bottom," said Fideli.

They lifted it out and Vesa sheared off the domed top. We saw the termites flooding the broken bowl below, each grabbing an egg which was borne off to safety. Vesa carved the stump into a house shape, a cube, and put the cube into the basket, then replaced the dome on the broken termite house. The cube would be placed at the foot of the chishinga shrine pole, becoming a grave for ihamba, that is, for the dead hunter who now existed in the form of ihamba as spirit.

We came to a huge anthill and found a *chikwata* thorn tree upon it, a purgative medicine. Chikwata was added so that it would catch (*kukwata*) the ihamba with its thorns. We picked its branches carefully.

We found a plant called *mutuhu* ("no reason") barely four inches high by the side of the path. We took it all, exposing startlingly black roots which showed a brilliant white interior. Mutuhu used along with mututambololu calls ihamba to come out. The two comprise a potent, dangerous coming-out medicine for inducing abortions.

We went on singing. The doctors were concerned about the ritual firewood; it had to be ironwood because this wood was strong, tall, and unbending, and had no stringiness in its texture to tie up huntsmanship. At last, just as we were turning back, we came across a felled ironwood tree. Fideli got astride the bare trunk and hacked patiently at it with his ax, careful to let none of the firewood fall to the ground. When they collected enough they gave the wood to me to carry, which I was glad to do.

"There are medicines for the below and the above and inside – every medicine to make ihamba come out," said Singleton. "Let's go back to the road."

We returned to the house of the sick person, Meru, a middle-aged woman who was a classificatory sister of Singleton's. She was still inside. We found a spot behind her open-air kitchen to establish our shrine, and Fideli laid an antelope skin on the ground so that Vesa could set down the basket. First the shrine pole (the forked pole of bitter wood, sharpened into horns to attract the hunter's spirit) was planted and the spirit house set in front. Then the antelope skin was put in the shade of a tree for Meru to sit on.

Singleton and Vesa prepared the medicines, found a can to receive the tooth when it was taken out, and covered the can with a smelly castor oil leaf and soap bark lid to keep the tooth inside. Singleton lit the ironwood fire with matches instead of using kitchen coals. Everything must be new. Etina, a female assistant, pounded the leaves. Then she took a calabash of water and poured some on the ground to the east of the mortar, to the west, and finally into the mortar to make the leaf tea medicine. The libations were for the useless spirits, the *ayikodjikodji*, who must not be left out.

One pan of cold medicinal tea was set aside while another pan of tea was heating on the fire. Cupping horns lay ready in the medicine basket. We needed drums, so a boy was dispatched to find them. People were beginning to collect.

Now Singleton medicated his doctors. He, Fideli, Vesa, Luka the second apprentice, and I drank some of the tea. For a moment it made my head swim, but soon my senses cleared. Singleton announced to the crowd, "If there are any pregnant women here, go away." The concentrated "coming out" influence of the medicines and ritual objects was so strong that there was real danger of a miscarriage.

Singleton inspected the shrine and said, "Look, we've made a mistake. We should have things laid out so Meru faces east where the sun comes out of the earth, not west the way we've got it."

"We did that because of the shade," said Fideli. "But no matter, we'll leave it. We shall see."

A small procession was approaching — Vesa leading Meru, the woman with an ihamba tooth in her body. Vesa seated her on the antelope skin. She made faces at the sight of the medicines around her and the razor blade in the basket. This was a miserable, proud, suffering woman. They washed her with spongy masses of the medicine, squeezing all the pounded leaves onto her body until she was entirely drenched with them. This was to open her from the outside. The doctors used red clay to draw a line down her brow and nose, temples and cheekbones, protecting her head. Then they gave her medicine to drink — to open her from the inside. The power was growing.

The doctors took castor oil leaves, laying them over their fists. Then with a concerted shout — "Paya!", smacked the leaves with the other palm, and the leaves fell on Meru in blessing.

"Maheza! Maheza!"

"Ngambu!" shouted Singleton.

"Tafwa!" ("My friends, he is dead!"), we all replied.

Then began the drums in an irresistible rhythm heightened by clashing ax heads, while we sang and clapped. Singing, Singleton came close to Meru and shouted, "Come out!", directing his call into her body.

Then they began divining the ihamba's name. "If it's you, Nkomba, shake. If not, don't shake." They were speaking to the inside of Meru's body.

She hardly shook at all, sitting there with her legs straight out on the antelope skin. "Is it Kadochi? Shake if it is. Quick now!" Singleton danced the antelope mating dance in front of Meru. Already the group had increased to a crowd of about thirty people, at least half of whom were children. A young woman with an armful of school books passed behind them, saw what was happening, gave a sniggering laugh, and continued on her way. The doctors made tiny slits in Meru's back, then sucked on cupping horns and placed them over the slits. "Come out!" shouted Singleton at the place where the horns adhered.

Meru suddenly said her first words (coming out with "words," mazu, helps to make the ihamba come out). "I don't agree. I have something in my liver, my heart. It's my children; all my children have died. I just want to die because there's no one to look after me." The people heard her frankness and were pleased. They continued to sing.

But Singleton was not satisfied. "I haven't seen you shake happily yet. You're stiff with worries."

"I heard how Meru's own younger sister cheated her," her brother said. "When the sister went to sell the beer that Meru brewed, she didn't bring Meru the full price. Her own sister cheated her out of her money." By speaking for her, the brother helped unblock more of her "words" — grudges which had to come out. Meru shook violently in corroboration, but she was tired. From the divination they perceived that the spirit inside her was the old hunter Kashinakaji.

More "words" came out such as "I don't see Paulos in the crowd. Where is he?" Meru was offended. Paulos was her well-to-do classificatory brother. It was revealed that Paulos had never been told of the change of date for the ritual.

"If you want Paulos to come, shake. If not, don't shake," Singleton said. She shook hard and they sent a messenger for him.

Worse was to follow. The assistant who was supposed to change the tape recording cassette had reversed it instead, thus erasing one side. Bill was angry. The crowd immediately sensed this and turned in silence, hoping to hear Bill's "words".

"Perhaps these foreigners are closing up ihamba," someone said. "They ought to come out with their grudges."

"He can't say words," said Fideli. "He doesn't know our language. Besides, Edie is a doctor. Why should she close up ihamba?"

Meru broke in with "words" spoken in a high oratorical tone, reiterating all her complaints and ending with, "The way things are, I'll die."

Singleton was still for a moment, attentive. "I've seen that it is the ihamba, so he must come out." He was very happy, addressing Kashinakaji in Meru's body, "Forgive us, grandfather ihamba, I have to take you from the body of my sister so I can keep you with me." Then he said, "The man who has come is your brother; he is coming right now." He was talking to Meru this time, telling her that Paulos had arrived. Paulos had indeed arrived and he was in very ill humor.

"You told me Ihamba was to be on Thursday," he said. "And you go and hold it on Wednesday. Is that good manners?" Everyone tried to explain. Then the drums began once more.

The heat was drawing up black clouds above us. Meru fell shaking in the midst of the singing, and Singleton again tried to draw out the tooth.

Voices broke in, "Yes, let her fall half-dead like that. Do you want the witchcraft dancing in her? You do." The doctors wanted the spirit to show itself so they could bring it out. Yet there was a tone of horror in the voices. So many grudges were coming out.

It was a long ritual. The cupping horns were reset; the drumming began anew; and Singleton repeatedly traced a path on her back to direct the trouble that he could feel under the skin.

Meru spoke from her ritual position, "I feel resentment."

"We have seen the ihamba," said Fideli. "And you have put on your words."

Others in the crowd also enunciated "words," coming out with their own resentments. Now Meru would not even shake.

Meru's pain got to us all. We stood with bitter expressions, gazing at her. Fideli took a leaf poke and dripped medicine on Meru's head. Singleton held his skin bag in front of her face, then brushed her face with it. But Meru would not shake.

Meanwhile our translator, dizzy with gin, turned to me and said nastily, "Paulos is angry because you never came to see him when you said you would." I was overcome. I was supposed to have gone on the Saturday before. But old Line died on Saturday and I was at the funeral. One thing after another! I left the

translator and went around to the other side of the crowd, mortified. Again the crowd sensed anger and waited for my "words", but I would not speak. After thinking a minute I came back and explained matters to Paulos about the funeral.

I was very upset. How could I publicly bad-mouth the translator? There I was stiff with worry, and it was stalemate in the Ihamba. I was a participant and participants should not be uptight like this.

At the same moment, Singleton remembered that Meru was facing west. Nothing would "come out" like that. He shifted the whole ritual scene into its mirror image, and we all moved around until Meru was facing east in the direction of sunrise. This was quite different. I gazed across the crowd at my translator. "They want my words," I thought. "I want to participate so much. But how can I?" I was forced to accept the impossible and in accepting it, tears came into my eyes. My eyes stabbed with pain, and the tears came out.

Just then, through my tears, I could see Meru sway deeply, and everyone leaned forward. I realized along with them that the barriers were breaking. Something that wanted to be born was now going to be born. Then a certain palpable social integument broke and something "calved" in the whole scene, myself along with it. I felt the spiritual motion. It was a tangible feeling of breakthrough encompassing the entire group.

And then Meru fell!

Amid the bellow of the drums, Singleton swooped rhythmically with his finger horn and skin bag, ready to catch the tooth. Bill beat the side of the drum in time to the rhythm, and as for me, I had just found out how to clap. You simply clap with the drums, and clap *hard*. All the rest falls into place. Your whole body becomes deeply involved in the rhythm, and all reaches a unity. Singleton was at Meru's side and the crowd was on its feet clapping. Singleton pressed Meru's back, guiding and leading out the tooth — Meru's face in a grin of tranced passion, her back quivering rapidly.

Suddenly Meru raised her arm, stretched it in liberation, and I saw with my own eyes a giant thing emerging out of the flesh of her back. It was a large gray blob about six inches across, opaque and something between solid and smoke.⁴

I was amazed, delighted. I still laugh with glee at the realization of having seen it, the ihamba, and so big! Everyone was hooting, and we were all jumping with triumph. The gray thing was actually out there, visible, and you could see Singleton's hands working and scrabbling on the back. And then it was there

no more. Singleton had whatever it was in his pouch, pressing it in with his other hand. The receiving can was ready; he transferred whatever it was into it and capped the castor oil leaf and bark lid over it. It was done.

But there was one more thing. Everybody knew that they had to go through one last formality, divining the afterbirth. "If ihamba has not come out, shake. If it has come out, don't shake," said Singleton. Meru was quiet. At once there was a huge flash of lightning and a clap of thunder that exploded overhead. Meru sat up panting. The longed-for rain poured down and we all rushed into the kitchen shelter.

"Go to the house you two," said Fideli. Bill and I rushed through the curtain of rain to the house. Bill stumbled before he entered, fell into the mud, and then entered out of breath. Singleton came in with his blue shirt dark with water, carrying the receiving can which he set down on the floor. I wore a big smile.

He held up his hands to us. "See, I have nothing in them," he said. He squatted down and dredged for a long time in the bloody mixture. At length he drew out an old tooth, a molar, of natural size with a dark root and one side sheared off as if by an ax. It was the ihamba — a tooth of the old dead hunter, Kashinakaji.

On the evening of December 3, Singleton and Fideli visited our hut to discuss the Ihamba. The first thing that Singleton said was, "The thing that we saw, we were five." This was his statement that the doctors too had seen a thing. The doctors were Singleton, Fideli, Vesa, Luka, and myself.⁵

I respectfully described what I had seen, but Singleton made no comment. He did not describe what he had seen. I was in no mood to become analytical so I did not push the matter. When the keystone of the bridge is put into position and everything holds, you tend to just look on with your mouth open. This is what happened to me. If I were to have become analytical I would have had to be a different person from the one who saw the spirit form. My role was to be a participant observer so I could describe the background events and how the medicine was collected and used — in other words to tell the story.

Yet in order to complete this kind of story, there is the question whether I actually helped the healing. It should not be forgotten that I was there very much as an auxiliary. But as such I was part of the process, and it is my sense that Fideli knew what he was doing when he invited me. (Some further background to this is available in E. Turner 1992.) Let us say that

although I did not come out with any "words" like the rest of them, my tears must have been obvious, and they are a kind of language. In previous rituals the wave of release had not included me. This time it did. It was something not coming from me, not coming from them, but happening to all of us together.

The time sense was not that of cause and effect; these things come as wholes. Either I was in the group or I wasn't. Such differences from Western ways of thinking are themselves interesting. I feel that my own experience of tension and its release was probably necessary for me to have partaken in the good outcome, just as Singleton and Fideli had previously come out with their "words" as well. How it was that the release happened to everyone simultaneously, including the patient, I do not know. That is how it was. I am sure it wasn't me that caused the extraction and cure. But maybe I did help, for I certainly was right in it in that particular way. That this is possible for an articulate outsider, is what is both humbling and intellectually exciting about the event. It has made me thirsty for more.

Having completed the description I feel that the reader knows what is mainly important about the ritual and the spirit form. My wider speculations came later. Because the material is so unusual, I include my speculations in the next section.

That same evening, Singleton told us he had sent a hunter into the bush to bring back an antelope, to be shared among the five doctors. We drank honey beer, listened to the tapes, and sang and laughed a lot. Throughout the visit Fideli kept exclaiming, "I'm so happy!" praising the Baha'i deity Baha'ullah, talking about his upcoming trip to the Baha'i temple at Haifa in Israel, and trying to get Singleton to say what Ihamba was all about. Singleton was stressing the hunger of the ihamba tooth, its desire for meat; and practical as usual, how to satisfy it — which was finally done as follows.

On December 6 at 6:00 a.m., Singleton fed the ihamba with meat from an antelope. He opened the abdomen of the antelope and cut out a half-inch piece of liver which he trimmed into a disc with a hole in the center. He took the disc and a sac of blood into Meru's house, and we followed him. The winnowing basket lay ready on the dirt floor, with Singleton's mongoose skin pouch on it. There was also a clean Vaseline jar with a lid, now half full of maize meal made from the grain "which is hard like a tooth." Singleton added his liver disc and sac of blood to the basket. Then he took some red clay out of the pouch, crushed it with the end of his musengu horn, and smeared some clay over his fingers for protection. He picked up the liver ring and

carefully removed the ihamba tooth from his pouch. Choosing a tiny piece of red clay, and holding the tooth and clay together, he inserted them into the hole in the liver ring. He put the ring containing the ihamba into the Vaseline jar, stuffing it in and positioning it with his thumb at the center of the surface of the corn meal. Then he poured over it the blood from the sac, and screwed on the lid. The bottle was now a brilliant red above and white below, a union of blood and meal.

Bill wrote later, "Subjectively, I felt very strange. Images flashed through my mind . . . bread and wine; semen and menstrual blood; solid and liquid; yin and yang; a boulder in the stream and the water; time flowing past; life itself." Apparently, we both felt as if a kind of resolution had occurred. Even the reader may sense the effect. Singleton said that when ihamba was fed with blood it was satisfied, and so it appeared to be.

Now that the feeding was done, Singleton called Meru into the house. She came running, radiant, with smiles all over her middle-aged face. Singleton took the blood sac and marked her on the shoulders and beside her eyes. She was now cured and protected.

COMMENTARY

The principal issue raised by this description of a visible spirit form in Zambia is not the correct method for symbolic analysis, the meaning of the ritual, nor even the style of the report itself, but the question, "What is actually going on here?" This raises a second question, "Have I left the field of anthropology entirely by asking the first question?"

My colleagues warn me that not every anthropologist can have such an experience and that it would make other anthropologists anxious about whether they should try to have such an experience. This implies that I should keep quiet about my experience and perpetuate the myth that such things don't happen. I don't intend to do that. Rather, my intention is to engage in dialogue with other anthropologists who have had such experiences in order to build up a reliable body of data on spirits and similar phenomena. Hopefully, the establishment of regularities and thus a more general understanding can be derived from such a body of data.

If it becomes respectable for anthropologists to admit to such experiences when they occur, it would become possible to speak from *within* a culture, rather than as an outsider. Ethnography

could become an endeavor shared by natives and anthropologists. It would become possible to focus in a meaningful way on those rare events that are central to the life of many traditional societies.

To return to the central issue, what was actually going on in ihamba? The most parsimonious explanation would be that spirits actually exist. This would account for the importance placed upon the rituals by my consultants and it would also account for my own experience. Following the same line of argument, we could say that somehow medicines do really talk to the ihamba in their own way and say "Come out!" Singleton did really speak to the spirit of Kashinakaji inside Meru's body. As Victor Turner has demonstrated in his work, the deeds of the Ndembu display a coherence and elegance which invite the most complex analysis. This coherence may be due to the fact that, in Ndembu terms, "the spirits show them the way."

But there is a matter which does not seem to make sense — the human tooth that Singleton showed Bill and me in Meru's house after the ritual. The existence of this tooth creates certain dilemmas. Which caused the disease, Kashinakaji in spirit form or the tooth? Did two things come out of Meru? Or did Singleton knowingly use sleight-of-hand, to produce the concrete human tooth? How much does it matter?

In this connection, the reader may be reminded of the renowned essay by Lévi-Strauss, "The Sorcerer and his Magic" (1977:446-453). The editor of the book in which this account occurs asks the question, "Since the sorcerer is aware that he is using sleight-of-hand how does he retain his own faith in the system?" (Landy 1977:445). Quesalid was originally a cynic who for power reasons obtained "shamanic" training in the art of hiding a tuft of down in the cheek which the practitioner could pretend was the pathological foreign substance he had sucked out of the body of the patient. Having learned and practiced this procedure, Quesalid found to his surprise that he was actually able to cure his patients. Of course it has been pointed out in recent ethnography (for instance, A. Campbell 1989; Stoller 1984) that traditional peoples do not make the same distinctions between "real magic" and artifice that we do. Does the truth lie in Lévi-Strauss's claim that the cure demonstrates "the coherence of the psychic universe, itself a projection of the social universe" (1977:446)?

Lévi-Strauss (1977:452) lists the many elements of the total situation in a healing ritual:

in which sorcerer, patient, and audience, as well as representations and procedures, all play their parts. Furthermore, the public must participate. . . . It is this universe of vital effusions which the patient . . . and the sorcerer . . . allow the public to glimpse as "fireworks" from a safe distance. In contrast with scientific explanation, the problem is to articulate . . . the states, emotions, or representations into a whole or system. The system is valid precisely to the extent that it allows the coalescence or precipitation of these diffuse states, whose discontinuity also makes them painful. To the conscious mind, this last phenomenon constitutes an original experience which cannot be grasped from without.

Certainly one cannot fully grasp the Ihamba experience "from without," but I do know what it was like to experience it from within. I was overjoyed at seeing the spirit form and at Meru's obvious deliverance. It was only later that I tried to understand the experience "from without." What I saw come out was not a tooth, so how do we account for the existence of the tooth? There was nothing in our audio tapes, recorded in a variety of circumstances, that hinted of duplicity.

Later in my reading I came across a chapter entitled "Extracting Harmful Intrusions" in *The Way of the Shaman* by Michael Harner, one of the few descriptions that does not ascribe an extraction to trickery (1980:115-117):

Illness due to power intrusion is manifested by such symptoms as localized pain or discomfort, often together with an increase in temperature, which (from a shamanic point of view) is connected with the energy from the harmful power intrusion. . . .

A shaman would say that it is dangerous not to know about shamanism. In ignorance of shamanic principles, people do not know how to shield themselves from hostile energy intrusions through having guardian spirit power [for a similar reason Singleton warned us that we should drink leaf medicine to shield ourselves from the escaping ihamba]

The shamanic removal of harmful power intrusions is difficult work, for the shaman sucks them out of a patient physically as well as mentally and emotionally. This technique is widely used in shamanic cultures in such distant areas as Australia, North and South America, and Siberia.

If you ever viewed the film *Sucking Doctor*, which shows the healing work of the famous California Indian shaman Essie Parrish, you saw a shaman pulling out intrusive power. But Western skeptics say that the shaman is just pretending to suck something out of the person, an object that the shaman has already secreted in his mouth. Suck skeptics have apparently not taken up shamanism themselves to discover what is happening.

What is happening goes back to the fact that the shaman is aware of two realities. As among the Jivaro, the shaman is pulling out an intrusive power that (in the Shamanic State of Consciousness) has the appearance of a particular creature, such as a spider, and which he also knows is the hidden nature of a particular plant. When a shaman sucks out that power, he captures its spiritual essence in a portion of the same kind of plant that is its ordinary material home. That plant piece is, in other words, a power object. For example, the shaman may store in his mouth two half-inch-long twigs of the plant that he knows is the material "home" of the dangerous power being sucked out. He captures the power in one of those pieces, while using the other one to help. The fact that the shaman may then bring out the plant power object from his mouth and show it to a patient and audience as "Ordinary State of Consciousness" evidence does not negate the nonordinary reality of what is going on for him in the Shamanic State of Consciousness.⁶

In this long passage from Harner, the dual nature of the intrusive object is directly addressed: The shaman is aware of more than one reality. He/she captures the essence of the intrusive object (the spirit of Kashinakaji the hunter) — which in the shamanic state of consciousness among the Jivaro may have the appearance of a spider, but among the Ndembu (or at least in my experience of an Ndembu ritual) has the appearance of a six-inch gray blob — which he/she then gathers into something which is seen as a piece of wood or a tooth (which are also significant in themselves). Such a dual system also appears among the Wlabiri of Australia whose doctors found a dingo spirit inside the patient which they extracted in the form of a worm (Cawte 1974:48).

This sort of explanation differs from that of Lévi-Strauss who argued that Quesalid was an imposter who went on to become a great shaman in whom the radical negativism of the skeptic

gave way to more moderate feelings until he eventually lost all sight of "the fallaciousness of the technique which he had so disparaged at the beginning" (1977:45).

Both the tooth and the tuft of down become more significant when considered in the light of Harner's explanation. Victor Turner had some insight into the concept of alternate realities when he argued that the tooth is the slaying weapon par excellence, the epitome, the personification of the sudden aggressiveness needed by a carnivore to bring down a fleeing animal. In the following passage about the forked pole shrine of the Ndembu, Turner (1967:298) implies a good deal when he describes the synthesizing and focusing capacity of ritual symbolism:

It must be stressed that the *chishing'a* [forked pole shrine] is regarded by Ndembu not as an object of cognition, a mere set of referents to known phenomena, so much as a unitary power, conflating all the powers inherent in the activities, objects, relationships, and ideas it represents. What Ndembu see in a *chishing'a* made visible for them in its furcate, ambivalent, and awe-inspiring nakedness, is the slaughterous power of *Wubinda* itself [the Ndembu spirit and cult of huntsmanship].

The curious thing about this passage is the belief that shines out of it, the transmutation of symbols into reality. In his sympathy with the Ndembu, Turner thus goes beyond the idea of symbol as abstract referent. Now we see the shrine pole as one of the poles (as if magnetic) of the two realities, the one the material shrine pole and the other the spirit realm, between which the power of *Wubinda* jumps back and forth, as it were, into recognition and out of it.⁷ Victor Turner's own writings constantly show this ambiguity, sometimes espousing the beliefs of the people he studied and sometimes speaking from the standpoint of positivism (for the former see V. Turner 1975 and the latter V. Turner 1968).

It was that unitary power, combined with the medicines, the participation of the five doctors and the crowd, and the doctor's tutelary spirits, that drove into visibility the spirit substance that I actually saw. Thus working backwards, the Ndembu were right to regard symbols not as "objects of cognition, mere sets of referents" but as "powers," using Turner's words (1967:298). And working backward still further, it might even be said that many of Turner's analyses of symbols enable us to trace not psycho-

logical processes but actual spirit ones, the paths of their power toward us. But this Turner was only able to suggest, as in the example of the quotation above.

Anthropology forbade that he overstep its boundaries. Because of this, a shallower idea of symbolism has begun to affect many researchers so that their understanding stops at the surface of symbols — at their social and psychological effects. They themselves cannot see these material forms as objects with actual power, even though their field people do. These anthropologists have shown themselves to be fundamentalist secularists, however much they bend over backwards to empathize with the people they study.

So when I consider the ihamba tooth which was the result, the trophy, the material prize gained from the long morning of ritual, and wonder about its appearance at the end, what then? Was it that the tooth, brought into ritual focus, was employed to pull toward itself, like a magnet, the harmful thing I saw? That is not quite it. Singleton used the same word, ihamba, for the thing that was inside — that is, the one I saw coming out — and the tooth, which in the doctor's view had indeed been inside. The doctors could switch from addressing "grandfather" to commanding a biting "thing" to come out. When the ihamba, whatever it was, that had invaded the veins and arteries of the victim was extracted, it took the form of a gray blob which seemed to be absorbed into the tooth. This concept of an entity inside reminds me of a report by Essie Parrish, the Pomo shaman referred to above:

When that sick man is lying there, I usually see the power. These things seem unbelievable but I, myself, I know, because it is in me. . . . Way inside of the sick person lying there, there is something. It is just like seeing through something — if you put tissue over something, you could see through it. That is just the way I see it inside. I see what happens there and can feel it with my hand — my middle finger is the one with the power [compare the photograph of an Ihamba doctor holding his middle finger over a divining mortar in Victor Turner's book, *The Drums of Affliction* (1968:169)]. The pain sitting somewhere inside the person feels like it is pulling your hand towards itself — you can't miss it. (Harner 1980:127-128)

Singleton's skill appears to correspond to that of Essie Parrish, an articulate, English-speaking woman, albeit from an entirely

different culture area. Fideli told us that you could see the ihamba moving through the veins of the body: "I am telling you the truth." He did not use the "tissue" image, but there are many references in the tapes to seeing and sensing the ihamba. Singleton said, "I've seen that it is the ihamba, so he must come out of her." "We have seen the ihamba," said Fideli. Fideli also said, "When an ihamba goes into a horn you feel it vibrating." All of these sayings were vindicated by the actual sight of the spirit form, gray, quite definite, like a round blob of plasm.⁸ It is this object which is central to my account. It was, for me, the afflictor in a different shape.

What is important in Ihamba is the moment when Singleton clutched the "thing" in his skin pouch. This is the moment when the ihamba that was formerly within was translated into a concrete object which is placed in the receiving can. The fact that the doctors allowed the same word, ihamba, to run as it were out of Meru's body, into the receiving can, and later into the Vaseline jar, attests to its processual unity, its unbroken flow of identity. We could put it backwards: "that ihamba tooth in the Vaseline jar was the ihamba that was in the receiving can, which was the ihamba that Singleton clutched in his mongoose skin bag, which was the ihamba that came out of Meru, which was the ihamba that had been hurting her with all the agony of a tooth."

When operating in the forward, cause-and-effect mode, Meru's affliction by a human tooth looks impossible; in English the only words for such a process are "trickery," "sleight-of-hand," and the like. But these terms derive from quite a different world from the scene at Kahona. Looking backwards from the outcome of the Ihamba to Meru's sickness, the picture does not seem so impossible. This is because the past is only verified by the future (Wagner, personal communication⁹) and this ihamba was destined to be fed. Thus its past took shape after the event, as a computer shifts everything that has been written to adjust to new insertions or formatting commands.

What the ihamba itself consists of is the biting inside, that hard spirit which cannot come out without a sudden transformation, effected socially by living people communicating with the spirit, ready for the "coalescence or precipitation of the diffuse states," in the words of Lévi-Strauss. It is what it is.

The last question concerns particulars and universals in the sensing of spirits in different cultures. The Ndembu cosmology of course is not everyone's. At the moment we cannot fathom why each culture has its own. There appear to be no universal

"spirits"; only a few of the world's cultures have experienced "angels," for instance. Others have knowledge of animal helpers, while Africans know the support of dead kin. At least we have found out, partly with the help of Victor Turner, that ritual and systems of spirits and power objects are intimately concerned with people in the living context of their compeers.

In a paper like this, honesty becomes very important, and what is personal is part of the process. Therefore I include a paragraph from my notes that shows a certain distress:

Writing this last passage is like wading through glue. Something is trying to stop me. The devil disguised as Christianity is furious that I have found him out. "We are not ready for your universalisms," he says. "It is not time. Quick! Back to your old beliefs. You never saw a spirit."

How does acceptance of the informant's world view affect anthropology? It leaves a door unlocked. Those who have gone so far, like Alan Campbell (1989), could find this little door and be free to come and go. Let me explain. Campbell wrote an extremely sympathetic book on tolerance for the oddities of Wayapi Indian thought. Yet he confessed that he did not regard shamanic manifestations among the Wayapi "as entities in the form of animals or people"; he felt he ought to see them "as conceptual devices . . . metaphors through which the living world is expressed" (1989:90), a theory he derives from "minuscule points of grammar" (1989:21). Is this faithful reportage of the people's experience? The people would deny it. The "metaphor" model is everywhere to be found in anthropology, but it is rarely found in the real world where events of the psyche are regarded as common place, where different cultures have for long been exploring the intangible in terms of their everyday experience, where to date in some hospitals in America nurses are trained to understand the near-death experience,¹⁰ where stories of spirits and lights and midnight paralysis and hagriding (Hufford 1982a) continually emerge when there is a listener who will not mock them.

Thus it is becoming clear that what we are referring to are not unusual experiences, because they occur to so many people. Furthermore, when one reviews tests made on telepaths and such specially gifted persons, the phenomena they handle can hardly be called unexpected because such persons have developed skills to induce them. The development of skills is seen, for example, among Balinese trancers, Brazilian Umbandists, and circum-Pa-

cific shamans, as well as among African doctors. It is time that we recognize the ability to experience different levels of reality as one of the normal human abilities and place it where it belongs, central to the study of ritual.

NOTES

1. My thanks are due to the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research and to the Carter-Woodson Institute for Afro-American and African Studies at the University of Virginia, for grants-in-aid to make a restudy of the Ndembu. I am particularly grateful to William Blodgett whose unstinting help made the enterprise possible; also to Singleton Kahona and Fideli Benwa and their ancestors who were the true authors of this paper (and to whom this paper is dedicated); and to Benwa Muhelwa, Fideli's father, who was also a wise teacher in matters of ritual; to Cecile Clover, and many others. Finally I acknowledge the intellectual legacy of Victor Turner, which is beyond price.
2. I capitalize Ihamba when referring to the *ritual*, and use it uncanceled (ihamba) for the object, the tooth, and its spirit appearances. This will help to distinguish the ritual from the afflicting agent in the following account, much as the Africans distinguish them contextually.
3. Hunters actually remove a tooth from a dead comrade and carry it with them on their expeditions in order that it might help them kill animals. How the tooth gets into a victim is a matter that may not be published.
4. I believe that if I had tried to touch the gray form, my fingers would have gone through.
5. Bill saw no spirit form; however, in other matters he received "second-sight" messages from a different African doctor and was interested.
6. Victor Turner's book (1968) showed that the extraction of harmful intrusions is not limited to the Americas, Siberia, or Australia, but is found in Africa as well. The distinction between shaman and spirit-guided healer has created confusion here. Singleton was not the kind of shaman defined as one who lies prone while his shamanic consciousness wanders forth to bring back the helping

spirit to the sick person. He was the kind of healer who is endowed with a tutelary spirit who guides him in his craft. Both types of healer are guided by a helping spirit. In Africa, it is the patient who falls in trance, and by lying prone in an altered state of consciousness, her body responds to the medicinal and ritual "calling out" effects so strongly focused upon her. A similar stage of consciousness radiates all around the ritual core, a fact well-known to the doctors, who medicate those who are closely concerned (as we were medicated) in order to give them power to see the spirit and for protection.

7. The ritual also gave exercise to the sense of "off and on," in the repeated shift into another level of reality and back into the mundane. This shifting occurs in rituals elsewhere, often in masked rites involving masking and unmasking such as in Tubuan initiations in New Ireland, in trance rites where the difference between the realities is clearly seen, and anything of the "now-you-see-it-now-you-don't" kind.
8. As for the Ndembu, in William Blodgett's field notes of 1985, page 219, Philip Kabwita refers to the bad ghost musalu. "Mung-inju medicine makes musalu visible. You can see musalu, which comes in smoke or mist, when you drink pounded leaf medicine."
9. Roy Wagner (personal communication) put it this way: "The body's construct is one ahead, and perception one step behind the 'now'."
10. See Josephine Memorial Hospital Nursing Standards, Crescent City, California.