



INTERCÂMBIO

White Sangomas: the manifestation of Bantu forms of shamanic calling among whites in South Africa

Os sangomas brancos: a manifestação de formas bantu de chamado xamânico entre brancos na África do Sul

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Abstract: South Africa is one of some few countries where sizeable communities of black and white people live together which have preserved their distinct cultures. Other than in the Americas, South Africa has a black majority with the Bantu African languages and cultural institutions largely preserved – and it has the most marked history of segregation. Thus few elements of Bantu cultures have been adopted by white South Africans. Yet in recent years a core element of Bantu culture, the shamanism and mediumism of the “Sangomas”, has begun to manifest itself among whites in South Africa – in the characteristic forms of such “calling”. Interestingly this has not happened by “cultural learning” in significant cases. This requires a different model of explanation. In this essay Rupert Sheldrake’s theory of “morphogenetic fields” will be applied to this phenomenon and its implications considered.

Keywords: Bantu shamanism and mediumism. Sangomas. Intercultural transmission. R. Sheldrake’s theory of morphogenetic fields. Syncretism studies.

Resumo: A África do Sul é um dos poucos países onde grandes comunidades de pessoas brancas e negras convivem e preservaram suas culturas distintas. Além das Américas, a África do Sul tem uma maioria negra com as línguas africanas bantus e instituições culturais amplamente preservadas – e tem a história mais evidente da segregação. Por isso, poucos elementos das culturas Bantus são adotados pelos sul-africanos brancos. Porém, nos últimos anos um elemento central da cultura bantu, o xamanismo e a mediunidade dos “sangomas”, começou a se manifestar entre os brancos na África do Sul – nas formas características desse “chamado”. Curiosamente, isso não aconteceu significativamente por “aprendizagem cultural”, o que requer um modelo diferente de explicação. Nesse artigo, a teoria dos “campos morfogenéticos” de Rupert Sheldrake será aplicada ao fenômeno e suas implicações serão consideradas.

Palavars-chave: Xamanismo e mediunidade bantu. Sangomas. Transmissão intercultural. Teoria dos campos morfogenéticos de R. Sheldrake. Estudos sobre sincretismo.

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Introduction in inter-cultural perspective

The reception of Bantu African spirituality and forms of mediumism in South Africa in comparison with Brazil.

South Africa has for a long time been characterised by strict racial and cultural boundaries. As such it is widely perceived as the very opposite of the culture of Brazil. This includes the spiritual sphere. However, for about a century processes of gradual mutual reception of culture and spirituality has gradually begun in South Africa. At first this happened mainly in the cultures of the Bantu peoples, where religious beliefs and practises emerged which fused “white” Christianity with their own heritage - primarily in the so-called “African Independent (or: Instituted) Churches (“AIC”). After the demise of “apartheid”, the legally entrenched racial segregation and rule of the white minority over the black majority and those of mixed-race or the Indians in 1994, a reverse influence of Bantu spirituality can be observed among whites. It is interesting to explore this influence, especially with a view to parallel developments in Brazil.

The basis of comparison is that both countries have histories of centuries of coexistence between whites and Bantu peoples, which have influenced each other towards the formation of a common culture. The obvious differences also have to be taken into view: Today Brazil is a linguistically homogeneous society with a sense of common or shared culture. In South Africa the Bantu and the white peoples, as well as the others, have retained their distinct languages, cultures and ethnic identities. The lingua franca, English, is spoken only by a small minority as maternal language. Yet both societies are characterised by a mixture of European and African, especially Bantu cultures, with some admixtures, both genetically and culturally, of the aboriginal peoples of both countries, the Amerindians and the Khoi-San, whose numbers have dwindled to small remnant populations.

The proportions of ethnic and genetic make-up are almost inversely symmetrical: 80% of South Africans are Bantu peoples. Of these, many have admixtures of Khoisan ancestry, especially in the maternal line (Barbieri, 2013), some 8.5 % are whites, 9 % are of mixed race, chiefly of Khoisan ancestry, and 2.5% are Indians. The genetic makeup of the ancestry of the present Brazilian population is about 25% African, 10% Amerindian and 65% European (Godinho, 2008, p. 33). As to social categories of “race” as of 2010 some 47,1% declare themselves to be white, 43,42% to be of mixed race, 7,52% to be black, 1,1% to be yellow and 0,43% to be Amerindians. (IBGE, Censo 2010). The difference between the genetic make-up

and the self-perception as to racial identity shows the degree of mixture of the Brazilian people. While the genetic composition of the different population groups shows their history, the present affiliation indicates the conscious “lineage” a person chooses.

In spite of these differences both countries share the almost unique common trait that their national cultures are the result of an encounter, fusion and reciprocal influence of religion and cultures of European and Bantu African peoples. This sets them apart from those countries where such influence is based on colonial domination, such as in many African countries. South Africa and Brazil share in particular their common rooting in Bantu cultures. This is important for our purpose, since Bantu cultures are characterised by well-developed institutions of “shamanism” or “mediumism”, which sets them apart from the oracular-based divination of West Africa.

In both countries Bantu mediumism has spread beyond the original basis in Bantu peoples and their cultural institutions into white or mixed-race milieus and environments. This process has been ongoing in Brazil for centuries. In South Africa a similar process has set in more recently, some decades later.

On the mode of transmission: cultural learning or “information fields”?

In the following this spread is taken into view. An interesting finding is, that it cannot be sufficiently explained by “cultural learning”, neither by direct observation. Rather it can be found that Bantu mediumism appears to create a “field” which is “read” by sensitive persons who are not Bantu or of Bantu ancestry, as they show the well-structured symptoms and features of a Bantu shamanistic “calling” and subsequent unfolding of their mediumistic faculties without prior cultural learning and familiarity with role models.

This is a highly interesting phenomenon, which raises questions which may not find unanimous answers. In particular those who adhere to a materialistic-positivistic world-view may find themselves at a loss as to how to account for the phenomenon, and may tend to “explain it away”. To those whose outlook accommodates “super-natural” or “para-natural” phenomena this may be easier. For the purpose of this essay, assumptions of such “informational fields” (Sheldrake, 1991, p. 108, cf. Sheldrake, 2013, p. 187) will be treated as a hermeneutical tool, since they have been proposed by serious scholars of natural science in recent decades (Hammer, 2001, p. 276). It is beyond the reach and expertise of a historian

of religion or culture to dismiss them as incompatible with natural science. Positivistic claims should best be treated as expressions of a culture-bound consensus about the definitions of “reality”, which is dominant in some parts. Since the culturally verified phenomena described here are beyond the bounds of positivism, it might be appropriate to base the further considerations on their acceptance and to resort to models addressing them appreciatively. On this basis the phenomenon of “mediumistic spread” may be investigated.

The theory of “morphogenetic fields” proposed by Rupert Sheldrake will be adopted here. His theory is based on extensive research in developmental biology. He showed that the development of the forms of organisms cannot be explained sufficiently by genetics. In particular he pointed out that the notion that genes fully “programme” the development of an organism is only evidenced for the most elementary cellular structures, but not for any complex processes of “morphogenesis”, i.e. the development of forms as of body shape nor of any intellectual aspects of beings (Sheldrake, 2013, p, 177ff.). Sheldrake points out that since the turn of the 21st century the idea of “epigenetic inheritance” has become widely accepted in genetics. It means that features learned can be passed on genetically to next generations. Sheldrake regards this as indication of a nascent acceptance that a purely materialistic model of inheritance is insufficient (Sheldrake, 2013, p. 175). He explains them as fields of information about shape, structures and also patterns of thought, experience, perceptions and behaviour which develop over time and which are “read” by nascent organisms which adopt them and develop according to their patterns: “Inheritance depends on genes and on morphic resonance” (Sheldrake, 2013, p. 177). This theorem may serve to explain the phenomena of transmission of structures of Bantu mediumistic experience and of the development of these culture-specific forms of manifestation of a “shamanistic calling” among whites in South Africa, among which the factor of “cultural learning” can be safely excluded.

Attributions of reception of African heritage in Brazil

The reception of Bantu shamanism in the form of Umbanda into the culture of whites might be viewed as a unique Brazilian phenomenon. It has been attributed to the domestic communion including intermarriage between the constituent races of Brazil which resulted in the formation of a common culture in spite of the social and racial categories and distinctions which continue to persist in the continuum of society.

Gilberto Freyre described the formation of Brazilian culture as the result of generations of such intermarriage and of close the domestic communion between Portuguese colonists and their African slaves which provided a basis of physical and emotional closeness which facilitated the process of cultural “métissage” which he saw as characteristic of Brazil’s culture. (Freyre, 1933, vol. 1, p. 15).

The genetic findings support his views about the emotional and familial basis for close cultural exchange by which many elements of African culture and religion entered Brazilian culture from its formative stages onwards. The founding population of Brazil were mostly Portuguese men who married Black or Amerindian wives. It also shows that subsequent immigrations were skewed in favour of men, so that this distribution of the maternal genome persisted. "O que mais me surpreendeu foi a descoberta de que a reprodução se fez de forma brutalmente unidireccional: filiação paterna europeia e filiação materna ameríndia ou africana" (Nadais, 2000).

This asymmetry indicates pathways for the reception of non-European cultural elements in the formation of Brazilian culture. Elements in the dominion of women would be incorporated more readily, such as cuisine, dance, popular music, tales told to children including fairy tales, possibly fashion, elements of erotic culture which originate in the extended domestic communion of the “house”, a sense and styles of movement of emotional expression, feeling and tastes. Elements belonging to the cultural domain of the men would remain determined by the patriarchal side of European culture with its adaptations to local colonial circumstances. In this arrangement the female traditions of Bantu culture would be received more easily than the male. This may apply to Bantu mediumism too. The male Bantu “curandeiro” would be perceived more as an outsider, located and dwelling at the periphery, spatially and socially, and would likely be distrusted, even feared or despised, rarely idealised, as a “feiticeiro”. A woman in the role of e.g. a Mãe-de-santo would be accepted more readily, even as compliment to the male Roman Catholic priest, than a man in her role would be. Bantu culture lends itself to such division since the roles of mediums are distributed between women and men with the former dominating.

Segregation and conditions of reception in South Africa

In spite of daily interaction between the races in South Africa, at the workplace and more privately through domestic workers in the house, the conditions of

exchange, or rather: of reception, differ in South Africa. Here long-standing policies of segregation and a dozen languages and peoples coexisting in culturally self-conscious communities have been effective barriers against cultural reception of spiritual ideas and practises across the boundaries of culture and race. This isolated the whites from African culture in particular. A degree of resistance against cultural “métissage” can also be observed among black people.

On this background the recent adoption of Bantu divination by whites in South Africa is remarkable, especially since this is not the result of any deliberate or intentional embracing of Bantu spiritual culture. Such deliberate appropriation of Bantu shamanistic practises and rites does occur – both in South Africa where it has become fashionable in counter-culturally or esoterically-minded segments of whites, as in in Brazil, where predominantly whites from southern Brazil are adopting Umbanda, beyond the traditional regions of Afro-Brazilian culture (Kleinhempel, 2015, p. 10f.)

Contexts of the emergence of Bantu shamanism among South African whites

The debate about the recognition of symptoms of Bantu shamanist calling as distinct from psychiatric disorders in South Africa

The notion of culturally distinct psychic realities has been discussed in South African psychiatry, with two opposing views prevalent, one, loosely identified with “transcultural psychiatry” by him, which views psychic disturbances as culturally invariant, and “cross-cultural psychiatry”, which accepts cultural differences in psychiatric disorders and also a delimitation of psychiatric and spiritual disturbances. (Swartz, 1989, p. 2). It should be noted however that in the field of “transcultural psychiatry” the awareness of culturally conditioned specific psychic conditions and of their spiritual background and meaning is growing. L. Swartz illustrates the difference in approach in the assessment of the state of “thwasa”, which denotes the experiencing a “calling” as a diviner in Bantu cultures of South Africa:

D. Kruger (1974, 1978), like other authors, has suggested that there are similarities between divining and psychotherapy. Addressing the quite commonly-held belief that diviners are psychiatrically disturbed as a result of the thwasa state, he studied diviners using the Rorschach and Thematic Apperception Test. He found them to be a 'normal (although self-restrictive) group' (D. Kruger, 1978, p. 9). He also found no psychometric evidence for the argument that the thwasa state of being called by the ancestors is equivalent to schizophrenia (Swartz, 1989, p. 34).

The issue which L. Swartz refers to here is that some psychiatrists of a more positivistic orientation tend to ignore the specific condition of those who experience a calling of Bantu mediumship and have dreams in which they are told what to do or in which next steps of their training are revealed to them, like the finding of persons or objects, and will tend to diagnose these states as forms of schizophrenia, in spite of the clear distinction made also in traditional black African cultures between such states as schizophrenia.

There is a rising acceptance of such states, especially in the medical field, which are vaguely attributed to “indigenous forms of knowledge”, but also in the field of intercultural studies (Bernard, 2001). The acceptance of spiritual explanations of certain states of consciousness and of psychic conditions as well as of “paranormal” experiences is essential to the recognition and understanding of spiritual and mediumistic forms of healing (in the widest sense) and of counselling. A preliminary acceptance on pragmatic grounds as effective means in certain (“unenlightened”) cultural contexts does not do justice to the phenomena and would imply a degree of double standards by accepting as effective what is rejected on an epistemological level. There is a growing awareness of these issues in intercultural encounters and fields of therapeutic action (Marks, 2006, pp. 471ff.). Lynne Marks of the University of Cape Town pinpoints this common rift as follows:

Portman and Garrett (2006) ... highlight the worldview of the Native American healer as based on the inextricable interconnectedness between spirit, the environment, and the self, resulting in a complex holistic treatment practice. The importance of the individual’s belief system is pivotal to the acceptance of the healer’s knowledge and the healing process. This multidimensionality is highlighted by ... a method of research that is sensitive to a culturally based healing paradigm. While the hegemonic system of western medicine has recognised the cultural importance of the work of the Mexican curanderos, medical validity is withheld, despite evidence of a clinically significant service offered by these healers (Marks, 2006, p. 472).

In view of the increasing recognition of spiritually based and mediumistic forms of healing by governments, such as the South African government, and also by the World Health Organisation (Marks, 2006, p. 477) it is essential to understand their foundations and their dynamic presence in contemporary culture. Tracing pathways of reception and of spread of South African Bantu mediumship and of its effect on those who come into its orbit is a contribution to this purpose.

Psychoanalytic approaches to Bantu mediumism in South Africa in the 20th century and its legitimization on these terms

The emergence of white “Sangomas” (Bantu shamans) from the late 20th century onwards has to be viewed on the background of growing social acceptance, as reflected in the psychiatric debates mentioned above. If in the 19th century any white person in rural South Africa experienced symptoms of a Bantu shamanistic calling there would have been no social space within white society to profess them, let alone to practise as a trained sangoma, even if this could have been done in secret. The debates among black diviners whether it is permissible for a white person to become a sangoma reflect this cultural segregation. The point made by those excluding whites is based on the notion that ancestral spirits must manifest themselves in the process, apart from those of the instructor or of the land.

The preoccupation of South African psychoanalysts with Bantu mediumism came about through cultural exposure. In the middle of the 20th century one of the pioneers of studies on Bantu mediumship in the psychiatric field, Bernard J. F. Laubscher, worked as a psychiatrist in a hospital in the Eastern Cape. He had studied psychiatry in Scotland and was familiar with psychoanalysis, initiated in the Scottish Rite of Freemasonry and had participated in spiritistic séances. His world view was strongly Esoteric. On this basis he came to acknowledge the reality of the spiritually caused disturbances which characterise the early stages of vocation as a Sangoma, the Ukuthwasa stage and gained the friendship of a Xhosa Igqirha who introduced him to the beliefs of his culture. Laubscher fully accepted the truth of these experiences and beliefs as culturally specific expressions of a higher reality. Of his encounter with this diviner, Solomon Daba, he wrote:

He was taking me on a mental journey into the hidden world of Xhosa thought. The feelings and perceptions which underlay the awareness of the pagan mind and give it a wisdom which raises him and gives him the distance of dignity and makes him feel the satisfaction of a deeper contact with life which somehow means more to him than the knowledge and power of other people. I for one could not help becoming aware of some common universal level of consciousness in which our thinking was having its existence. Indeed that we were in tune on a certain universal level of the Cosmic Mind (Laubscher, 1975, p. 47).

This passage contains several references to European Esoteric convictions. Laubscher emphasises that in spite of differences of culture and of education they both followed sophisticated pathways to a sphere of manifestation of the “Cosmic Mind” which he believed to be universal in spite of culturally different forms of

manifestation. On this basis the beliefs of Xhosa culture and the perceptions they disclose and enable are spiritually relevant to a European, as himself. The keyword of “wisdom” underlines this spiritual significance. In this evaluation Laubscher rejects a view of the Xhosa belief system as a mere cultural “construct”. Rather he appreciates it as a system giving access to feelings and perceptions which his own culture would not provide, but which would speak to him on the level of a common universal consciousness. This supported his esteem of those elements of Xhosa belief which would appear strange to most members of European cultures:

The unison of understanding transcended his red blankets [i.e. traditional Xhosa dress] and my European clothes, my education and his illiteracy, we were in contact with a stratum of the Cosmic consciousness. We were mentally floating in a world transcending space and time. It was then the word "Ukutwasa" that showed the way. The Xhosa Isanuses [i. e. high ranking sangomas] describe many facets of this strange experience of ukutwasa, the chief characteristic, however, remains an awareness of things and events far beyond the world of our senses. Ukutwasa can take you out of yourself and even visit the Abantubomlambo [i.e. the “River people”, a class of spirits believed to reside under the water who disclose esoteric knowledge and special psychic powers], and gain a contact by means of which wisdom can flow. It was at that moment that an intuitive flash like sheet lightning in a Transkeian [i.e. Eastern Cape] night, suddenly laid bare a landscape of psychic significance (Laubscher, 1975, p. 47).

Here the Laubscher affirms his own belief in a realm of spirits and of immaterial or unembodied entities, and repeats his conviction that through contact with the Bantu African spirits “wisdom can flow” – a phrase which far exceeds issues of “healing”, which are the master concept (or metaphor) by which Bantu mediumship is labelled and appreciated in most of European reports about Sangomas. In the same vein he affirms a link between psychic and spiritual dimensions of reality by the image that Ukuthwasa reveals “a landscape of psychic significance.” Perceptibly Laubscher is well rooted in European Esoteric and spiritual traditions of the time before the 2nd World War. Some of this frame of reference has gone lost in the heydays of Positivism in the middle of the 20th century.

In the same region, a Cape Town psychoanalyst in the tradition of C. G. Jung, Vera Bührmann also encountered a Sangoma and took interest in his mediumship. However Bührmann reinterpreted the cosmology in terms of Jung’s idea of an extended self, seeking to “internalise” it. Quite robustly she declared:

I perceive the fantasies about and the images of the ancestors ... as expressed in the Xhosa cosmology as projections from their unconscious, especially the collective

and cultural layers. The ancestor and witch concepts are therefore archetypal (Bühmann, 1986, p. 26).

Vague as this idea of an extended or “higher self” is, which is meant to include all spiritual entities, the concept goes back to notions of an “Absolute Ego” (or Mind) of the philosophy of late Idealism and gave some cultural credibility to Jung’s belief in transcendent sources of inspiration appearing in the individual conscious and especially subconscious mind as well as through significant events in his field. The concept has become powerful in the context of new Age thought. Here the “higher Self” is regarded as the “real Self”, which:

possesses a vast consciousness not bounded by space and time. This Higher Self participates in the divine Mind in a way our ‘skin-encapsuled ego’ ... does not, but at the same time it is personal in a way the universal Life Force is not. In other words, the Higher Self functions as the personal mediating link or bridge between man and God... (Hanegraaff, 1998, p. 211)

By reframing Bantu mediumship in this notion, as present in Jungian thought, Bühmann created a pathway of access to the phenomena of Bantu mediumship which enabled her to appreciate the phenomena and experiences of Xhosa mediumship on her own epistemic grounds of Jungianism, finding enough common ground to take lasting interest in them. She has created a pathway of interest and access for the Jungian community, which lasts to the present, where L.R. N. Mlisa as (Bantu) Xhosa psychologist, employed as lecturer in academia, explicates her Igqirha mediumship in these terms at an International conference of Jungian psycho-analysts in Cape Town in 2017, who declares in the abstract for her keynote speech: “Ukuthwasa will never be understood in western terms without inclusion of the Jungian Psychological perspective” (Mlisa, 2017, p.15).

As someone initiated as a Sangoma in a very traditional environment she chooses C. G. Jung’s theory to explicate her mediumship in these terms to an international audience, emphasising common views.

The reception of Bantu mediumism in “African Initiated Churches” and in Christian theology

The reception of forms of Bantu shamanism and mediumistic practise by black African churches, has paved a way for social acceptance in the largely Christian society. Two parallel movements may be observed.

The one is that “African Independent” or “Instituted Churches” (AIC’s) which have arisen since the late 19th century in many African countries have integrated spiritual beliefs, rituals and practises into their form of Christianity. Most of them have Protestant or Pentecostal origins. Among them Bantu shamanism has been included as a form of “prophetic” practise. The office of the “prophet” is a distinct role in these churches. It requires that the prophet has the gift of mediumism and has is found to be capable of administering effective spiritual healing. The spirits have assumed a somewhat different role here in comparison to the Sangomas. The setting of practise differs and to some extent to the forms differ. This incorporation of Bantu shamanism into these churches, which are the most numerous in South Africa maintains social acceptance of Sangomas in a Christian context as well (Anderson, 1991, p. 74ff). While deriving from African Traditional Religion (ATR), many Sangomas are Christians and do not perceive the spirit realm to be necessarily Pagan, although it is perceived to be connected to African Traditional Religion. To evaluate this as an instance of “double faith” implies certain judgements of what is Christian and what not. Bantu mediumship has been incorporated through the role of “prophets” in the AIC “Zionist” churches who also conduct spiritual healing ceremonies (Sundkler; 1964) and by the continued practice of Sangomas who identify as Christians (Cultural Conceptions of Life After Death, 2008). This phenomenon of “double faith” of incorporating Bantu shamanism into Christianity is not only present in the practice of those who consult Sangomas, but also among the Sangomas themselves.

The other source of knowledge about Bantu shamanism consists in the anthropological studies in particularly by some missionaries and subsequently by Black African theologians. Unlike anthropologists, who mostly relied on interpreters during the weeks or months of their fieldwork, the missionaries were in a position to delve more deeply into the cultural and religious lives of the people among whom they lived. Not all of them cared to study these cultures and beliefs, but those who did wrote some of the best and most comprehensive studies of black African religion and culture existing to this day. Axel Ivar Berglund, a Swedish Lutheran missionary, born in South Africa in rural Zululand of missionary parents, returned there upon completion of his academic degrees in Sweden and in South Africa to write *Zulu Thought-Patterns and Symbolism* (Berglund, 1976), a book which Victor Turner – himself an “iconic” and culturally influential anthropologist who did sound field studies in Zambia (Turner, 1975) - praised as “one of the most important statements of the ‘inside view’ of an African religious system ever made” (Berglund,

1976, retro). Their studies of African traditional religion, later augmented by studies by black African scholars like J. Mbiti (Mbiti, 1989) or G. Setiloane (Setiloane 1976), remain sourcebooks on African Traditional Religion until today. Their works provide the main pathways towards an understanding of Bantu mediumship in the context of African Traditional Religion to this day. Their sound work also created some appreciation for the seriousness, rigour and complexity of selection, admission, training and performance of those who become recognised as graduated Sangomas.

The emergence of white sangomas

The reception of traditional Bantu mediumship of the “Sangomas” into urban culture – and also into white milieus of South Africa is important.

One of the first whites to be initiated as a traditional diviner, a “nyanga”, was Rae Graham, an English nurse who immigrated to South Africa in 1948 to live in the northern regions among the Tswana and Venda people (McCallum, 1993, p. 244f.). Her life in rural environments, as a merchant’s wife and a nurse, provided her with numerous and close contacts with black people and their culture. As a woman of keen academic interest and mind-set she took interest in the cultures of her environment, including Bantu mediumship. Feeling attracted to it and being recognised as “gifted” she was admitted to training and passed her examinations in this process and became recognised as “nyanga”, in spite of her being a white person. Later in life she became a member of Johannesburg’s city council and thus a public figure and role model even in the high time of apartheid. As to terminology, she insisted that she was not a “Sangoma”, i.e. someone working through contact with the spirits, but a “nyanga”, working with herbs, divination and intuition (McCallum, 1993, pp. 245ff.). However her training also involved essential elements of mediumship and requirements of paranormal events and faculties. The distinction is thus more gradual. What concerned Rae Graham was that some Sangomas were said to work with evil spirits, which she rejected. Mentioning this aspect, of course, is important, since there is a very shady aspect and characters among Sangomas who will not hesitate to engage in black magic and murderous practices (Van Binsbergen, 1998, p. 14f.). Those are not to be identified with Sangomas in general.

The terminology for Bantu shamans varies between regions in South Africa. L.-R. N. Mlisa, an academic at the university of Fort Hare is a trained Sangoma herself – or in the language of her people: an “iGqirha”, which is the Xhosa equivalent of the Zulu word “Sangoma”, writes about the problem of black magic:

Moreover, *igqirha* would be seen as acting like *ixhwele* (herbalist) and/or *igqwirha* (witch). *Igqirha* have always been perceived as a clean, pure and honest healer, whereas *ixhwele* has always been seen as a person who can use any type of herb or method to exact revenge – to the extent of using human parts and sending *izulu* (lightning) to kill the alleged witch or person (Mlisa, 2009, p. 67).

Her explanation certainly reflects a professional ethos as *iGqirha*, by attributing practices of magic harm to the herbalists alone. In practice this distribution may not be so clear-cut, as W. Van Binsbergen pointed out. L.-R. N. Mlisa concludes however, that this is not a matter of roles but of the personalities, whether some diviner will use special mediumistic or magic powers for the sake of harm (Mlisa, 2009, p. 66).

Among the recent white Sangomas are John Lockley, of Irish and white Zimbabwean descent who learnt the art of the and was initiated after 10 years training in the Eastern Cape of South Africa (Bröll, 2012), or Jessica Shackleton, a British-South African artist, who also did her Sangoma training there (Shackleton; 2009) have special public presence through seminars and websites. Jessica Shackleton, a descendent of the Antarctica explorer Ernest Shackleton, declared to have sought “new spiritual horizons” through her calling (Shackleton, 2009, personal communication), integrated her Sangoma identity with her work as an artist. Lockley became a spiritual teacher in Ireland, Germany, Great Britain and the Netherlands, where he conducts seminars, as announced on his website (Lockley, 2017) where he introduces into the spiritual world of the Sangomas. Apart from them also other white Sangomas have been presented on the internet. (Sangomas - A student documentary, 2013 and: White boy blazing a trail in S. African spiritual world, 2015).

From the United States of America, James Hall, an author and journalist, became a Sangoma. He encountered the sphere of Bantu mediumship through extensive encounter with Miriam Makeba, whose mother was a Sangoma (Makeba & Hall, 1987, p. 32). M. Makeba, who had a regular international dedicated a CD-album, entitled “Sangoma” (Makeba, 1998) to songs as she had learned from her mother. During his interviews with M. Makeba she recognised his mediumistic abilities, so she introduced him to the realm of Bantu mediumship, which finally brought him to undergo training as a Sangoma in Swaziland (Hall, 1996, p.20). Also to be mentioned is Nicky Arden, born of Jewish-German parents in Durban, South Africa, who became a Sangoma after a period of emigration to the United States. She wrote about her initiation and the pathway to it (Harden, 1996).

Sangoma training is based on the belief that the guiding spirits come from both the initiate's family and from the mentors or teacher's side. They are "located" to a degree, even if they may manifest themselves anywhere. Entering training as a Sangoma demands an acceptance of the notion of spirits or "ancestors" as Jo Thobeka Wreford, a Cape Town academic lecturer wrote of her own experience, in agreement with cultural knowledge (Wreford, 2008, p. 59). It is hardly possible to interpret the dreams, the precognitions, the significant paranormal occurrences associated with them as manifestations of a personal "unconscious" or of an "unconscious mind", i.e. as results of knowledge already acquired somewhere on the way. Van Binsbergen, himself a trained Sangoma, reflects on the chasm between the largely positivist convictions of his academic milieu and those which are at the basis of his own practice as a Sangoma in the Netherlands, which he requires his clients to accept when working with them (Van Binsbergen, 1998). The assumption that any mediumistic phenomena must be manifestations of an "unconscious mind" has come under criticism as un-reflected and unwarranted in anthropology. Thus H. P. Dürr formulated succinctly:

Society, as it becomes ever more complex, loses any knowledge about these things. It faces the transcendent from now on by forbidding, by displacing, later on, by 'spiritualising' and 'subjectivising' it. Here lies the root of all the 'theories of projection', as they were to be developed one day by Feuerbach and Marx, by psychoanalysts and positivistic critics of ideology. The 'external' moves into the 'interior' and when it, at times, cannot deny its original character, it is again incorporated into subjectivity as 'projected'. 'Nothing at all may remain outside, since the mere idea of an 'outside' is the real source of Angst.' [my translation] (Duerr, 1978, p. 63)

A problem with the loose and all-encompassing use of the concept of 'projection' for transcendent phenomena is, that it loses its psychoanalytically well-defined meaning as referring to subliminal ideas and impulses, which are projected outside and are thus accessible in therapy. The notion of "projection" refers to contents of the soul whose rejection or banning from consciousness has a definite role for the sustenance of the self-concept and for the stability of the ego (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1977, vol. 2, pp. 400). The notion of "projection" is a clinically important and useful term in the context of psychoanalysis. In the context of our study, the loose usage of "projection" amounts to a colonial gesture, whereby the manifestations of "alterity", of the spiritual cosmology and phenomena of African culture are "incorporated" by the notion of "projection" as unconscious or un-accessed elements of the own "self". Their cultural and epistemic alterity is denied and ignored. The strangeness of African constitution of reality is dismissed.

Types of Bantu mediumship and the stages of initiation

Types of mediumship

Sangoma mediumship is one of three types of mediumship which is recognised in South African Bantu culture: the „herbalists“ (iZinyanya, iXhwele) who are believed to be shown the herbs they need through dreams, the diviners of a „shamanic“ type (iSangoma, iGqira) who work with a combination of oracles and intuition and who are consulted about issues of health and crises, and the „seers“ (iSitunywa), who are also called „prophets“ in African Independent Churches, who are said to have a natural gift of clairvoyance, even extending into the future, and who do not use oracles (Mlisa, 2009, p. 9).

Amanda Gcabashe, a Sangoma who became a public figure through her media presence in South Africa (Gcabashe, 2016) and also abroad (Fleming, 2009), gives a brief definition of what this form of mediumship and distinguishes it from the role of “iNyanga”, explains the difference between them on her website:

One is born with the abilities of being a Sangoma. This gift is initiated through your family (can be both or one of your maternal or paternal lineage). With time though, any other soul with a desire to work through you may do so. Izangoma are able to communicate with ancestors through various different gifts that each one has been born with. In addition iZangoma serve as dream interpreters able to assist those who have visions to decipher these and explain them. Dreams are an important tool used by our ancestors to pass on messages.

As a Sangoma, you serve as an interpreter / link between the person ozhlola (consulting through you) and the souls surrounding that individual. ... Izinyanga are trained through apprenticeship to be healers using imithi [i.e. plants or animal products use for the treatment of physical or spiritual diseases]. ... Anyone who has an interest can be trained in the identification of imithi, correct preparation methods, dosages, uses. Some iZangoma though have an ancestors who was an iNyanga who will then guide and teach the Sangoma on the various remedies that he used whilst still alive. This is not the case for every Sangoma...(Gcabashe, 2009).

This text indicates a certain hierarchical difference between the Nyanga described as on a lower rank of mediumship compared to the Sangomas. The essential requirement is that the Sangomas act as mediums by which ancestral spirits work. They are understood to be the actual agents in this process and also as the entities who initiate the process of become a Sangoma. As such this is nothing which can be learnt out of one’s own volition. The experience of receiving a calling (Ubizo) to undergo the course of training which involves a specific state of mind or condition, called Ukuthwasa, to become a Sangoma is defined by L.R. N. Mlisa as:

“Ukuthwasa is a spiritual journey that is specifically designed by ancestors for those who are endowed with the gift of healing by their ancestors.” (Mlisa, 2009, p. ix)

The stages of initiation

It involves a complex, structured process. The state of being in this process, Inthwasa, is usually feared as Mlisa explains:

It is inkathazo [madness] indeed, since it involves syndromatic illnesses and a conglomerate of factors that culminate in various afflictions. Part of the problem is the expense involved in the process, which people view negatively. Sometimes ukuthwasa involves signs that resemble madness, such as hallucinations and illusions. Due to these characteristics it is known as inkenqe (cultural madness), or umshologu (spiritual madness) not ‘shades’ as continuously referred to by many anthropologists (Hammond-Tooke, 1989), that needs cultural doctoring. Hence, entering into the ukuthwasa initiation heals the person (Mlisa, 2009, p. 9).

She states that the process of training is often feared as time-consuming, expensive, disruptive to family life and employment, and also involving the obligation to heed the inspiration of the ancestral spirits perpetually. Yet the afflictions suffered by someone who experiences signs of a spiritual calling are so severe that some feel that they cannot evade answering the call if they wish to regain physical or psychological health and well-being. It is considered to be possible to reject the call, but often at a high price.

Mlisa defines seven stages of the training process:

1.) **The Prediction Stage of a chosen Igqirha (Sangoma):** This stage is often manifest in childhood already, as “the rich information at this stage is gradually brought to the fore as the child grows and matures, mostly through dreams, visions and a sensitivity to her environment. At times a child shows an extraordinary sixth sense as she matures” (Mlisa, 2009, p. 139).

2.) Manifestation of signs to indicate the Ubizo:

The signs of ukuthwasa might begin to manifest, but often the person may not be aware that she has to thwasa. However, others start the process by seeking counsel with igqirha at this stage as the dreams affect them. ... Only when troubles intensify for those aspiring to ukuthwasa, serious action is undertaken. The prominent manifestations are dreams and other symptomatic characteristics... (idem).

3.) The Stage of Intense Afflictions:

This stage is often an alarming experience for both the person and family. Participants often start reflecting during this stage, since the intensity of the calling increases only at this stage; ... The manifestation of the symptoms presumably takes place to force the person to take action. Once the manifesting characteristics intensify, and both the person and her family seek counsel with amagqirha ... This is when verification and confirmation that a person should thwasa are often carried out. (idem).

4.) Confusion, Resistance and/or Acceptance:

The point is that no-one wants to thwasa. For example, irrespective of this truth, regression and vacillation take place between different stages. The vacillation may continue throughout the training process until a person is fixed in the middle of the training or just before graduation. ... Vacillating feelings are often interchangeable with feelings of hope. Hope may help to inject positive energy that allows umkhwetha to proceed to the next step with vigour and enthusiasm. (ibidem, p. 140)

5.) Ukuvuma Ukufa: This stage involves a series of rituals:

- a) The formal beading and donning the attire of a trainee (umthwasa). This is done with a ritual which involves séance, sacrifice, the adoption of a new name, symbolising a change of identity, including assuming adopting the surname of the Igqirha conducting the training, to become part of the initiator's family, also economically,
- b) rites of cleansing, an acceptance of death and illness, and to be inducted or baptised into the state of a trainee (ukuthwasa),
- c) cleansing rituals of the body, the homestead and environment, accompanied by sacrificial rituals,
- d) rites of acceptance, with sacrifice and prayers for the initiate. In the time leading up to this point the initiate has to learn the necessary knowledge and has to develop his or (mostly) her inborn mediumistic skills in order to proceed with the requirements of the following stage:

This is the stage where an intensified training begins. The trainer is entirely convinced that umkhwetha has a calling and she has committed to it. She has to demonstrate skills and abilities in the divining system (assessments, diagnosis and preparing treatments for clients). Her exclusion from family life and social life intensifies and new restrictions are introduced. Her food restrictions differ markedly from the previous stage. ... She must also help in mentoring her juniors. Most of the time, umkhwetha is expected to work independently, but under the strict guid-

ance of the trainer. She becomes an assistant to her trainer. She can also lead certain procedures and rituals under the guidance of either her trainer or *ikrwala* (newly graduated *igqirha* – an intern). Moreover, she must demonstrate more expertise and knowledge in understanding how various herbs are collected, stored and used (*ibidem*, p. 149).

6.) Ukuphuma:

This is the last stage of the intensive training that prepares *umkhwetha* to be a full-fledged healer. It proceeds to graduation. It consists of four ritual activities ... At this stage *umkhwetha* graduates to become a full-fledged diviner (*idem*).

Now the trainee enters a kind of internship, working independently under the guidance of the trainer. This stage includes long times of isolation and seclusion, ritual pilgrimages and rites at special sites in nature, spiritual retreats, sacrificial rituals, public proofs of mediumistic prowess, a new name change and rites of public investiture and acceptance in the new role as *Igqirha* (*Sangoma*) concluding by entering the state of internship (*ibidem*, p. 149ff.).

7.) **Ukuphinda Indlela:** This is the stage of being accepted into the community of *Igqirhas* or *Sangomas* as a full member. However this may include further learning from senior *Sangomas*, since this is held to be lifelong process (*ibidem*, p. 161).

Considerations on the maintenance of standards of quality for training of Sangomas

The complexity and structure of this training process, as described on the basis of extensive field work and of her own training as a *Igqirha* (*Sangoma*) in the Eastern Cape Province in the setting of rural Xhosa culture by L.-R. N. Mlisa, with many rituals involving the fraternity or sorority of *Sangomas* (*Igqirhas*) and the wider community, as well as the detailed instructions, of which a mere summary and outlines have been given here, show that this is a highly context-bound process which is difficult to reproduce outside of its original cultural setting. The replication of some of these elements in other countries are bound to involve a measure of reduction in complexity and thus also of fullness of meaningful acts. It may be assumed that this can also involve a reduction in structure on the experiential side.

Unfortunately, it appears that this full training process may be confined to some environments in South Africa where the pertaining ritual knowledge is preserved

and upheld in the community. There is some debate on the internet about deficits in ritual knowledge and performance by some Sangomas, which indicate a serious development in some parts (Nakujubi; 2015). There are certain differences as to the structure of this process between different Bantu cultures in South Africa, but a similar degree of sophistication can be assumed throughout. The processes of “creolisation” through the merger of different ethnic traditions in urban settings as observed by Van Binsbergen (Van Binsbergen, 1998, p. 9) may contribute to the development of shallow and unstructured forms of training.

Sangoma practice can thus not be understood in the neo-shamanic sense of a means of deepened or wider “self-awareness and of exploration of arcane realms of the “self”, since any candidate is required to be gifted with paranormal faculties and a calling which manifests itself in special dreams or precognitions, in significant crises or through extraordinary events, including such of healing, which have occurred around the candidate. In short, the acceptance into training as a Sangoma is a decidedly elitist matter for the gifted and often burdened few. Self-exploration beyond the realm of ordinary self-reflection is an essential part of the training, ventures into arcane realms of forces, beings and factors which influence and determine the candidate (Mlisa, 2009, p. 136f.). Nevertheless it is not a voyage of self-exploration which is in principle accessible to everyone, as a psycho-analysis would be. Of course the standards of rigour may vary. However some degree of social and professional control can be assumed as a rule where the admission to training and its enactment are embedded in the appropriate traditional structures.

On the role of the internet for knowledge about Bantu mediumism and on its limitations: the significance of the “field”

The internet may serve as a medium to learn about Sangomas, about their world view and experiences. It is changing perceptions about Bantu mediumism in South Africa and in Europe, where it has found interest and acceptance. Sangoma practice – and this implies the structured process of developing a calling - however remains largely bound to an immediate encounter and to physical presence.

By comparison: most psychoanalysts will reject the idea of therapy by internet since the immediate closeness and the resulting “field” that arises between the client and the therapists are essential elements of the therapeutic process, even in view of the psychoanalytic restraint about any physical interaction, which includes the widespread seating of the therapist behind the client. Considering that Sangoma

practice involves material elements, not only of oracles but also of ritual gestures and of the ritual space in which counselling takes place.

The notion of a “field” may have an ontological quality, as created by the emotional and physical proximity, which creates a connection that extends beyond the exchange of information, binding those who participate in it in an intuitively perceptible way (Kleinknecht, 2011, p. 659). These findings indicate the limits that exist for the spread of Sangoma mediumism through the internet. This may also apply to the side of counselling, i.e. to those who seek advice and help from Sangomas through the internet. The following image of a traditional divination session may illustrate the point. The observations on the role of a “field” may be confirmed by the case study presented in the following chapter.

Image 1 – A Sangoma counselling session in the Mpumalanga province, northern South Africa



Photo: Harry Kleinhempel, 1960 [© U.Kleinhempel]

The photo above shows the traditional setting of Sangoma counselling. It is in a private homestead. The actual divination by help of the oracle system of symbolic objects cast on a mat, are not the only elements in this session. The three drummers show that the spirits are ritually invoked, with dancing in song in between sessions. They indicate the spiritual and religious aspect of Sangoma practice. The curative aspect is represented by the client, who sits by the side of the mat, who may have a

question which can likely be associated with something that needs “healing” in the wider sense: either medical or psychological or social, as mending relations, or to ward off evil, or to diagnose factors in a difficult situation of life. It would however be erroneous to reduce Sangoma practice to the aspect of “healing”: it may also be about issues of gain or of influence, even against the will of those concerned, thus about aspects of “magic” action. The oracle however is used for diagnosis of factors in a given situation. The beads and ritual dress as well as the symbolic colours indicate the social aspect of Sangoma practice as a profession regulated by society and culture, with accepted training, examination and graduation, which entitles to wear these attributes as socially recognised symbols of the profession. All three aspects involved in Sangoma practice are recognisable here: the spiritual-religious, the curative (psychologically, medically or socially) and the spiritistic / paranormal. Keeping these three dimensions in mind, it may be interesting to see, which of these are recognised in the European reception of Sangoma practice.

Cultural exchange and altered perceptions: a case of a white boy experiencing Sangoma calling (ukuthwasa) in a black environment in South Africa

Can cultural contact possibly have an ontological impact? The question arises if one looks at the case of a white boy, Todd Kyle, raised in an English immigrant family in rural northern South Africa in a predominantly black environment, who manifested all symptoms of a Bantu mediumistic calling and successfully trained to become a sangoma. His case has been reported by media both in South Africa (Selaluke, 2015) and in Germany (Denzel, 2016). S. Selaluke’s description contains the significant features of a Sangoma calling manifested by Todd Kyles:

It all started with bad dreams. That is how Kyle Todd (11) recalled how his calling to become a Sangoma (traditional healer) came about. He was only 9 years old then. Now, two years later, he is one of South Africa’s youngest Mlungu Sangomas (white traditional healers). He is fully qualified, having completed his training last year October. Speaking to *Rekord*, Todd said: ‘An old man would come into my dreams and teach me about the bones and medicines. At other times it was a young black Sangoma teaching me how to read the bones too.’ Todd Kyle identified the old man as his grandfather, Frank Marshall, whose name he adopted as professional name.

One day, he woke up and asked his parents to accompany him to the east of Pretoria. Driving without knowing where they were heading, they ended up in the township of Mamelodi [i.e. a suburb of 350 000 inhabitants]. Surprisingly, when

they got to Mamelodi, Kyle Todd started directing his parents to the house of the young sangoma who would later train him to become what he is today.

Speaking about the training, Todd said: 'I was not scared to do the training, as the old man told me in my dreams that everything will be fine and I gladly accepted the calling.'

Today, Todd is a proud young English sangoma and has helped more than 60 patients in Mamelodi. He is very good with healing children.

Todd was born in England, where his parents originated from. His parents lived in Watermeyerpark, Pretoria, until recently. They have since moved to Musina in Limpopo (Selaluke, 2015).

All of the features reported here are manifestations of characteristic Sangoma callings:

- 1.) the disquieting dreams, preparing for
- 2.) the appearance of ancestral spirits, such as Todd's grandfather as teacher of mediumship in dreams, to which
- 3.) a spirit from the side of the Sangoma teacher will appear, in this case the spirit of a still living instructor, followed
- 4.) by the revelation of where to find the as yet unknown Sangoma teacher in an wholly unfamiliar locality without any further information but that provided in the dreams,
- 5.) the acceptance of the calling. There is a degree of cultural convergence in this case. Bantu tradition insists that the mediumship is a gift – and demand – bequeathed by personal ancestors who had mediumistic abilities. This is the case in Todd Kyle's family. His (great-)grandfather, who appeared to him in dreams, was indeed a spiritual healer in England.

The sequence reveals the distinctive pattern of a Bantu shamanistic calling. The family's history of mediumistic endowment, which had manifested itself generations earlier in England, before the family emigrated to South Africa appears to have predisposed the son, Todd, for the "reception" of the Bantu form of expression of mediumistic calling.

A report in the British newspaper the Daily Mail, reports in some detail about Todd's predictions of significant events. The report then goes on to discuss the occurrence of white sangomas:

Small numbers of whites have in recent years joined the ranks of South Africa's 69,000 registered sangomas but rarely -- if ever -- are they this young. Phephisile Maseko, coordinator of the national Traditional Healers Organisation, believes he is the youngest practitioner of his craft from the white minority. Sangomas occupy a respected position in South African society, particularly among blacks, who view

them with a mix of reverence and fear. Not only do they treat physical and psychological conditions but they also act as mediums (Safodien, 2017).

The latter remark is important too, since the prevailing perception of Sangoma practice as some kind of “intuitive healing” is complemented by the identification of Sangoma practice as mediumism.

A report on German National Television, ARD, adds more significant details: The occurrence of verified white Sangomas is appreciated as a sign that Bantu African culture is significant and “makes sense”. It is reported that Todd Kyle – as a youngster – dreams experiences of his clients from their perspective as adults. As to his background his family are devout Christians. However they have been open to Bantu mediumship, since Todd’s father was cured from an intractable pain in the body, when the wife of his pastor brought him to a Sangoma who helped him successfully. He later identified the dreams of Todd as significant in terms of Bantu mediumship (Denzel, 2016).

Todd had no direct instruction about the complexities of the condition of *Inthwasa*, which could have shaped his development. His dreams and specific paranormal experiences cannot be understood as “cultural constructs”, even though their interpretation is guided by them. The notion of “cultural constructs” does not explain the occurrence of this sequence of phenomena, but the significance attached to them. This is relevant in a second step. Thus Todd’s father reported that he had similar dreams as his son, as a child, but no special significance was attached to them. Presumably his mediumistic gift had thus withered or remained dormant. The element of “culturally constructed meaning” sets in at this point, where consequences for action could arise, what to make of the phenomena. In a context of African culture Todd’s father might have developed to become a diviner as well. (In the perspective of Bantu mediumship the pain which Todd’s father experienced in various places might be related to this dormant gift which received resolution through his son).

The report by T. Denzel also mentions the phenomenon of “incorporation trance”, which is a key feature of the ritual of Afro-Brazilian religions like Candomblé and Umbanda, as well as in other Afro-American religions, that a mentor spirit becomes manifest in characteristic movements through trance mediums. In Umbanda these are regarded as spirits of deceased persons of different types – corresponding to “classes” of ancestors in Bantu cosmology – sometimes still known by name. Denzel reports that Todd “incorporates” his great-grandfather with

the specific features of his slightly impaired gait during trance (Denzel, 2016). This is a culturally conditioned phenomenon, which yet occurs spontaneously.

Conclusions about the role of the cultural “field” and environment in the spontaneous manifestation of mediumistic calling

The reception of Bantu mediumship and the regular reports about it in contemporary media certainly occur in the context of a revision of the “disenchantment of the world”, as diagnosed by Max Weber (“Die Entzauberung der Welt”) in 1922 (Asprem, 2004, pp. 434ff.). This is evident in the fascination of B. Laubscher by Sangoma cosmology and experience. The empirical evidence of transcendent experience provided by Sangoma mediumship is received on the basis of different “Western” world views, as shown with regard to V. Bührmann and L.R.N. Mlisa. In its empirical concreteness and cultural formation it appeals to different audiences. To the degree that the phenomena of Bantu mediumism are taken seriously and are broadcast to wider audiences they indicate that a wider concept of reality finds public acceptance, also in European societies. These reports appear to have a catalytic effect, by providing credibility to world views as proposed by the scientific and spiritual Spiritism of the late 19th century and early 20th century. They appear to reflect a widespread conviction that reality may not be wholly “disenchanted”, but that some reconciliation between rational empiricism and a sense of the transcendent is indeed possible. This is certainly the cultural environment to which R. Sheldrake addressed those of his books in which he presents his research on morphogenetic (informational) fields to a wider public. The search for an extension of the scientific understanding of reality, in order to accommodate “transcendent” phenomena is a major theme of contemporary culture and fits its mood (Asprem, 2017, p. 39f.). On this background, it is perfectly justified to apply his theory of morphogenetic fields to well-documented phenomena of Bantu mediumism among whites, as a hermeneutic approach. Its legitimacy rests on the widespread public acceptance of the theory and of the phenomena reported, such as the shamanic calling of Todd Kyles and its culture-specific Bantu forms of manifestation. One may approach these phenomena in the perspective of cultural hermeneutics, as suggested here, adopting R. Sheldrake’s theory as a hermeneutic instrument for the explication of an otherwise enigmatic phenomenon. By doing so it is introduced into the discourse of culture, which as perceptibly the aim of major news channels, like BBC or ARD too, who are bound to a degree of acceptance as “reasonable” in European public opinion.

A close look at the case of Todd Kyles has revealed that living in a black African environment may indeed have had an effect on the type and sequence of prescient dreams as they appeared to Todd Kyles. Vestiges of a culturally invariant pattern appear in the report of his father about his own childhood dreams. In this respect the factor of cultural (attributed) meaning has had an enhancing effect in the development of the son, whereas the cultural rejection in a largely positivistic, rationalistic or protestant Christian environment in Britain had a dampening effect which led to the withering and subsiding of the symptoms of mediumship in the father, although the family history shows that under certain conditions this gift could even manifest itself in Britain as with the (great-) grandfather, whose mediumship is remembered by the family. His reappearance in the dreams of his descendants as spiritual mentor instructing Todd in the art of mediumship however is a peculiarly Bantu Africa feature which has to be accounted for.

It appears that the effect of the cultural environment does not only pertain to the interpretation of phenomena and to the attitudes which lead to a fostering of their development or to their suppression, but that they structure the manifestations even without the affected persons having any knowledge of them. This agrees with notions about informational “morphogenetic fields” as proposed by Rupert Sheldrake, and in particular with the phenomenon of “morphic resonance” which could be applied to the explanation of structures of Bantu Ukuthwasa phenomena occurring in whites who have immigrated to black South African environments without having special knowledge about these beliefs, sufficient to explain adoption by learning an cultural transfer, as exemplified by the Kyle family. Their predisposition of a mediumistic heritage was, according to this model, sufficient to create an effect of “morphic resonance” which led to the clear structured pattern of Ukuthwasa phenomena in which his mediumistic calling manifested itself in him as a boy from nine years of age onwards. This phenomenon is described by Sheldrake as follows:

...living organisms inherit not only genes but also morphic fields. The genes are passed on materially from their ancestors ... ; the morphic fields are inherited non-materially, by morphic resonance, not just from direct ancestors but also from other members of the species. The developing organism tunes in to the morphic fields of its own species and thus draws upon a pooled or collective memory (Sheldrake, 1991, pp. 110ff.).

This may explain the surprising effect that mere living in a black environment, coupled with specific familial conditions for receptiveness to Bantu mediumship in

the family made them “tune in” to this cultural heritage of their environment, bringing forth the spontaneous effects in the dreams and paranormal experiences of their son, which manifest the Bantu pattern so closely.

Given that this effect of “morphic resonance” does not require physical proximity, it is quite possible that it may also take effect over a distance, among European audiences quite separated from Bantu African cultural and social environments. This implies that experiential realms become accessible which have hitherto been culturally inaccessible to those who cannot be present physically in the well-limited and guarded ritual contexts. The internet thus assumes a “theurgic” power - to frame this function in a concept of spiritual tradition – by evoking spontaneous resonance in those viewers who may have latent mediumistic gifts in them.

This includes the possibility that the regular objective and fairly detailed reports about Bantu mediumism in European media may create effects of “resonance” not only on a conscious level of giving new credibility to suppressed or largely forgotten European mediumistic practices and convictions, bringing to memory also the cosmologies and perceptions of reality belonging to them, but that they may also create effects of “resonance” on an immediate experiential level of phenomena, of mediumistic dreams and experiences of “calling”. This appears to result in altered perceptions and attitudes among the audiences and readers abroad. The unbiased confrontation with the culturally conditioned mediumistic realities and phenomena of Bantu culture as mediated by whites who allow the public in Europe to identify with opens a door towards for the re-evaluation of such phenomena and may alter attitudes to their cosmological assumptions about reality. It may be interesting to see, if the forms of Bantu shamanic calling will subsequently also manifest themselves abroad or whether they remain bound to closer physical contact and common environment.

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