



## Dreams and Medicines: The Perspective of Xhosa Diviners and Novices in the Eastern Cape, South Africa

by Manton Hirst

### Abstract

*Based on anthropological fieldwork conducted in the Eastern Cape, the paper explores the interconnections between dreams (amathongo, amaphupha) and medicines (amayeza, imithi, amachiza) as aspects of the Xhosa diviner's culture, knowledge and experience. Background information is provided in the introduction, inter alia, on the Xhosa patrilineal clan (isiduko), divination (imvumisa, evumiso) and religious and cultural change. The ability to dream, inter alia of the ancestors and medicines, is central to the diviner's intuition and professional stock-in-trade, which are part and parcel of a religious healing tradition. Examples of dreams involving the ancestors (iminyanya), diviners, clients and medicinal plants are presented and analysed in relation to relevant case material. The ritual significance of dreams is explored in some detail. The distinctions between diviner (igqirha lokuvumisa) and herbalist (ixhwele), and between medicines and charms (amakhubalo), receive attention in the section on medicines. The underlying purpose of traditional Xhosa religious ideology is discussed in the conclusion.*

### Introduction

Closely linked to the ancestors and integrated into Nguni, i.e., Zulu and Xhosa, traditional healing practices, dreams and medicines are significant aspects of the fully-fledged diviner's intuition and professional stock-in-trade. The Zulu diviner (*isangoma*, pl. *izangoma*) reputedly develops 'a soft head' and becomes 'a house of dreams' (Callaway, 1970, p. 260). Apparently, the ancestors command the aspirant Zulu diviner at night, ostensibly in dreams, to pick and use, inter alia, 'cleansing' medicinal roots called ubulawu (Callaway, 1970, p. 272). Similarly, Xhosa diviners and novices report a remarkable sensitivity to dreams (*amaphupha*, *amathongo*). It is by no means unusual for a diviner, after dreaming about a medicinal plant (*iyeza*) in the bush, to go and collect it in the place in which it was seen in the dream and to use it to treat (*ukunyanga*) a client or novice. Nor is it unusual for a diviner to dream about people with various afflictions coming for divination (*imvumisa*, *evumiso*) and treatment. Xhosa novice

diviners or initiates (*abakhwetha*) also ingest ubulawu to enhance dreaming (*ukuphupha*, to dream) (cf. Hirst, 2000, pp. 128ff.). Novices are predisposed to dream, inter alia, of the ancestors (*iminyanya*), the various afflictions linked to their calling as diviners, traditional rituals (*amasiko*) and medicinal plants. The ancestors are known to change their form in dreams (see below). Sometimes they first appear as wild beasts (*izilo*) and later as parents and/or grandparents demanding, by their presence and through their revelation and/or remonstrance, the performance of neglected traditional rituals. The significance of a dream invariably turns on the question of its meaning which, although initially unclear to or partially hidden from the dreamer, is considered to emerge gradually, like the person called to become a diviner. Diviners consider such dreams to have ritual and medicinal significance in healing (see below).

With particular emphasis on the perspective of Xhosa diviners and novices, the present article concerns dreams, medicines and the interconnections between

them in representation and practice. The approach is frankly ethnographical. Nevertheless, an attempt is made in the discussion to deal with some of the psychological perplexities raised in the article, in particular the psychic sensitivity of the diviner. Dreams and medicines are undoubtedly comparable aspects of Nguni and Bantu culture in general. However, the material presented here deals mainly with Xhosa diviners and novices. In the conclusion, the underlying significance of Xhosa traditional religious ideology is explored in more detail. However, by way of introduction, before embarking on the stated theme of the paper, it might be useful to provide some background for readers unfamiliar with Xhosa diviners (*amagqirha okuvumisa*, sing. *igqirha lokuvumisa*) and culture.

## I

The set or cluster of agnatically related homestead heads living in a particular area has singular significance in Cape Nguni social life (Hammond-Tooke, 1985, pp. 49ff.). Such men, typically descended from a common grandfather or great-grandfather, are very conscious of the group to which they belong. They refer to it as the *imilowa*, a term used in the plural indicating that the members are being thought of rather than the group as such. The size of the agnatic cluster varies from two or three to about twenty homestead heads. Such a small, localized group exhibits all the integration and functions that hitherto have been attributed to the Cape Nguni 'lineage'. The important functions of such minimal descent groups are limited to the settlement of disputes between the members of the group and to constitute the condition of the congregation of the ancestor religion. Members of the cluster do not hold land or stock in common. That is the function of homesteads, which tend to be self-sufficient economic entities with inheritance rules operating only within the immediate family. Even in the case of wider co-operation between homesteads, descent seems to be less important than propinquity and assistance is often drawn from the ranks of neighbourly non-kin. Nevertheless, the members of the agnatic cluster are expected in general to assist one another. In addition, they acknowledge the authority of the genealogically senior male member of the cluster in matters of social control and ritual. Such a man, called *intloko* or "head", presides over an informal court composed of the adult male members of the cluster, which arbitrates in disputes between the group's members and discusses proposed marriages of its sons and daughters. Although the *intloko* has no real authority to enforce his will, he has considerable influence through his power to pronounce a curse backed by the full authority of the

ancestors, whose main concern is that the status of the genealogical hierarchy be maintained. Among the Cape Nguni, the two basic principles of social organization that find expression in the clan are the respect for genealogical seniority and the exogamy rules forbidding marriage or sexual intercourse between agnatic kin, with the latter prohibition being the diacritical feature distinguishing Nguni from all Southern Bantu. Widely dispersed territorially, clans are also not social groups. Clan members never come together for any purpose and there are no clan rituals. Yet the possession of a clan name, which is called *isiduko* among the Xhosa, is crucial for the person. It is inherited patrilineally, is unchangeable and effectively excludes a number of potential mates, namely people belonging to the clans of all four grandparents, from possible marriage or sexual relationships.

What people are aware of in practice is the presence in their general locality of a number of people who bear the same clan name as they do. In the absence of written records in an oral culture the actual relationship between people sharing the same clan name is unknown, all that is known being the fact of agnatic relationship. However, also present in the social environment are a number of clansmen who can trace their relationship to one another through the six-generation genealogy, which usually points unequivocally to one of their number as the senior clan kinsman or *inkulu*. He has the important responsibility of presiding over all rituals involving the homesteads, the names of whose heads appear on the common genealogy, ideally no matter where they may be living. If someone resident in the homestead of such a member becomes ill, and the cause is diagnosed by the diviner as ancestral wrath, it is the *inkulu* who must be present and who ritually constitutes the congregation of the local agnatic group, sometimes having to travel some distance to fulfil his obligations. Yet it is only the agnatic cluster that can be said to be the worshipping group in Cape Nguni ancestor religion, despite the fact that a number of them are linked together by their possession of a ritual elder in common.

Certainly, from my own field observations in the peri-urban context of the townships of Grahamstown and King William's Town, the importance of the clan is attested to by the fact that, in practice, a senior clansman of the locality, to whom actual genealogical connection is unknown beyond the fact that he shares the same clan name, can serve as proxy to the *inkulu* in the performance of ritual(s) addressed to the ancestors. The important point here is that, among the Xhosa, the performance of traditional rituals falls under the auspices of the local agnatic group and

therefore the authority and control of the inkulu, rather than that of the diviner. In the case of ritual slaughter, the diviner, whether male or female, generally acts as guide or adviser to the inkulu or his proxy. Rarely is a diviner, albeit a male, requested to assist with the slaughtering or to perform it himself. Similarly, in the case of a person being inducted as a diviner, the rituals fall under the auspices and control of the local agnatic group of which the candidate is a member, rather than the initiating diviner, even though the latter plays a leading role in these events. Only in the *intlwayelelo* does the diviner actually make the offerings, on behalf of the candidate or novice, to the River People or their alternates (see below). Xhosa diviners and herbalists still consider clan membership to have social and religious significance. They refer to each other, as their clients sometimes even refer to them, by their clan-names. Like the Zulu, the Mfengu do not have clans. Among the Mfengu, in the absence of the clan-name the praise name (*isikahlelo*) substitutes, which is similarly used in referring to a healer (cf. Hirst, 1997, pp. 218-219).

## II

The ancestors are typically deceased senior males of the agnatic group or clan, the descendants of a common great-grandfather (Hammond-Tooke, 1975, pp. 17-19 & 1980, pp. 324-333; Mayer & Mayer, 1974, p. 151; Wilson, 1982, p. 27). Notably men of weight and influence, the ancestors were leaders of followings - clan founders, clan leaders and kings of the distant past with many descendants - occupying nodal positions in the kinship structure. Nevertheless, as Hunter (1936, p. 123) noted for the Mpondo, all deceased old people (*abantu abadala*) reputedly become ancestors, women no less than men and lineal ascendants (e.g. Father, Father's Father, Mother's Father, Mother's Father's Father, etc) no less than significant collaterals (e.g. Father's Sister, Mother's Brother, Mother's Sister, etc), whose status reflects, to a considerable degree, their status in life. The ancestors stand for family relationships that are legally constituted and, in short, the structure of authority. As the ultimate social sanction and legitimation, the ancestors are clearly beyond question.

The ancestors reputedly influence the lives of their descendants and communicate with them in dreams and omens (*imihlola*). According to Xhosa oral tradition, the ancestors are conceived as disembodied ghosts (*imishologu*) in the form of wind or 'spirit' (*ngumoya*). The nature of the ancestors is well known. They reputedly brood in the eaves and round the threshold and hearth of the homestead (*umzi*).

They are also said to gather round the gatepost, where the deceased homestead head was formerly buried, and more especially the tethering-post (*ixhanti*) of the cattle-fold (*ubuhlanti*), where cattle and white goats without blemish are slaughtered and libations of European brandy (*ibhulanti*) and fermented sorghum beer (*utywala*) made to invoke and commemorate them. To invoke the ancestors and confess one's faults in a loud voice before the tethering-post is the first step to obtaining redress for any infraction of tradition. It is important to note that the ancestors are closely associated with breath (*umphefumlo*), wind (*umoya*), power (*amandla*), fearsomeness (*isithinzi*) and luck (*ithamsanqa*), and they are referred to obliquely in terms of respect (*intlonipho*). *Intlwayelelo* (from the verb *ukuhlwayela*, to sow seeds by broadcasting) is the name of a propitiatory ritual associated with the induction of Xhosa diviners. However, it is also performed 'to make the homestead right' (*ukulungisa umzi*) in cases of illness (*isifo*, *ukugula*) or misfortune (*ilishwa*) affecting a person or a family, where the ancestors have been neglected by the failure to perform the appropriate life-cycle rituals (Hirst, 1990, pp. 136ff.; 1997, p. 237). *Intlwayelelo* can be performed at the river (*emlanjeni*) or sea (*elwandle*), in the forest (*ehlathini*) or grassland (*ethafeni*). Accordingly, as the case may be, the various offerings (see below) are addressed to the River People (*Abantu Bomlambo*), the Sea People (*Abantu Baselwandle*), the Forest People (*Abantu Basehlathini*) or the Grassland People (*Abantu Basethafeni*), all euphemisms of respect (*intlonipho*) for the ancestors. Significantly, Xhosa healers maintain that no amount of medicine, whatever its composition, is likely to be efficacious in treating a client or novice who has neglected ritual performance. It is not simply the case that the ancestors increase the power of medicines, knowledge of which was obtained from them through cultural transmission. Although healers and particularly herbalists are reputedly skilled in the use of medicines, family traditions are also linked to the use of medicines (cf. Hammond-Tooke, 1980, p. 342). When neglected, the ancestors reputedly turn their backs on, and withdraw their protection (*ukukhusela*) from, their descendants, exposing them to the deleterious effects of witchcraft and sorcery (Hirst, 1997, p. 220). Neglected ancestors thus increase the power of one's rivals' or enemies' medicines. Once the ancestors have been supplicated and appeased (*ukungxengxezela*, and *ukuqamagusha*), however, their protection ensures the efficacy of the healer's medicines.

Apparently, as a result of jealousy or envy (*umona*), an anti-social person can bewitch (*ukuthakatha*) or poison (*ukudliswa*) people and livestock. Among the

Xhosa, the distinction between witchcraft and sorcery, both of which are referred to by the term *ukuthakatha*, is blurred in thought and practice. Witchcraft is an innate psychic power to cause illness or misfortune, whereas sorcery is the use of various substances derived from plants, animals and humans as poison to harm. A female witch (*igqwirha*, pl. *amagqwirha*) reputedly inherits a dreaded familiar, such as the lightning bird (*impundulu*), from her mother (cf. Hirst, 1990, pp. 237-248). Like the Eastern European vampire, *impundulu* apparently feeds off the flesh and blood of its victims (Hirst, 1990, pp. 243-245). However, a male sorcerer (*umthakathi*, pl. *abathakathi*) also apparently makes *impundulu* using charms (*amakhubalo*) and magic (*imililo*). Where a person is afflicted by *impundulu* there is appropriate protective treatment, which is called *ukuqaphula* or *ukukhupha iintlanga*, involving scarification, cupping, bloodletting and the rubbing of protective medicines into incisions made in the skin (cf. Hirst, 1990, p. 161).

Traditional rituals involve paying respect to the ancestors, which are routinely invoked to be present on certain ritual occasions and mystically partake of the sacraments, the cooked meat and/or fermented sorghum beer, with their living descendants. Nowadays, cattle-folds are no longer commonplace in the townships and, even in the rural areas, the dead are buried in the local cemetery. Nevertheless, in the townships and even in the suburbs of large South African cities, people use makeshift cattle-folds for slaughtering cattle and goats on ritual occasions. Generally, Xhosa consider the gatepost or tethering-post of the cattle-fold to be situated more or less where it would be if it were actually there in the makeshift ritual space of the backyard. The foregoing shift in the bovine complex among the Xhosa, from practical reality to the reality of practice, is the result of a complex historical process involving, inter alia, military conquest, political resistance to colonial domination and apartheid, social, economic and, more recently, political change, as well as the spread of Christianity and education.

Most healers are nominal, if not practising, Christians. From the healers' perspective, Christianity and traditional religion are considered to be related systems of thought and practice. The terms of one system are translatable into the terms of the other and the ensuing transpositions used in a mutually reinforcing way. For example, on a Sunday morning in July 1976, we were walking back from the river, where at dawn the diviner, Nja'Bomvu ('Red Dog'), had performed *intlwayelelo*. Gesticulating, the diviner declared in an authoritative tone to the male and female members of the procession accompanying

him: "Today, we have spoken to God (*uThixo*)." As I was walking beside the diviner, I reminded him in an undertone that, at the river, he had explicitly addressed the offerings to the ancestors. "That is what I mean," he said emphatically. Evidently, there are also connections between Satan (*uSathane*) and the so-called witch or sorcerer of Xhosa tradition.

Before the arrival of European Christian missionaries, prior to and during the nineteenth century, the Xhosa apparently already believed in a Supreme Being, *uQamatha*, a *deus otiosus* that reputedly created the world and then withdrew. The ancestors are said to intercede with *uQamatha* on behalf of their descendants. As a result of missionary influence, *uQamatha* came to be supplanted in ordinary Xhosa speech by the Christian God, *uThixo*, a term of Khoekhoe origin that the early Khoi missionary interpreters used in evangelical work among the Xhosa. The missionaries adopted the Xhosa term *umoya* (wind) as the translation of the Holy Spirit in the Bible, and the term has been used in Xhosa translations of the Bible ever since. In adopting the Christian concept of God, diviners have by no means supplanted the position of the ancestors as *umoya*, but merely endorsed it (Hirst, 1990, p. 170). For diviners maintain that God (*uThixo*) created the ancestors, earth, wind, water and so on. The wind brings the rain, filling pools and rivers and nourishing plants, animals and people. In other words, by virtue of the act of creation as described in the Book of Genesis, God legitimates the mediatory role of the ancestors in human affairs. The missionaries also influenced, albeit indirectly, the method of slaughtering cattle in traditional rituals. During the late nineteenth century, the earlier method of slaughtering, which involved making a lesion in the abdomen of the beast and severing the aorta by hand, was abandoned in favour of severing the spinal cord just below the head with a spear (*umkhonto*). In both instances, the beast was made to bellow before it was slaughtered by jabbing it in the abdomen with the spear point, but without piercing it or drawing blood. In the case of a goat, its throat is slit and its spinal column severed in one deft stroke of the blade, which is sharpened beforehand. Sociocultural change is clearly not a linear, unidirectional process in which non-dualistic, holistic and traditional representations are progressively supplanted by Christianity and a mind-body dualism consonant with Western biomedicine and consumer culture. On the contrary, the evidence suggests that sociocultural change is a complex dialectical process in which old and new are integrated, synthesized and increasingly supplement each other.

### III

The Xhosa intransitive verb *ukuthwasa* refers to a process of gradual emergence, as of the phases of the moon, which has both ritual and psychic significance in the context of becoming a diviner. The novice emerges gradually through various ritual stages, ranging from the initial calling to the final induction as a fully-fledged diviner, all of which are closely linked to the ancestors. In addition to distinctive ornaments made, for example, from white beads, the fully-fledged diviner is entitled to wear a distinctive hat (*isidlokolo*) and girdle (*umthika*) made from the skins of small wild animals (*izilwanyana*) such as baboon (*imfene*), springbok (*ibhadi*), red duiker (*impunzi*), bushbuck (*imbabala*), black-backed jackal (*impungutye*) and slender grey mongoose (*unomatse*), and worn with the furry side facing outwards. The diviner also carries a spear (*umkhonto*), a stick called *umnqayi*, which is blackened in the fire at the conclusion of circumcision (*ukwaluka*) or female fertility rites (*intonjane*) and used in stick-fighting and dancing, and a hippo hide switch (*imvubu*). Diviners wear their regalia when dancing (*ukuxhentsa*). *Umxhentso* is a distinctive dance performed by a small group of diviners on ritual occasions when one of them is treating a novice or client. In the dance, which involves a stamping gait and contortions of the body, the dancers move round anti-clockwise in a circle to the singing and handclapping (*umyeyezelo*) of the audience. Sometimes a novice also beats a drum to enhance the hypnotic percussive effects of the handclapping. During the dancing, diviners and novices are sometimes spontaneously inspired to perform a ritual divination called *umhlahlo*, and the dancing ceases temporarily while it takes place. In former times, diviners and their novices also apparently performed *umxhentso* prior to performing divination. The ecstatic dancing induces a mild altered state of consciousness in both the dancers and the members of the audience (cf. Hirst et al., 1996, pp. 268-269). Time dilates and attention becomes focussed on a phantasmagoria of sensory stimuli involving, inter alia, colour and form (Hirst, 1990, pp. 81ff.). The concept of gradual emergence is linked, *pari passu*, to the gradual emergence of various healing talents (*ubugqirha*) in the candidate diviner. The foregoing would include, in addition to having the requisite practical knowledge and experience to make effective use of traditional rituals and medicines in treatment, the intuitive ability to divine (*ukuvumisa*) the causes of illness or misfortune in people and livestock. *Ukuthwasa* is associated with a trouble (*inkathazo*) or affliction, with what the Xhosa generally term illness or misfortune. Most diviners and novices narrate a litany of afflictions, which often start in childhood

and extend into adolescence and early adulthood (cf. Hirst, 1990, pp. 111-136; 1997, pp. 220-221). Somatization is the process whereby psychosocial and interpersonal problems are expressed in terms of somatic symptoms (cf. Kirmayer, 1984 & 1989, p. 329; Kleinman, 1980; Kleinman & Kleinman, 1985; see also Hirst et al., 1996, pp. 280-282 for more references). It is widespread among the Xhosa, particularly aspirant diviners (cf. Hirst et al., 1996, pp. 266ff.). Xhosa diviners have an established nosology of disorders, which are linked causally to witchcraft, the ancestors or both. The state or condition of the person undergoing *ukuthwasa*, which is sometimes described as 'mad' (*ukuphambana*) or 'crazy' (*ukugeza*), is referred to by the noun *intwaso*.

The special aptitude or skill of the Xhosa diviner lies not simply in the ability to see or dream, but to grasp and articulate the significance underlying or hidden by appearances, whether of the ancestors in dreams or people in divination. The diviner's proclivity to unmask and disclose is institutionalized: it is a long established form of conduct. Further, the various associations and interconnections linking the diviner, inter alia, to the ancestors, dreams, divination, medicines and traditional rituals are part and parcel of the representations and practices, the woof and the warp, of a religious healing tradition.

Divination usually involves a small group of people, numbering anywhere from 2 to 12 or more (Hirst, 1993, p. 106). They typically sit on the floor in a half-circle round the diviner, who sometimes sits on a small, low wooden stool (cf. Hirst, 1997, pp. 227-228). A member of the group consulting the diviner - not necessarily the client, that is, the person with the affliction, who, for various reasons, might not be present - usually places the stipulated fee in cash, the amount varying depending on the practitioner's skill and reputation, at the diviner's feet (cf. Hirst, 1993, p. 106). At the end of the consultation the diviner invariably asks the people whether they are satisfied with the divination. If so, the diviner pockets the cash. If the people consulting the diviner are dissatisfied with the divination, however, they are entitled to take their money and consult another diviner. Medicinal treatment and ritual assistance are usually paid for separately, and the costs are not necessarily inconsiderable.

In the divination the diviner proceeds to tease out the reasons underlying the consultation by making well calculated statements descriptive of the afflicted person and the nature of the affliction (cf. Hirst, 2000, pp. 126-128). The diviner is not in trance or an altered state. Although open to any sudden feeling or intuition, which is usually expressed immediately, the

diviner also keeps a beady eye on the participants, particularly when they are clapping and are inattentive to being observed (cf. Hirst, 1993, p. 102). For example, the diviner said in reference to his male client previously identified in the opening stages of the divination, “I do not feel well here about the stomach (*Andiphilanga ngase siswini apha*)” (Hirst, 1990, pp. 322 & 351, line 29ff.; also Hirst, 1993, pp. 107-108). The diviner carefully elaborates the statement and starts to unravel the problem of his client who, prior to the consultation, was actually being treated for duodenal ulcer in an East London hospital (Hirst, 1993, p. 105). In Xhosa oral tradition a man who complains of stomach ache, particularly after partaking of meat and fermented sorghum beer with his friends, is a shorthand description of someone who attends the traditional rituals of others consuming the viands, but never reciprocating by holding any rituals himself. So it comes as no surprise that the diviner uncovers a list of neglected traditional rituals on the part of his client, ranging from the birth ritual (*imbeleko*), which was neglected in his case, to the mortuary rituals following the burial of the male household head, namely *umkhapho* and *umbuyiso* (see below), which were neglected in the case of his deceased father. Nevertheless, the problems of clients vary a great deal, ranging from a host of minor ailments (cf. Hirst, 1990, pp. 74-76) or a swarm of bees entering a dwelling to witchcraft or lost or stolen property or livestock, and do not necessarily always centre on human afflictions linked to neglected ancestor rituals (cf. Hirst et al., 1996, pp. 268ff. for a few relevant cases). A successful divination is one in which the diviner de-negates the resistances and inhibitions of the participants who, as in the previously mentioned example, find themselves spontaneously agreeing with the diviner at the end of the divination, each contributing his or her part of the story (cf. Hirst, 1993, pp. 110-111). At any rate, according to the procedural rules of divination, the participants, as a group, must agree or disagree to each statement the diviner makes (cf. Hammond-Tooke, 1980, pp. 356-357). They state their agreement by chanting in unison, “Agree, we agree (*Vuma, siyavuma*)”. Alternatively, in reference to a significant point made by the diviner, one of the consultees simply says, “Phosangasemva,” translated literally as “Throw it behind you,” that is, in other words, ‘we agree’. When disagreeing with the diviner’s statement, the participants usually say, “I do not hear (*Andieva*)”. So, right from the start, the diviner who makes an incorrect statement in all probability will be corrected by the disagreement of the participants, who are usually impressed when the diviner accurately describes the problem with minimal prompting on their part. Even when questioning the diviner in the divination, which is

permitted, the participants do so in guarded terms and are careful not to disclose any information concerning the case to the diviner. After establishing the identity of the afflicted person and the nature of the affliction, the diviner finally offers a resolution to the problem invariably involving medicinal treatment and/or the performance of traditional ritual(s). Significantly, at the end of the aforementioned divination, the diviner prescribed for the use of his client a particular type of *ubulawu* called *ubuka*, notably a forest liana that is never ingested but used only for washing the body. The technical Xhosa term for the diviner, that is, *igqirha lokuvumisa*, literally refers to a traditional ‘doctor’, that is, *igqirha*, who, before proceeding to treat the client, first establishes consensus among the participants, i.e., family and/or friends, in the consultation as to the identity of the afflicted person and the nature of the affliction. The epithet ‘traditional’ is appropriate here not simply because a distinctly African body of knowledge and practice is being referred to, but because it is transmitted from practitioner to novice by word-of-mouth. Interestingly enough, an old Xhosa term for an expert diviner is *isanuse* (from the intransitive verb *ukunuka*, to smell), a term recalling the diviner’s reputed ability “to smell out” the troubling affliction or witch in divination. It is not unusual for relatives and friends to hide objects in and round the homestead for the novice diviner to find and reveal. To be able to do so enhances the emerging diviner’s social prestige, charisma and power.

#### IV

Among Nguni diviners, females outnumber males in a ratio of about 3 or 2 to 1 (for the Mpondo, see Hunter, 1936, p. 320; Hirst, 1990, p. 26 for the Xhosa; Hammond-Tooke, 1975 for the Mpondomise and Hammond-Tooke, 2002, p. 283 for the Zulu). The preponderance of females is explained in terms of the peripherality of women in male-dominated social groups (Lewis, 1971). Of all Southern Bantu women, Nguni women are the most peripheral (Hammond-Tooke, op cit). Nguni social life is strongly male-dominated with rigid, chauvinistic boundaries governing behaviour between men and women (Hammond-Tooke, 2002, pp. 283, 285). Lewis’s thesis does not altogether explain why a small number of men become diviners. Accepting the socio-economic marginality of Nguni women, the question is whether Lewis’s thesis can simply be generalized to include the, albeit few, male healers. Ironically, the generalization of his thesis to include males has the effect of weakening his essentially feminist position. At the same time, it also implies that Xhosa male diviners are, by definition, effeminate or homosexual, a view hardly supported by strong empirical evidence.

Aspirant Xhosa diviners are undoubtedly marginal or peripheral persons in socio-economic terms. The gradual passage of the candidate through intermediate ritual stages to eventually attain the status of healer undoubtedly has socio-economic implications, more especially in the immediate short-term for the candidate's family who are expected to pay or, at least, assist in paying, the initiating diviner's fee, usually involving a large amount of cash and including a beast. Nowadays, where for various practical reasons the candidate does not have the requisite economic support of the family to pay the practitioner's fee, it is not unusual for the candidate to work for the initiating diviner for a few years, reimbursing him or her with the proceeds earned from divination and treatment. On the basis of evidence presented in my unpublished thesis, becoming a diviner is not only an entrepreneurial means of earning a living, but also a means of resolving interpersonal problems in the family. However, the point is that, without the necessary intuitive talent and the requisite knowledge of, *inter alia*, traditional rituals and medicines, it is unlikely that the person will be economically successful as a diviner, more especially because the healer's reputation is transmitted by word-of-mouth (cf. Hirst, 1990, p. 74). As mentioned previously in connection with divination, a fully-fledged diviner is manipulating much more than a past, albeit mystically caused, affliction to solicit money from clients to improve her or his material circumstances. In addition to the knowledge diviners acquire, for example, about rituals and medicines during apprenticeship to a practising diviner, they also manipulate their own psychic sensitivity or intuition, which, according to oral tradition and their own statements, is certainly one of their distinguishing marks (cf. Callaway, *op cit*; Hammond-Tooke, 2002, p. 278). It can be argued along lines similar to Hammond-Tooke that Nguni diviners are subject to the life transforming *ukuthwasa* affliction, as a result of which they emerge as duly recognised and empowered psychic sensitives with powers of intuition that are routinely and recursively employed in divination and healing. However, the material presented below clearly suggests that the aspirant diviner is recognised to possess an unusual degree of psychic sensitivity right from childhood, long before *ukuthwasa* occurs as a life-transforming event. Further, there is evidence to suggest that the afflicted novice is simply becoming aware of and learning to manage and cope with her or his underlying psychic sensitivity through the initiation process entailed in being inducted as a diviner, but this is another story. With the focus on the importance of intuition in traditional Xhosa healing practices, particularly as regards dreams and medicines, evidence in support of the case that the

diviner is a psychic sensitive is presented below.

### Aims and Methods

The aims of this paper are twofold. Firstly, to present and analyse hitherto unpublished material on the dreams of Xhosa diviners and novices. Secondly, to discuss dreams in relation to a particular category of medicinal roots called *ubulawu*, which are used to enhance dreaming. Hence, the sections of the paper are respectively devoted to dreams and medicines.

In December 1974 N S Tyota, a leading Mfengu diviner in the townships of Grahamstown, presented me with a gift, what later proved to be the start of his biographical account of becoming a diviner (cf. Hirst, 1997, pp. 218ff.). It consisted of a few handwritten pages in a brand new hardcover exercise book that he had dictated to his young school-going daughter who had written it down in English in neat cursive script. Through my association with Tyota, and more especially once I was established as his initiate with an appropriate Xhosa name (cf. Hirst, 2000, pp. 123ff.), I was introduced to diviners, novices and herbalists who frequented his home for professional or social purposes. The healers were as intrigued to meet me as I was to meet them. Frequently, Tyota encouraged them to test my knowledge of professional matters by asking me tricky questions relating to witchcraft familiars, the wild animals of the homestead (*izilo zasekhaya*), various commonplace Xhosa afflictions and so on. When I answered a difficult question correctly, the healer would enthusiastically commend both Tyota and me. On such occasions a visiting healer would also spontaneously volunteer material, which was immediately recorded on my cassette tape recorder. Everywhere I went I took my notebook and tape recorder, which the healers and people generally became so used to seeing that they would remark if I did not have them with me. I tried to mitigate any possible anxiety that might be associated with the use of a tape recorder by playing to the healers and people tape recordings of divinations or speeches made at rituals, which were so greatly enjoyed by everyone that I was invited to social gatherings at the homes of healers solely convened for this purpose. At the same time, the local fraternity of healers in the townships held regular quarterly beer-drinks, which were sponsored in turn by individual members. During fieldwork (1974-1977), I sponsored three beer-drinks, which were held at the homes of different diviners in the townships. Such events were well attended, even by visiting healers from out-of-town. At the first beer-drink I attended in August 1974 the healers called upon me to give a full account of my research, which I did in great detail with Tyota translating from English into Xhosa. The consensus among the healers

was that I was at liberty to write up and publish the material I collected, as long as I was honest and did not purposely misrepresent them or discredit their practices. Diviners regularly invited Tyota and me to attend sacrifices, beer-drinks or dances (*iintlombe*) they or their clients were holding, and we availed ourselves of as many of these opportunities as we were able. We also paid social calls to healers at their homes, usually on Sunday mornings. On such a visit to Sijamankungwini in January 1976, he casually turned to me in conversation and quizzically asked me if I would like to hear some of his dreams. The best material is always collected when people spontaneously volunteer it, rather than being elicited by the researcher armed with a battery of questions, which people usually find intimidating. Towards the end of fieldwork in the latter half of 1977, with the assistance of several people, including an aspirant Anglican priest at St. Peter's, high school children in the townships and anthropology students at Rhodes University, the townships were surveyed on the ground street by street; even the sites densely packed with squatter homes, such as in Wood Street or 'Silvertown', were visited. The only healers unknown to me who were uncovered were three aged female novice diviners, who treated one or two minor ailments with herbal remedies.

During 1975-1976, I attended evening classes in Xhosa at the Technical College in Grahamstown. Most of the ethnographical and biographical material collected in the townships of Grahamstown was recorded on tape and transcribed verbatim with the invaluable assistance of my Xhosa field assistant at the time. The best method to be followed in translation was to discuss the meaning of Xhosa terms with the people who had originally supplied the material. Sometimes Xhosa-speakers provide good English equivalents for baffling Xhosa terms. When discussing the meaning of Xhosa texts it was by no means unusual for people to provide further material, such as biographical information, which was eagerly recorded and later transcribed and translated. When Sijamankungwini was discussing the translation of his account of dreams with us, he spontaneously referred to relevant biographical material in clarification of a point, with the result that a fuller account of his biography was later recorded. Throughout the initial interview, the female novice of his diviner daughter, Nobulawu, sat quietly and unobtrusively in a corner of the room listening intently to the proceedings. On a following visit she immediately volunteered an account of her dreams. In fact, the research would have been impossible without the close co-operation and enthusiastic assistance of Xhosa diviners, novices and people generally.

During the late 1980s and early 1990s, the material obtained from a female novice, Zodwa, in King William's Town was recorded predominantly in English. At my suggestion, she started to keep a daily record of her dreams. Keeping her notebook and pen on her bedside table, she would write down her dreams every morning when she awoke and did so continuously over a two-year period. I am grateful to her for allowing me unrestricted access to her most intimate reflections and for permission to publish a little of her dream material here.

As Tyota's only initiate at the time, I became responsible for preparing his medicines for clients. Using the diviner's grinding stones, I crushed various roots and barks to a fine powder, a somewhat difficult task to master initially. Children playing on the street would often come and gather round and tease me. They would ask me in Xhosa why I was playing with firewood (*inkhuni*) and what I hoped to do with it. They tried on several occasions to make me cross. When it became clear that I would not lose my temper, however, they soon gave up teasing me. It was on such an occasion, when I was grinding medicines for Tyota, that Nontando paid an unexpected visit. She gave me my Xhosa name, Khandamayeza (Grinder of Medicines) or Khandi'yeza for short (Hirst, 2000, p. 132), which soon stuck and was used by almost everyone. On Tyota's instructions I would mix small quantities of the crushed plant materials and then wrap them tightly in brown paper noting the purpose of the medicine in Xhosa on the wrapper. Frequently, I delivered the small parcels of medicines to the homes of Tyota's clients on foot, which was a useful way of getting to know them and the locality. Tyota also regularly gave me samples of various plant materials with specific instructions on how to use them and he always expected a detailed report from me the next day on the perceived effects. I accompanied him several times on plant foraging expeditions to the bush, sometimes alone or with other healers, where he taught me more about the various plants he used in healing. He would name the plant in Xhosa and then list the various parts of it and what they were used for. He did so quite matter-of-factly in a business-like manner. Often, before I could ask a single question, he had already moved on to talk about another plant nearby. In fact, he would do so whenever live plants were available for discussion. Then, at other times, he would carefully test my retention of the knowledge he had imparted to me. He would ask me tricky questions and correct me if I made mistakes. At a workshop held at Rhodes University's Botany Department shortly before his death in September 1994, he took me on one last tour of the indigenous plants and trees in the garden reiterating their names



and listing their uses.

### The Social Background of the Dramatis Personae

Tyota was a married man in his early fifties with five children who lived his entire life in the wattle and daub house his father had built and in which he was born in Tanti, Grahamstown (Hirst, 1990, pp. 31-32). A member of the amaTolo division of the amaZisi, his praise name was Dlangamandla, i.e., "to eat with energy/power" (cf. Hirst, 1997, pp. 218-225). He was the twelfth-born of thirteen children, nine of whom survived infancy (Hirst, 1990, p. 44, fig. 2). Of all the healers in the townships, he had the most extensive network of clients, both within and beyond Grahamstown, including whites and non-whites. In 1974 he had some 200 debtors on his books owing a balance of some R1, 900 (Hirst, 1990, pp. 54-55). Certainly, up until his death in April 1995, he was the doyen of clients and the healer's healer in the townships. At Easter and Christmas he was so busy that he would employ the services of two additional local diviners to help him cope with the throng of waiting clients. His eldest daughter is a nursing sister at a local hospital. He was minimally educated and left school before completing Standard 3 (cf. Hirst, 1990, p. 128). During the 1930s, his father would not permit Tyota's elder brother, Mtedwa, to be initiated as a diviner. Right from youth, Tyota wanted to be a diviner, but he encountered considerable opposition from his father. His father was an ambivalent character, who "wore a red blanket and walked barefoot until the day he died in 1966". As a young man, he had apparently repudiated becoming a diviner after a disagreement with his father, Tyota's grandfather Jamangile, a diviner at Peddie. The dispute apparently turned on the question of who should provide the slaughter beast, a white goat without blemish, to beg pardon of the ancestors and to make a protective necklet (*intambo yosinga*) from the hide. That followed an unfortunate incident in which Tyota's father "got stuck in the mud (*udaka*) in a dam for three days" while searching for Jamangile's lost cattle (cf. Hirst, 1990, p. 43). The incident later resulted in Tyota's father's conversion to Christianity and move to town. He became a lay preacher in the Wesleyan Methodist church in Grahamstown. During the 1940s, as the adolescent novice of the Mfengu diviner, John Mwaba, an affine of the famous diviner Satuma Njajula of Middledrift in Ciskei, Tyota experienced the calling to become a diviner and was immersed (*ukuthwetyulwa*) in the Kowie River. After arriving home in a dishevelled state, unable to speak and without his clothes to the consternation of his parents, his father finally acquiesced to his initiation as a diviner.

Zodwa is a member of the amaCisana clan, an unmarried mother of two grownup sons in her late fifties and a nurse at a local hospital. The fourth-born of her mother's five children, she never knew her father, who died during her youth. Her maternal uncle or mother's brother (*umalume*) brought her up in Ginsberg location, King William's Town. Her childhood was not particularly unhappy and she enjoyed a warm, caring relationship with her foster parents. During the 1970s, while in her late twenties and training to be a nurse in Alice, she fell in love with a man living in Zwelitsha. At first they were to be married, but he later ditched her for a rival. As a result, she would find herself crying (*ukukhala*) for no apparent reason. In this context, while in Alice, she had her first important dream. She also became increasingly aware of her lack of social identity and connection to her parents, siblings and paternal relatives. Apart from her clan name, she knows nothing about her father or his family. As an adult, Zodwa only got to know her mother after she retired from her job in Port Elizabeth and returned to live in Ginsberg. Zodwa became Tyota's initiate in 1982, but he died before completing her initiation.

During a career as a farm labourer spanning some fifty years, Sijamankungwini worked on several farms in what are now the Makana and Ndlambe municipal areas (cf. Hirst, 1990, pp. 32-33, 41-42). A minimally educated member of the amaJwarha clan in his seventies, he was a 'doctor of the medicine digging-stick' (*noIugxana*), a kind of herbalist, of great repute. Throughout our acquaintance during the 1970s, he wore strands of white beads (*amaCamagu*) about his neck, wrists and ankles like a novice diviner. As a young man, during the 1920s, after three of his daughters died in the 1918 influenza epidemic, he consulted a female diviner in Transkei, the daughter of Kusitile. She started initiating him as a diviner (*ukuphehlelwa*, to be initiated; from the transitive verb *ukuphehla*, to churn), but he did not get on with her. He pointed out that his illness did not go together with her healing power (*ubugqirha*). "My own healing power is that with which my children have thwasa'd. They have thwasa'd in my own way. We amaJwarha thwasa at the river and the forest." As a result, he never completed his initiation, was never inducted as a diviner and later practised as 'a doctor of the medicine digging-stick'. His elder sister (*udade 'bawo*) practised as a diviner (*igqirhakazi*) for many years in Tanti, Grahamstown. She had a profound influence on his impressionable young daughter, Nontando, who lived with her for a while before taking up employment at a seaside hotel as a teenager at fifteen or sixteen years of age (Hirst, 1990, p. 33).

Nontando was the sixth-born of her father's nine

children, three of whom died in infancy (Hirst, 1990, p. 43, fig. 1). When I met her in 1974 she was a fully-fledged diviner in her late thirties, with no formal education, residing in Wood Street. Tyota finally inducted her as a diviner during the 1950s. When Nontando's passionate love affair with her married white employer at the hotel ended bitterly, she returned home suddenly, without even collecting her pay, to the consternation of her parents (Hirst 1990, p. 124). Then, later, one afternoon, while swimming with her girl friends in a large pool in the Kwelerha River, she experienced the calling to become a diviner (*ukuthwetyulwa*) and was immersed in the water (Hirst, 1990, pp. 120-122). Nontando's eldest sister, who lived on a farm in what is now the Ndlambe municipal area, also practised as a diviner.

Nobulawu was Nontando's female initiate of two years standing when I met her in 1975. She was a large, very timid, but kind and helpful, uneducated married woman in her forties with grown-up children. She was a member of the amaMzangwa clan. Her husband, Mzingisi, was a member of the amaNtshilibe clan with no education. As a young man, he had been the novice of a male diviner residing in Alice, Mthebesi, who had died without completing his initiation as a diviner (cf. Hirst, 1990, p. 124). They had both resided in the townships their whole lives. Nobulawu initially complained of "pain (*ihlaba, ubuhlungu*) in her whole body", one of the characteristic signs of *ukuthwasa* (Hirst, 1990, pp. 115ff.; 1997, pp. 220-221). She also readily admitted that it was far more interesting and exciting being a novice, than doing routine household chores at home. Clients regularly consulted Nontando and Nobulawu attended dances and rituals with her.

### Dreams

Right from the start of Tyota's biographical narrative, he points out that his parents told him that he used to dream frequently when he was a boy (Hirst, 1990, p. 107; Hirst, 1997, pp. 221ff.). He would tell his parents his dreams only to be laughed at. "What kind of child is this, Nofayile?" Tyota's father would ask his mother. At the time, Tyota was attending primary school and, like most children his age, even he did not know what kind of child, let alone person, he was in the process of becoming. Nevertheless, he would relate his dreams to his parents when he rose in the morning only to be laughed at. "How will this child be, Nofayile?" his father would ask his mother. Throughout Tyota's narrative, he gives clear and unequivocal expression to the rather obvious concern he causes his father (Hirst, 1990, p. 128). Although Tyota dreamed every night, he did not know the reason why he did so. Thus, he would relate his

dream to his parents in the morning because he did not know how to interpret its meaning. Tyota pointed out that "A diviner sees things in his dreams and hears things with his ears that go together with his blood (*igazi*): it is a spirit (*umoya*). It is that spirit which controls (*ukulawula*) one. I just hear myself talking in the divination without knowing what to say, but it would be exactly what the people (i.e., consulting him) want to hear. When a person is going to be a diviner the ancestors come as wild animals (*izilo*) of the forest now. Then, in the dream, the animal changes into a person and one is told that he is your grandfather, who was a diviner. That spirit of his gets inside one, and one becomes a diviner like him" (Hirst, 1990, p. 184).

"My whole family has *thwasa*," Sijamankungwini said (Hirst, 1990, p. 107). "My father, Ngene, also had *thwasa*. He used medicines to try and stop it, but it was not removed from his blood. Even my young granddaughter, Yoliswa, has *thwasa* in a strong way. She sighs (*ukuzamla*) in her sleep. It was the same thing with me. When I was still living with my mother, I used to go to sleep before her. One night, I heard a person calling (*ukubiza*) me by name: 'Pitilli, Pitilli.' I got up and went to my mother to see why she was calling me. My mother said, 'I did not call you,' and she wondered what it could be." Referring to Nontando when she was a child, Sijamankungwini said, "We would take notice of a child who is *thwasa*, even when she is asleep. Nontando would sigh in her sleep. We would sleep on reed mats (*iikhuko*) on the floor. Nontando would leave the blankets and she would be heard crying in a distant place in the house. Her ancestors have taken her. When Nontando was very young, she would dream a lot. On one occasion I remember she had a dream in which she saw an old man walking with a stick. The following morning she told me the dream and described the person. She did not know who he was. I recognised him and said, 'That was your grandfather (*utata umkhulu*)'" (Hirst, 1990, pp. 106, 300).

As the foregoing examples suggest, the parental response to children's dreams differ. On the one hand, it can be characterised by hardly concealed embarrassment particularly for a father to see his son as the 'spitting image' of himself as a youth manifesting all the apparent signs (*izimbo, imihlola*) of becoming a diviner, precisely the time-honoured family profession father had repudiated as a young man. On the other hand, it can be characterised by solicitude and the occasion of the dream used as an opportunity to introduce the child to the ancestors. Like the Nguni in general, the Xhosa consider dreams to be the ultimate evidence for the existence of the ancestors, who apparently intervene in and influence

human affairs through dreams. Since the ancestors are imminent in dreams and their will is manifest through them, dreams are conceived to be communications emanating directly from the ancestors. Thus dreams serve as the experiential validation of, and ultimate justification for, Xhosa religious representations and rituals commemorating the ancestors. The practices of Xhosa diviners take place against a backdrop of oral tradition and lore constituting a pervasive religious ideology linking the ancestors to the minutiae of ritual performance, personal experience, knowledge and power. Why dreams are associated with the ancestors is not difficult to understand. Such experiences occur in a liminal space set apart from routine social life in an other, under or subliminal world beyond waking consciousness and on the boundary of the unconscious. The fact that dreams simultaneously assume the contours and concerns of this world, pointedly so, as it turns out, in the instances described below, is a theme that is nevertheless consistent with Xhosa oral lore or 'theology' about how the dead are thought to influence the living.

Nobulawu narrated a dream that occurred in 1972 and eventuated in her meeting Nontando early the following year. It is noteworthy that the dream was not the first or precipitating one, which she had been too afraid to discuss openly with anyone until her meeting with Nontando. In her dream she saw two female diviners, both of whom it was said in the dream were diviners associated with the river, sitting in her home. One was Noyoyo, whom Nobulawu knew well because, prior to her death in 1972, she had been treating her for pain. The other was Nontando, whom Nobulawu did not know. In the dream it appeared as if Noyoyo had come to introduce Nobulawu to Nontando. Nobulawu saw the two female diviners leave her home and arrive at Nontando's house, the outside of which Nobulawu noticed was painted a dark blue. Later, she had a dream in which she saw her paternal great grandmother (*umakhulu khulu*), who was a diviner, in the company of her deceased parents and paternal grandmother (*unina khulu*). In the dream they all gathered supportively round Nobulawu. Her great grandmother asked her if she recalled seeing the two female diviners in her dream, and she replied that she had. Her great grandmother told her that, of all her great grandchildren, not one took after her. She wanted Nobulawu to follow in her footsteps as a diviner. "My child," Nobulawu's mother said, "you are going to be helped by that female diviner," and she pointed to Nontando, who appeared beside her. On a later occasion when Nobulawu was discussing her dreams with her husband, she told him that she recognised the house she had seen in her dream to be one she had previously walked past when going to

visit relatives and friends. She recognised the house by the colour it was painted. Her husband encouraged her to go there and consult the female diviner she had seen in her dreams. Subsequently, Nobulawu worked up the courage to go to the house in Wood Street. There she was astounded to meet Nontando, whom she immediately recognised as the female diviner she had seen in her dreams, and later became her novice.

Novice and even practising diviners, both in the townships of Grahamstown and elsewhere in the Eastern Cape, report having had a prescient dream of a particular diviner. The dream usually eventuates in an unexpected, though memorable, meeting with the actual diviner who appeared in the dream, resulting in the development of a mutually warm, supportive and productive relationship between healer and novice, which is ultimately consummated in the induction of the latter as a diviner. Xhosa diviners and even ordinary people unconnected to the profession maintain that it is always preferable for the novice to dream of the initiating diviner. It is considered particularly auspicious (*ukulunga*) for the candidate to do so, for such a dream invariably manifests the will of the ancestors, which is the *sine qua non* of the future diviner. Like any intimate interpersonal relationship, relationships between Xhosa novices and diviners are sometimes fraught with difficulty. As in Sijamankungwini's case, the novice might not get on with the diviner for temperamental reasons. The diviner can also die before completing the initiation and/or induction of the novice, or be insufficiently qualified to do so (see the case of Moni mentioned in Hirst, 1997, p. 224). The synchronicity between an experience, whether dream, vision or intuition, and an actual event, such as meeting the future initiating diviner or finding a medicinal plant in the bush, has ontological significance in the sense that it generates the close relationship between diviner and novice, constituting a therapeutic relationship characterised by mutual openness and receptivity to inner experience. Such a dream foreshadows, and is indicative of, the future close relationship between the novice who dreams and the diviner who figures in the novice's dream. Indeed, such intimacy is traditionally considered essential for the successful outcome of the initiation process. Tyota mentions how, after seeing his future instructor in a dream, he unexpectedly met him in Tanti the following day. There was an immediate affinity between them - so much so that, when Mwaba decided to return home to Middledrift, Tyota accompanied him as his apprentice (Hirst, 1997, p. 224). Significantly, prior to consulting the female diviner in Transkei or even later while being initiated by her, Sijamankungwini never dreamt about her.

Sijamankungwini presented a succinct account of his dreams as a novice diviner. "In my dream I suddenly went up to the sky and began flying (*ndaphupha ndisithi khwasu ndenyuka ndaya phezulu ndabhabha ke ngoko*). I was afraid I would fall heavily, but I came and landed gently on the ground. Again, I was trying to climb a very steep, rocky hill and I could not grab onto the rocks. I was afraid I would fall down heavily on the ground. Instead, I went down and touched the ground lightly. Then I dreamed of the elephant (*ubade*; a respect term for *indlovu*, elephant) and the leopard (*ingwe*) in the forest. I dreamed of the river and in the dream I stayed with the River People. There is a whole world in the river - people, cattle, fowls and everything. I saw a river fowl (*inkuku yomlambo*) on the water shaking its body and tail feathers up and down" (Hirst, 1990, p. 181).

The novice routinely reports (*ukutolika*) the dream to the diviner. The resulting narrative is generally taken to be the interpretation of the dream or vision, although the diviner may briefly reflect or underscore the emotional tone conveyed by the dream to the dreamer. Diviners assume that the dreamer has access to most, if not all, the background information variously represented in the details of the dream. If an interpretation of a dream is thoughtlessly requested, the diviner is likely to chide the novice to reflect carefully on the details of the dream or, in some instances, peremptorily told to ingest the oneirogenic roots called ubulawu in order to have another dream to further elaborate the meaning of the first. Diviners handle dreams differently from psychoanalysts. For Xhosa healers generally, a personally significant dream is a sacred sign or image resonating with the ancestors. The dream is a gift (*isipho*) bestowed by the ancestors, a symbol of cultural identity and a guide to good conduct to be remembered, treasured and acted upon religiously, rather than a more or less complex concatenation of imagery, metaphors or symbols requiring interpretation. Indeed, every interpretation merely posits another and so on in an endless chain. Diviners are aware that a discursive approach to dream interpretation merely dissolves the succinct metaphors already condensed in the image, which is particularly memorable to the dreamer. Clearly, among Xhosa diviners, the art of dream analysis is to preserve a rich sense of the integrity of the image, rather than merely to explain it away. Ephemeral though dreams undoubtedly are, they nevertheless serve to establish a reflexive, and thus therapeutic, interpersonal relationship between diviner and novice.

Prior to becoming Noyoyo's initiate, Nobulawu had a recurrent dream of a lion (*ingonyama*) roaming in the grassland near Makana's Kop (Hirst, 1990, pp. 182-

183). She did not understand the dream, which frightened her. She was also reluctant to discuss it with the diviner, her husband or anyone else in case she was considered crazy. However, following her initial warm meeting with Nontando, her initial resistance softened and she mentioned the dream to her. Subsequently, Nontando churned ubulawu in a beaker of water for Nobulawu to drink and with which to wash her body. According to Nontando, she prepared the diffusion using a mixture of riparian, forest and grassland types of ubulawu. Afterwards, Nobulawu had a vivid dream about her paternal grandfather, in which she left her house in Tantiyi in his company. Together they walked up the grassy slope towards Makana's Kop (Ntaba Ziyoni, Mount Zion). When they reached the top of the escarpment, her grandfather pointed down to a plant with a grassy tuft and said, "This is your ubulawu ... called unkomentaba." The latter is usually found growing in the grassland after good rainfall. Following the dream, Nontando accompanied Nobulawu to the spot before dawn where, at first light, she found several specimens of unkomentaba and picked a few for Nobulawu's use. Nobulawu started to use her own ubulawu and "felt much better after that". According to Nontando, Nobulawu's dream had evident ritual implications. The lion is a large wild animal (*isilo*) that, like unkomentaba, is associated with the grassland. Nobulawu's ancestors were thus associated with the grassland. Accordingly, Nontando performed the *intlwayelelo* for Nobulawu in the grassland near Makana's Kop (for an account of the river *intlwayelelo* see Hirst, 1990, pp. 136-147 and 1997, pp. 236-237). Afterwards, Nobulawu's dream of the lion never recurred, which is by no means unusual in such cases where the initiating diviner has properly performed the appropriate ritual.

As mentioned previously, Zodwa would find herself crying uncontrollably for no apparent reason. Then, she had a dream, the first of many such dreams, in which she saw a beast (*inkomo*). She did not know whether it was a cow, an ox or a bull. It opened its mouth and it appeared as if it wanted to say something to her. Before she could hear what it wanted say, however, she woke up. Thinking it ludicrous that a beast should want to speak to her, she was afraid to tell anyone about her dream. Like Nobulawu, she feared she would be considered crazy. Then, in 1982, she had a dream in which she saw a male diviner, whom she later consulted. The diviner performed divination and told her that it was not simply a beast (*inkomo*) that appeared in her dream, but an ox (*inkabi*). What it wanted to tell her, he explained, was that she owed many ritual debts (*amatyala*) to the ancestors, which had been neglected for more than two generations by her paternal

relatives through failure to perform traditional mortuary rituals including the ritual called inkomo yezilo, ‘the beast of the wild animals of the homestead’, linking her deceased paternal relatives, such as father and grandfather, among others, to the wider category of ancestors associated with her agnatic group or clan. Following the performance of several costly rituals, she managed to structure a support group including unrelated members of her own clan residing in the locality, siblings and maternal relatives. Not only did her dream about the ox never recur, but her attitude to herself and others changed. She became more reflective, tolerant and understanding of her, sometimes almost paranoid, fears connected to her many anxieties and difficulties in interpersonal relationships with co-workers, neighbours, siblings and offspring. Now she is more relaxed, less nervous, able to smile, even laugh, and takes life with a measure of philosophical acceptance.

Among the best diviners in the townships at the time, Nontando and Tyota commented on the link between dreams and divination (Hirst, 1993, pp. 102-103). Nontando said that she often dreamed of the client and the related affliction or problem before the person actually arrived for divination. So it was the case in a divination recorded during fieldwork (Hirst, 1993, pp. 106ff.). When my field assistant, Siphon Yeli, and I arrived to visit Nontando one morning, she told us that the previous night she had dreamt that an old man suffering from umlambo (river sickness) was coming to consult her that afternoon, and she expected him shortly after lunch. In the event he arrived just after 2 p.m.. Afterwards, he told me that it was a spontaneous decision to visit the diviner in question, made the night before on the recommendation of a neighbour, residing on the farm where he lived, who had previously consulted her. He had never visited Nontando before. Nontando said that “The ancestors come as a dream when a person divines, like a vision (*umbono*). Some diviners feel it in their blood (*igazi*) what people (i.e., clients) come for. Or, as a person divines, one feels one’s body shudder. Some diviners hear from the ooNomathotholo (i.e., the shrill, high-pitched, singing voices of the River People). Diviners are not all the same. As I am sitting here, the ancestors will come and I will feel drowsy and fall asleep for a moment. I will be told that clients are coming for a divination; they come for such a thing and it is caused by such and such. Then, the clients are sitting in front of me in the consultation. The ancestors speak Xhosa to me but you would never hear them, even if you are sitting next to me.” Tyota said that the diviner has two eyes. One is the diviner’s own, which is closed and looks inward to apprehend the images spontaneously produced there that are always pertinent to the client’s problems. Tyota often

referred to the successive flow of imagery he experienced in divination as dreaming while awake or having a vision with one’s eyes open. He said that, when the handclapping and chanting in the divination were well performed, he was inspired and the images readily appeared. The diviner’s open eye belonged to the participants in the consultation, noting their body language and reactions to divinatory statements. After a divination I attended at the home of a member of the Njajula family in Middledrift in February 1975, the diviner told me that he knew a stolen goat was involved because “a little bird whispered it in my ear”. The ability to perform divination is not learned or acquired; it is not so much a skill that anyone can explicitly teach someone else, but an inborn talent, the gift (*isipho*) of the ancestors, like musical ability, with which it is sometimes linked.

Fully-fledged diviners dream about medicinal plants growing in the bush or on the bank of a river and go and collect them where they were seen in the dream. Such dreams are invariably quite different from most dreams involving the ancestors. Firstly, deceased relatives and people generally are usually absent from such dreams. There is no benevolent grandparent or even the presence of a disembodied spirit or ghost (*umshologu*) to show the way. Absent, too, are the interminable dream sequences involving human conversations and actions that overlap and intermesh with each other in a way that most novices find confusing. Such dreams about medicinal plants are extremely brief and succinct. Secondly, the healer receives a clear image or colour postcard of the plant. It is always seen exactly as the healer finds it later on a foraging trip. So, when the person finds it in daylight, sunlight diffuses through the leaves and radiates from the plant in a striking way. If not for the latter fact, one could conclude that Xhosa healers are, like Siberian shamans, capable of out-of-body travel. Apparently, however, that is not the case. Although situated in a part of the landscape well known to the dreamer, the plant has never been picked there before. In September 1974 Nontando had a dream about a riparian species of ubulawu called undlela ziimhlophe, which she saw growing on a slope overlooking the Tylerha River (cf. Hirst, 2000, pp. 131ff.). After finding the place with some difficulty and picking a couple of small bundles of roots, Nontando admitted that although she had known the place since childhood and was submerged in the river pool below, she had never thought of looking for undlela ziimhlophe on that particular slope until she dreamed about it. In March 1975 Tyota had a dream in which he saw undlela ziimhlophe growing in great profusion on the banks of a small stream close to town. Feigning a studied disbelief, I made him a wager that we would find more plants in the place we

had visited previously near the Kwelerha River, where I had purposely left numerous young plants growing in sheltered circumstances to be retrieved on a later foraging excursion. Yet Tyota was adamant that, since he had dreamed, his prediction would prove to be correct, which it did (Hirst, 2000, p. 134). As is so typical of conscious intention, I did not find a single plant. Referring to ubulawu, Tyota said, "When the diviner needs to pick the root, he will see clearly where it grows in a dream. The whole plant will be surrounded with a white light. Next morning, even before the sun rises, the diviner will go and pick the plant at the place he saw in his dream." Like intuition in general, the dream expands not only the consciousness, but also the knowledge, of the healer. As one travels across the landscape with the healers to the foraging sites, wrong turns can be taken and directions required of passers-by and local residents. Entering the locale of the dream, however, recognition increases to the point that the healer knows exactly where to go to find the medicinal plant that previously featured in the dream. It is perhaps understandable that coming upon the plant thus, precisely as it was seen in the dream, a diviner can fall spontaneously to her knees and call upon (ukunqula) her ancestors by name, as Nontando did on the aforementioned foraging trip (Hirst, 2000, p. 133). Clearly, the image accessed by the healer in the dream is not a memory image situated in the past, but an image of an experience about to take place and situated in the future.

### Medicines

Two centuries ago, the naturalist, Lichtenstein, recorded in the journal of his travels among the 'Koozas' of the Eastern Cape (1803-4/1812, p. 255) that "Their diseases are all ascribed to three causes, either to being enchanted by an enemy, to the anger of certain beings, whose abode appears to be in the rivers, or the power of evil spirits. The cures consist in the first place of medicines, which have probably a good effect, but recourse is also had to some means of appeasing the wrath of the being in the river ...". Lichtenstein was interested in trees and plants, made observations concerning them in his journals and, in some cases, collected botanical specimens. During the nineteenth century, Western medicine and pharmacy was based predominantly on plant materials. Thus, it can be inferred that Lichtenstein is referring to plant materials when he uses the term 'medicines'.

The difference between the Xhosa diviner and herbalist (*ixhwele*, pl. *amaxhwele*) is more a matter of degree than kind. Whereas the diviner undergoes a calling emanating from the ancestors, the herbalist 'proper' acquires knowledge of medicines by

inheritance from father or grandfather and/or by purchase from an unrelated herbalist (cf. Hammond-Tooke, 1980, pp. 339ff.; Hoernle, 1985, pp. 130ff.). The transmission of the divining profession appears to have been disrupted from the late nineteenth century onwards, when it became popular to join an established or syncretic Christian church as an evangelist or preacher instead of being initiated as a diviner (cf. Hirst, 1997, p. 219). Nevertheless, the ties between herbalists and the ancestors are no less intimate, and their dreams about medicinal plants no less significant, than those of diviners.

Like the herbalist, the diviner is able to accurately identify and name a range of different plant products principally by smell and taste. In encountering an apparently unfamiliar root or bark, a healer feels its texture, smells it and chews a small piece. By comparison, Xhosa herbalists and diviners are more like Western ethno pharmacologists than ethno botanists. They classify medicinal plants in linguistic categories, such as ubulawu, for example, according to perceived similarities in their properties and effects, rather than in terms of their botanical characteristics, which are considered to be inconsequential. Like the herbalist, the diviner knows that medicines have certain recognisable effects on the human body, not to mention animals or liquids and so on, when ingested, mixed or applied in various ways (see below). Such effects, which are invariably known firsthand from bioassay, can be described in some detail and, where words fail, tacitly pointed to. Healers widely maintain that they only use medicines to treat clients that they have used to treat themselves. First, the novice learns about medicines under the instruction of a fully-fledged healer during the initiation period and later, as a fully-fledged healer, in practise. Medicines (*amayeza*, *imithi*, *imichiza*) are explicitly distinguished from charms (*amakhubalo*), which are used for washing in some instances but never ingested like medicines.

Although skilled in performing divination, the diviner is essentially a ritual specialist. In a few instances, the diviner's knowledge of medicines is as extensive as that of any herbalist. By contrast, however, it is unusual for the herbalist to be, at the same time, a diviner. Although generally lacking the medicinal expertise of herbalists, diviners nevertheless utilize a limited range of medicines in the treatment of clients and novices. Like herbalists, diviners also have recipes for tried and trusted remedies, which are prepared from various plant materials and/or animal products, for a variety of ailments, such as, for example, stomach ache (*isisu esibuhlungu*), pubic lice (*iintwala zehagu*), bile (inyongo), acne, coughs, colds and asthma (Hirst, 1993, pp. 103-104). It is the

herbalist who is the specialist with an extensive knowledge of medicines and their various uses. Herbalists acquire great reputations for their reputed skill in treating a host of problems linked causally to witchcraft/sorcery by means of scarification (*ukuqaphula*, *ukukhupha iintlanga*) and the use of protective medicines.

Xhosa resort to being doctored with protective medicines and charms (*ukuqinisa*, to strengthen or protect) in a whole range of situations or activities in which the ultimate outcome or goal is uncertain (cf. Hirst, 1990, pp. 238-240). For example, a person in competition with co-workers requires protective treatment to obtain a favoured job or promotion. A person involved in a civil or criminal delict requires protective treatment to ensure the favourable outcome of the case. A person can purchase a love charm (*intando*) from an herbalist to attract the attentions of a favoured paramour, as well as medicines to treat barrenness or impotency or to ensure passing the final school examinations. As previously mentioned, like some diviners, herbalists also treat a host of minor ailments. Unlike the diviner, the herbalist generally does not perform divination. Nevertheless, the herbalist holds a consultation with the client in which the latter describes the troubling affliction or problem and the former interprets it in terms of available medicinal treatment. Where relevant, a herbalist will also provide the client with appropriate ritual advice, which is unlikely to be considered particularly significant in the case of a person called to become a diviner who would necessarily consult a practising diviner for the appropriate ritual advice and treatment. As is to be expected, the materia medica of herbalists differs somewhat from that of diviners. Some plant roots and barks widely recognised and used by the latter are unknown to the former and vice versa. The close association between ritual performance and the efficacy of medicines in treatment more or less ensures some cross-referral of clients in practice between diviners and herbalists. Diviners refer clients to herbalists for protective treatment particularly in serious cases of witchcraft/sorcery. In cases where it is difficult for the herbalist to obtain a clear picture of the client's problem, it is by no means unusual for the herbalist not only to refer the client to a diviner for divination, but also to accompany the person to the consultation. Not only have some herbalists and diviners established close ties and consider themselves to be professional colleagues, but they also accompany and assist each other on plant foraging expeditions in the bush.

Most of the medicinal plants Xhosa healers utilise have been in the landscape a long time, probably longer than two centuries. They are not all necessarily

Xhosa in origin and a few are certainly Khoisan. Knowledge and use of medicines are widely distributed and by no means the sole prerogative of healers and novices. As previously mentioned, the use of medicines is part of family tradition. Nevertheless, healers have extensive knowledge of the medicinal plants they use - where they grow, when they flower and seed, how they propagate and what parts are useful for what purposes. Healers generally conduct their foraging activities in several different localities. In addition, their knowledge is finely attuned to the relevant details of season and rainfall.

Xhosa medicines and charms consist largely, though not exclusively, of material derived from plants, trees or fungi. Various animal artefacts and products, such as tusks, horns, teeth, claws, quills, shells, oils and fats, also form part of the healer's materia medica, although these preparations are not dealt with in any detail here. Medicines are usually ingested in various ways, as diffusions in water, snuffs, smoked or sublingually. They are mixed with animal fats or oils prepared from reptiles and applied to the surface of the skin or rubbed into scarifications made on the body. Medicines are used for steaming or washing the body, as well as emetics and purgatives. Some animal products are used similarly to plant materials, namely for the recognised properties or substance they are held to contain. One example should suffice. Tyota kept a dried horse placenta in his medicine bag that he cooked up in water to prepare a diffusion to induce labour in childbirth. In utilising toxic or poisonous plants in healing, extremely small homeopathic doses are preferred. Worn or carried on the body as part of dress or ornament, charms are closely linked to luck. Charms are not usually ingested, although they can be, particularly when they are, at the same time, medicines. The ubulawu called undlela ziimhlophe is a good example of a medicine, charm and ritual symbol.

To some extent like the ancestors, the various types of ubulawu are distinguished according to the spatial categories of river (*umlambo*), forest (*ihlathi*) or grassland (*ithafa*) where they grow (Hirst, 2000, p. 132). Each of the various types of ubulawu, as well as other important medicinal roots, is linked to a particular wild animal and by extension its pelt, and these connections have ritual significance in the doctoring and installation of hereditary clan leaders, councillors (*amaphakathi*), diviners and herbalists. Not all the types of ubulawu are ingested. At least two types, the roots of the water lily (*Nymphaea capensis*) called uzuba and the forest liana called ubuka, are considered too coarse and astringent to ingest and are used only for washing. Some diviners mix the various types that are ingested, such as

impendulo, unkomentaba, uhlungu-hlungu and undlela ziimhlophe, but this is done more to improve the taste than the effect.

Silene L. is a vast genus dispersed all over the globe (Harvey & Sonder, 1859-60, p. 125; Hutchings et al., 1996, p. 96). *Silene capensis* Otth., Caryophyllaceae (undlela ziimhlophe, 'white paths') is not widely known and has been little studied pharmacologically (Hirst, 2000, pp. 122-123). It has a white, erect, trichotomously panicled flower with obtuse lobes. In spring and autumn the flower opens in the evening to exude a scented perfume and it is cross-pollinated by moths. The stem and leaves of the plant are clothed with long spreading hairs. After good rainfall, it is found growing in grassy verges on well-watered slopes and particularly on riverbanks. In Xhosa oral tradition undlela ziimhlophe is closely linked to the River People, a euphemism of respect for the ancestors particularly among diviners initiated at the river. Only the diviner so initiated can identify and therefore pick and use the plant: it is never found in the herbal pharmacopoeia of the herbalist.

The root of undlela ziimhlophe is finely ground and churned (*ukuphehla*) in a beaker (*ibhekile*) of water with a forked stick (*ixhayi*) until it produces a thick white froth, which novice diviners consume on an empty stomach to enhance dreaming. The object is to fill one's stomach with the froth until one regurgitates a small amount, which indicates one has consumed enough. Novices consume it, washing themselves with the remaining dregs, over a three-day period at full moon (for a description of ubulawu use among novices in the context of dance see Hirst, 2000, pp. 134-136). Prior to participation in traditional rituals, novices also use it as an emetic to induce vomiting (*ukugabha*) and/or for washing the body to remove ritual impurity (*umlaza*). A diviner chews a small piece of the root, which has a pungent taste and smell, and spits it out on the threshold to attract clients (cf. Hirst, 2000, p. 131). Diviners and novices who ingest it regularly exude a musky scented odour, not unlike that of the flower, which is attractive and even mildly hypnotic especially when they perspire after performing any vigorous activity, such as dancing or foraging for medicines. The root is also churned in the cattle-fold prior to the performance of the traditional mortuary ritual, umbuyiso, and in the induction rites of the diviner.

Most Xhosa clans are associated with one or other of the types of ubulawu that grow in the river, forest or grassland. However, only clans associated with diviners of the river use undlela ziimhlophe as a ritual ablution and in the umbuyiso rites. Following the death of the male homestead head, the umkhapho is

performed to accompany (*ukukhapha*) the deceased to the ancestors. It involves the slaughter of a white goat (*ibokhwe*) without blemish. After a lapse of time, the umbuyiso takes place, involving the slaughter of an ox 'to bring back' (*ukubuyisa*) the deceased homestead head to brood over the homestead and cattle-fold as an ancestor, a celebratory affair officiated at by the deceased's first-born son and heir for the first time and hence the metaphor of the 'returned ancestor'. Undlela ziimhlophe is churned in the cattle-fold in the umbuyiso. The white froth is rubbed on the back of the beast, which is allowed to drink from the beaker, before it is slaughtered. Before the male and female members of the agnatic group taste (*ukushwama*) the sacramental portion of meat (*intsonyama*), which is cut from a tendon on the right foreleg and sprinkled with bile (*inyongo*) from the gall bladder, they first drink the ubulawu froth.

The root of undlela ziimhlophe features among the several offerings (*iminikelo*) in the intlwayelelo rites that are made at the river on behalf of the candidate being inducted as a diviner and addressed to the River People. The offerings include white clay (*ifutha*), ubulawu, white beads, pumpkin seeds, grains of millet and maize, sorghum beer, traditional tobacco (*Nicotiana rustica*), the body dirt (*intsila*) of the candidate and a new aluminium beaker (*ibhekile*). The diviner who previously indicated the need to perform the ritual in a divination usually performs it. The diviner is usually accompanied to the river by a small procession, consisting of friends and relatives of the candidate. It is considered dangerous for the candidate to accompany them to the river. The candidate is secluded (*ukufakamisa*) in a specially constructed makeshift grass shelter (*intondo*) or in a separate hut set aside for the purpose. During the three-day seclusion period, the candidate abstains (*ukuzila*, to mourn) from meat, milk, liquor, tobacco and sexual intercourse. The candidate drinks only from the beaker of ubulawu that the diviner provides in the seclusion hut and reputedly dreams copiously. On the arrival of the procession at the river, before the offerings are made to the River People, the officiating diviner addresses the ancestors in a short speech. During the 1970s, pieces of thick brown paper torn from old sugar or maize meal packets were widely used to float the offerings on the water (see also De Jager & Gitywa, 1963, pp. 112, 114). Invariably, two portions of tobacco are placed on the water. Should one of the portions return to the riverbank where the members of the procession are standing, by no means a rare event, diviners consider it particularly fortunate for everyone in the procession, including the non-smokers, to share the tobacco and smoke it together on the riverbank. Commensality is an important aspect of Xhosa



traditional rituals. When the members of the procession arrive back at the homestead, they report (*ixelani ehambo*) to the people in the courtyard (*inkundla*) of the homestead about what transpired at the river. If, according to the various omens observed, the River People accepted the offerings, the diviner removes the candidate from seclusion and the makeshift shelter is dismantled. The whole affair is concluded festively with a beer-drink and dance in which the diviners and novices perform *umxhentso* (Hirst, 1990, pp. 136ff.).

The beaker of ubulawu and the forked stick, which is symbolic of the person's connection to the ancestors of both father and mother, also feature in the *intambo yosinga* and *ukugoduswa* induction rituals. An important phase of the former is called *ukuvuma kufa*, in which the novice makes a speech "confessing to the illness". Afterwards, the diviner, using the forked stick, anoints the novice with copious amounts of white foam from the beaker on the head, shoulders, arms, hands, abdomen and legs, sometimes rubbing it in by hand. The candidate also drinks copiously from the beaker. Later, a white goat without blemish is slaughtered, from which a protective necklet is made from the hide for the candidate to wear. In an important phase of the *ukugoduswa* ("to go home"), involving a beer-drink, the diviner and the candidate appear together, both wearing regalia, in the courtyard of the healer's home. The latter gives a speech in which the former is sent home (*ukugoduswa*) to practise as a fully-fledged diviner. Prior to the beast being slaughtered, the soon-to-be diviner churns the ubulawu in the cattle-fold and, as in the former case, before partaking of the *intsonyama*, drinks it, and later dances with the other diviners and is even expected to perform divination to impress the audience and attract prospective clients. Following the induction rituals organized under the auspices of the local agnatic group, it is by no means unusual for mother's brother (*umalume*) or his son (*umza*) to slaughter a white goat and later, a beast and to brew beer on behalf of the newly inducted diviner.

## Discussion

The aforementioned dreams are unusual and striking, and resonate with the deepest human concerns of the dreamers, which is why they were remembered in the first place. Nevertheless, such dreams constitute the tip of the iceberg of the routine dream life of the person. Dreams often are partial, incomplete, confused and unintelligible. Either there is no clearly discernible narrative sequence in the dream or it is a chaotic jumble of imagery on which it is impossible to impose any order at all. So, when a person has a clear and intelligible dream, such as Nobulawu's in

which a retinue of her paternal relatives introduce her to Nontando, it is perhaps understandable that it becomes the basis for action, resulting in a memorable meeting with the healer. Nobulawu was not then aware of the sheer extent of the ritual debts (*amatyala*) her dreams foretold, ritual debts that she in her lifetime was unable to meet, including the neglect of mortuary rituals for at least two to three generations in the ascending patrilineal line. Yet, the dream was her badge of courage to find fellowship and acceptance in a relationship with a new healer. Indeed, Nontando fulfilled all Nobulawu's expectations as a healer and teacher. She clarified her frightening dream of the lion, transforming it through the medium of the white ubulawu substance into a benevolent, though deceased, grandfather who, in spite of his ambiguous characteristics as a lion and an unincorporated ancestor, introduces her to her ubulawu, which Nontando later helps her to collect. Nontando was aware that a middle-aged, married woman in Nobulawu's economic circumstances, who did not work and whose husband was not permanently employed but only did occasional odd-jobs, would never be able to afford the numerous slaughter animals required for her induction as a diviner. So Nontando correctly started at the beginning of the cycle of induction rituals by performing the *intlwayelelo* in the grassland to propitiate Nobulawu's ancestors, and accordingly ensure the power of her ubulawu and thus her protection. Although Nobulawu regularly started the divination for Nontando, she would never get to making the first statement and, after a few repetitions of this, the diviner would take over in expert fashion. Thus, Nobulawu never fully acquired the skill to perform divination and never emerged as a fully-fledged diviner. Nevertheless, she found consolation as a novice in a close relationship with the healer attending her in consultations with clients, helping her to collect and prepare medicines and accompanying her to rituals and dances. Being employed, Zodwa was able to perform all the costly rituals and more, although it took her several years to do so. However, like Nobulawu, she never acquired the ability to perform divination, and the mere thought of doing it, even as an experiment, caused her to experience an uncomfortable feeling of *umbilini* (nervousness). Similarly, Zodwa never emerged as a fully-fledged diviner, although she acquired some knowledge of traditional rituals and medicines to treat certain minor complaints and a new outlook on life.

Apart from Nobulawu's dream discussed above, Sijamankungwini's dreams, which span the period he was a novice diviner in Transkei, are also explicitly linked to ubulawu use; not *undlela ziimhlophe*, as it turns out, but a mixture of *uhlungu-hlungu* and

impendulo (*Dianthus albens Sol., Caryophyllaceae*). His account is a poetic and memorable evocation of the dream work of the contemplative novice. Being aware that the narrative of the dream is a construction that, however faithful, never entirely reproduces the quality of the dream, the thoughtful novice artfully extracts seminal images from significant dreams, linking them together like a poem or story, plumbing the depths of the dream medium of which the images are a product to emerge with new insight. Soaring through the air only to fall abruptly is a common dream image associated with childhood. While falling and before coming to the rest, the dreamer awakens suddenly, sometimes experiencing all the discomfort of fear. However, Sijamankungwini, the future medicine man, is less afraid of flying than of falling and, even in the event that he falls, he lands gently on the ground. Scaling a steep slope grabbing onto the rocks, like trying to overcome an insurmountable problem and losing grip, the dreamer, although afraid of falling, manages to touch the ground lightly. Sijamankungwini implicitly suggests here that, since the dream world is under the care and protection of the ancestors, whatever happens the dreamer comes to no harm. The dreamer has the propensity to identify so closely with the dream experience that not only does it seem real, but also it elicits emotional and physical responses. However real dreams sometimes seem, the dreamer nevertheless awakens afterwards (cf. Hirst, 2000, pp. 128-131, 136-137 for an account of my dream experiences linked to ubulawu use). Elephant and leopard are the perquisites of the Xhosa king and his councillors who, in former times, wore the ivory armband (*umxhaka*) and leopard skin robe (*umnweba*). The appearance of such large wild animals (*izilo*) in the dream is by no means arbitrary or incidental. In former times, a diviner or herbalist could only work as a healer in a particular area with the explicit permission of the hereditary tribal leader and his councillors. Thus, it is by virtue of the sanction of traditional authority, which the ancestors stand for and constitute, that the novice must go not only into, but also under, the river to become inducted as a diviner. Typically, like the dream world itself, the river underworld of the River People is so much like our own. Such is the nature of dream images, which appear to be real when they are not, and this suggests their symbolic and ritual significance. From the highly condensed image of the river fowl shaking its body and tail feathers up and down, it can be inferred that what Sijamankungwini is referring to here is the performance of the *intlwayelelo* ritual at the river. It is by no means unusual in the latter ritual that, when the diviner and the procession make the offerings at dawn at the river, the sensitive river ducks and fowls nestling on the banks or on the water are disturbed and fly up into the air squawking and turn above the

river in ever-widening circles. In so doing the river ducks and fowls, which are reputedly messengers (*izithunywa*) of the ancestors, convey to the living that the River People have accepted the offerings made on the novice's behalf at the river (cf. Hirst, 1990, p. 145). Since the reference to the *intlwayelelo* was apparent even when the dreams were recorded, it was explicitly mentioned to both Tyota and Sijamankungwini. Tyota said it was apparent that the daughter of Kusitile was not initiated at the river, but a diviner set aside in the forest (*ukucongwiwe*), which explains why Sijamankungwini did not get on with her because she was not in tune with the ritual prompting of his dreams. All the dreams described in the foregoing section foreshadow ritual performance, including Tyota's and Nontando's, although they demurred, mainly for reasons of modesty, to provide all the relevant details.

A good cross-section of people claim that they never dream or, at least, never remember their dreams. Thus the practical significance of the use of oneirogenic ubulawu roots in the initiation of novice diviners. The use of ubulawu (from the verb *ukulawula*, to control) is considered not so much to cause dreams, but to throw a white light (*ukukhanya okumhlophe*) on dreaming, making dreams more vivid and memorable. The diviner's myth, which details the novice's journey under the river and articulates the ontological charter of the institution as a long established form of conduct, is an account of the ubulawu dream of the founding ancestor, invariably referred to as father's sister (*udade 'bawo*), who was a diviner (cf. Hirst, 1997, pp. 219, 229ff.; Hirst, 2000, pp. 122, 137ff.). If the effects of ubulawu merely derived from cultural factors alone, it is unlikely that it would affect someone from a different cultural background, as in my case (Hirst, 2000, pp. 128-131, 136-137). Diviners and novices agreed that lucid, even prophetic, dreams were the main effects of ingesting ubulawu roots (Hirst, 2000, p. 136). Apart from having very vivid dreams at night, I noted no alteration in my ordinary waking consciousness. If lucid dreams were an effect of ingesting toxic substances, such as, for example, triterpenoid saponins reputedly contained in the root of *Silene capensis*, then it was peculiar that toxic effects were not experienced in waking consciousness, as they would be, for example, when ingesting toxic or psychoactive plants. Mind altering or toxic plants are known, *inter alia*, to temporally disturb vision and muscular co-ordination, which would make vigorous dancing and singing difficult, if not impossible, particularly after copious amounts have been ingested on an empty stomach. Thus, pharmacologically at least, what accounts for the reported effects of ubulawu roots on dreaming still remains a tantalizing

mystery.

Not all the practising diviner's significant dreams, particularly those latent with economic significance dealing with much-needed medicines growing in the bush or clients coming for divination, are necessarily linked to the use of ubulawu. As previously mentioned, the future diviner is sensitive to dreams from childhood. Thus a great deal of the diviner's dreams occur naturally and are invariably linked to current concerns, collecting a required medicine or treating a client's affliction. Fully-fledged diviners say that, as novices, they used copious amounts of ubulawu. Apparently, once the person has learned to give attention to dreams and understand their significance, the recursive ingestion of ubulawu is unnecessary, and it is largely used as a ritual ablution.

### Conclusion

Xhosa traditional religion is based on an euhemerism, coined after Euhemerus, a third century BC Greek romantic novelist, that the gods are recruited from the ranks of ordinary mortals, men and women (Seznec, 1940, pp. 11ff.). As Seznec's study of Renaissance art shows in exemplary detail, the enduring romance of the euhemerism is not simply that the gods are revealed in human form, but that they underpin the minutiae of the cultural construction of Nature. Earlier, the question was raised concerning the purpose of religious ideology. Undoubtedly, in the context of Xhosa healing practices, religious ideology serves many cultural purposes, largely of institutional significance, including reinforcing longstanding relationships. Clearly, it is one of the versions of 'honour thy father and mother'. Such ideology forms the cultural basis of a commonsense social psychology that works in practice because it resonates with the emotional circumstances of people and how they perceive and understand themselves in the context of their lives. In short, culture cures what it causes. However, religious ideology also has moral and ethical significance. It acts as a guide to good conduct, checking the sleight-of-hand of healers and shoring up the domestic and wider social relations of clients. Despite its predominantly male focus, Xhosa traditional religious ideology nevertheless accords significance to women, both as healers, who are predominantly women, and ancestors. Father's sister (*udade 'bawo*) plays a significant role in the calling of novice diviners, particularly females. Xhosa traditional religion also teaches an open acceptance of the quandaries of human existence and the mysteries of death: that there are many relevant questions, but few ultimate answers. As in the Old Testament of the Bible, where a problem arises experience nevertheless intervenes in the form of a dream to resolve the

difficulty. Through experience, the novice masters the sensual language of dreams, song, dance and ritual and the practical uses of medicines. Xhosa traditional religion has by no means remained untouched by Christian influence. The synthesis of the ancestors and the Holy Spirit has been a fertile ground for the development of charismatic religious movements in Africa (Sundkler, 1961; West, 1975). Thus, it is essential to retain the rich sense of the metaphor at the root of Xhosa traditional religion. To reduce the metaphor to a literal interpretation dilutes its moral and ethical integrity. If all the mysteries of life and death could be revealed, life would be even more meaningless and worthless than it already is in the post-modern era. And if healing practices could merely be reduced to the activities of invisible spirits, which are nowhere and everywhere, such a reduction would obscure the actual knowledge and skills of the healers, whose practices are nowadays in the spotlight and under question. Although an ancient Greek physician routinely invoked the presence and power of the gods in medical contexts, it made him an empiricist no less. The empirical basis of Xhosa healing practices remains to be explored in more detail particularly regarding the use of medicines. Rather than simply adverting to the scientific study of the chemical properties of plants, interesting and relevant though this undoubtedly is in this context, I refer to the anthropological study of the healer's knowledge of medicines, as outlined above. Correlation of the traditional and scientific databases should prove interesting and instructive. There is little evidence to suggest that such research is necessarily incompatible with the religious convictions or practices of healers, as long as it proceeds with their active co-operation, participation and support. Collaborative research would also raise the level of professionalism and skill of healers, make them accountable to the public they serve and put their healing practices on the map. Social representations are a rich source of information concerning how actors understand the ontological grounds of their own activities as agents (Hirst, 1997, p. 240). Religious representations, such as the ancestors, for example, although undoubtedly illustrative of the brain's proclivity for structure, are not merely products of the unconscious mind, as Jung so persistently asserted concerning the nature of the archetypes. Rather, the ancestors are evidence of the duality of structure (Giddens, 1984, pp. 25ff.) in terms of which the medium is the message. Culture is both the medium and the message. Religious representations are first and foremost cultural constructions acquired during socialization and include, inter alia, conceptions of Nature, self and others, etc. Thus, the contextual study of culture has wider psychological, social, economic and political

implications for a deeper understanding of religious experience as generative of social relations redressing, inter alia, the status of deprived people, particularly females. By way of analogy, what makes it possible for musicians to make music together is not merely the fact that there is a conductor, flourishing a white baton, in front of the orchestra. The musicians, including the conductor, are all reading the score. Through successive rehearsals, they all come to understand, know and appreciate the meaning of the music they are performing (see Schutz, 1964). Culture, like music, language, painting, dream, medicine or ritual, constitutes the medium, the sensual language, producing and reproducing the inter-subjectivity of the social participants, through performance involving actual experience. The significance is clear. Apart from traditional rituals, the Xhosa commemorate the ancestors in song and dance to the rhythmical

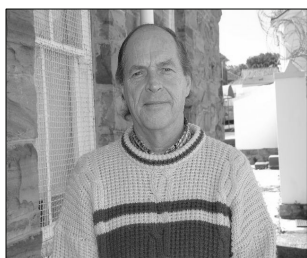
accompaniment of handclapping and the beat of a drum. As agent, the healer is, at once, both subject and object (Giddens, 1984, pp. xxvii, 1-14), an 'in itself' for others.

### Acknowledgements

I thank the anonymous reviewers for their useful comments on an earlier draft of the paper, which was presented at the conference on African Ritual and the Environment, Rhodes University, September 2003. I also thank the Curator of Anthropology at the Amathole Museum, Mr Fezile Cindi, for checking the Xhosa orthography.

### About the Author

Manton Hirst holds a doctorate in Anthropology and is an anthropologist at the Amathole Museum in King William's Town in the Eastern Cape. He has a long-standing interest in Xhosa traditional healers and healing. During



the 1970s, he completed an apprenticeship to a Mfengu diviner in Tanti, Grahamstown, and is presently completing the initiation of a Xhosa female novice. In addition to having given numerous talks to medical practitioners and members of the public, he has participated in the Grahamstown Festival Winter School on two occasions and in seminars and workshops with counselling and clinical psychology students and practitioners, as well as with botanists and scientists researching Xhosa medicines, at Rhodes University, Grahamstown and the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, Port Elizabeth. He has also presented a lecture course on the anthropology of the body, focussing on Xhosa traditional healing, for final year anthropology students at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. Dr Hirst has produced a museum display on Xhosa healers and a temporary exhibition on traditional Xhosa religion, and has participated in the production of ethnographic film documentaries dealing with Xhosa song, dance and traditional rituals for South African television and the Institute for Scientific Films in Göttingen, Germany. An International Fellow of the Association of Ethno Medicine and Transcultural Psychiatry (AGEM) in Heidelberg (Germany), he has delivered papers at two international conferences in Germany.

Manton can be contacted at [mantonh@amathole.org.za](mailto:mantonh@amathole.org.za)

### References

- Callaway, C. (1970). *The religious system of the AmaZulu*. Cape Town: Struik.
- De Jager, E. J. & Gitywa, V. Z. (1963). A Xhosa *Umhlayelelo* ceremony in the Ciskei. *African Studies* 22(3), 109-116.
- Freud, S. (1938/1913). The interpretation of dreams. In A. A. Brill (Ed.), *The basic writings of Sigmund Freud* (pp. 181-549). New York: Random House.
- Giddens, A. (1984). *The constitution of society*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Hammond-Tooke, W. D. (1975). The symbolic structure of Cape Nguni cosmology. In M. G. Whisson & M. West (Eds.), *Religion and social change in Southern Africa: Anthropological essays in honour of Monica Wilson* (pp.

The *IPJP* is a joint project of [Rhodes University](http://www.rhodes.ac.za) in South Africa and [Edith Cowan University](http://www.edithcowan.edu.au) in Australia. This document is subject to copyright and may not be reproduced in whole or in part via any medium (print, electronic or otherwise) without the express permission of the publishers.

- 15-33). Cape Town: David Philip.
- Hammond-Tooke, W. D. (Ed.) (1980). *The Bantu-speaking peoples of Southern Africa*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Hammond-Tooke, W. D. (1985). Who worships whom: Agnates and ancestors among Nguni. *African Studies*, 44(1), 47-64.
- Hammond-Tooke, W. D. (2002). The uniqueness of Nguni mediumistic divination in Southern Africa. *Africa*, 72(2), 277-292.
- Harvey, W. H. & Sonder, O. W. (1859-60). *flora Capensis*. Dublin: Hodges, Smith & Co.
- Hirst, M. (1990). *The healer's art: Cape Nguni diviners in the townships of Grahamstown*. Unpublished PhD thesis: Rhodes University, Grahamstown.
- Hirst, M. (1993). The healer's art: Cape Nguni diviners in the townships of Grahamstown, Eastern Cape, South Africa. *Curare*, 16(2), 97-114.
- Hirst, M., Cook, J. & Kahn, M. (1996). Shades, witches and somatisation in the narratives of illness and disorder among the Cape Nguni in the Eastern Cape, South Africa. *Curare*, 19(2), 255-282.
- Hirst, M. (1997). A river of metaphors: Interpreting the Xhosa diviner's myth. In P. McAllister (Ed.), *Culture and the commonplace: Anthropological essays in honour of David Hammond-Tooke* (pp. 217-250). Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press.
- Hirst, M. (2000). Root, dream & myth: The use of the oneirogenic plant *Silene Capensis* among the Xhosa of South Africa. *Eleusis*, 4, 121-149.
- Hoernle, W. (1985). Magic and medicine among the Bantu-speaking peoples of South Africa. In P. Carstens (Ed.), *The social organization of the Nama and other essays* (pp. 126-147). Cape Town: Maskew Miller.
- Hunter, M. (1936). *Reaction to conquest: Effects of contact with Europeans on the Pondo of South Africa*. Oxford University Press.
- Hutchings, A., Scott, A. H., Lewis, G. & Cunningham, A. B. (1996). *Zulu medicinal plants: An inventory*. Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press.
- Jung, C. G. (Ed.) (1964). *Man and his symbols*. London: Aldus Books.
- Kirmayer, L. J. (1984). Culture, affects and somatization. *Transcultural Psychiatric Research Review*, 21, 237-261.
- Kirmayer, L. J. (1989). Cultural variations in the response of psychiatric disorders and emotional distress. *Soc. Sci. Med.* 29(3), 327-339.
- Kleinman, A. (1980). *Patients and healers in the context of culture: An exploration of the borderland between anthropology, medicine, and psychiatry*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Kleinman, A. & Kleinman, J. (1985). Somatization: The interconnections of Chinese society among culture, depressive experiences, and meaning of pain. In A. Kleinman & B. Good (Eds.), *Culture and depression. Studies in the anthropology and cross culture psychiatry of affects and disorder*. London: University of California Press.
- Lewis, I. M. (1971). *Ecstatic religion: An anthropological study of spirit possession and shamanism*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Lichtenstein, H. (1812). *Travels in Southern Africa*. London: Henry Colburn.

- 
- Mayer, P. & Mayer, I. (1974/1961). *Townsmen or tribesmen*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press.
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (1964). *Sense and non-sense*. Northwestern University Press.
- Schutz, A. (1964). Making Music Together. In *The collected papers II, Studies in social theory* (pp. 159-178). The Hague: Nijhoff.
- Seznec, J. (1953/1940). *The survival of the pagan gods*. New York: Harper.
- Sundkler, B. G. M. (1961). *Bantu prophets in South Africa*. London: Oxford University Press.
- West, M. (1975). *Bishops and prophets in a black city: African independent churches in Soweto, Johannesburg*. Cape Town: David Philip.
- Wilson, M. (1982). The Nguni People. In M. Wilson & L. Thompson (Eds.), *A history of South Africa to 1870* (pp. 75-130). Cape Town: David Philip.
-