Credo Mutwa, Zulu Shaman: The Invention and Appropriation of Indigenous Authenticity in African Folk Religion

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How has Vusamazulu Credo Mutwa emerged globally, if not locally, as the supreme bearer of South African indigenous authenticity? Retracing his long journey from Zulu witchdoctor to New Age shaman, I have highlighted Credo Mutwa's ongoing reinvention of himself in relation to different appropriations of his authority. During the 1950s Mutwa was used to authenticate African artifacts for a curio shop in Johannesburg. Through his writings in the 1960s, his tourist attraction in Soweto in the 1970s, and his cultural village in Bophutatswana in the 1980s, he was used to authenticate the racial, cultural, and religious separations of apartheid. During the 1990s, as he acquired the label, shaman, through the interventions of exponents of New Age spirituality, Credo Mutwa's authority was invoked to authenticate a diverse array of enterprises in saving the world from human exploitation, environmental degradation, epidemic illness, endemic ignorance, organized crime, or extraterrestrial conspiracy. In all of these projects, the indigenous authenticity of Credo Mutwa added value because he represented the "pure voice," untainted by modernity, of an unmediated access to primordial truth. Although he has sometimes been accused of being a fake, Credo Mutwa, I argue, has been doing authentic religious work by reformulating enduring motifs of indigenous religion, even when his authenticity is certified by aliens.

Introduction

Attending an international conference on transpersonal psychology in Kyoto, Japan, during 1985, the great Zulu shaman, Credo Vusamazulu Mutwa, began his plenary address by remarking that he was delighted to be among people who

revered mountains because he was so fat that he was often mistaken for a mountain. In this humorous observation, Credo Mutwa indicated not only that he was familiar with a recurring feature of Japanese folk religion but also that he felt a certain sense of solidarity with indigenous Japanese religious life. As he later explained, the Zulu and Japanese languages share many common words. The two languages supposedly have a cognate vocabulary that enabled his wife to communicate effectively by speaking Zulu to Japanese shopkeepers. According to Mutwa, this shared vocabulary ultimately pointed to an underlying commonality of indigenous religion, whether that religion was referred to in Japanese as *Shinto*, "the way of the gods," or in Zulu as *Sintu*, "the way of man." By preserving their indigenous religion, the Japanese had established a model for the Zulu, according to Credo Mutwa, that would "make the black people of our culture as respected and powerful as the Japanese."

As guardian of tribal traditions, Mutwa had the responsibility of preserving the Zulu past. But he also claimed to know the future. At the 1985 conference in Kyoto, Credo Mutwa indicated that the future was in the stars. Asked to explain the significance of a bronze object he wore around his neck, Mutwa recounted that "in Africa we have a tradition that there are extraterrestrial intelligences watching the Earth. Do you not have reports in Japan of what are called 'Flying Saucers' . . . ?" According to Mutwa, aliens from outer space, known in Zulu as *abahambi abavutayo*, the "fiery visitors," featured prominently in the myths and legends of Zulu tradition. With increasing frequency, these extra-terrestrial beings in flying saucers were visiting the Earth. As Mutwa explained the significance of his necklace, "these ritual ornaments are intended so that when one of these vehicles comes to Earth, and extraterrestrial beings, who wish to establish contact with humanity, emerge, they will know the right person to talk to!" By his own account, Credo Mutwa—guardian of Zulu tradition; shaman, teacher, and healer of Africans; and prophet of the world's future—was exactly the right person (Mutwa 1996: xiv, 163, xxix, xv-xvi).

I focus attention on Credo Mutwa to raise a crucial problem in the study of folk religion, the problem of authenticity. I have no intention of solving this problem. Instead, I want to think about some of the processes through which authenticity is produced, appropriated, and mobilized under the sign of folk religion, popular religion, or indigenous religion. In other words, I want to highlight the dilemma of artificial authenticity in the study of folk religion.

Although folk religion might be regarded as a residual category, designating relations with gods, spirits, and sacred places that are left over when "world religions" have been factored out of the religious landscape, the very category of folk religion was produced out of a range of intellectual interests in the authenticity of the primitive, the savage, or the exotic. As historian of religions Charles Long has demonstrated, the notion of folk, popular, or indigenous religion has carried an aura of authenticity because it evokes the organic religious life of the

rural peasantry rather than the urban citizenry, the lower class rather than the elite, the ordinary people rather than the clergy (Long 1995). In the process of its production as a category, however, folk religion was appropriated, reproduced, and arguably reinvented by urban, literate elites within modern societies to lend an aura of authenticity to emerging nationalisms. These "invented traditions" transformed folklore into "fakelore" in the service of national interests.[1]

In the study of religion, we occasionally have to confront outright frauds. During the eighteenth century in London, for example, the literary conman, George Psalmanaazaar, produced an entirely fake account of the society, culture, and religion of the island of Formosa. As anthropologist Rodney Needham argued, the temporary success of this fraud can be explained by the fact that Psalmanaazaar managed to make his fake account of the religion of Formosa look very much like a recognizable religion, or at least a religion that would fit expectations of an "exotic" religion among his readers in England (Needham 1985: 75-116; see Stewart 1991: 31-65). Such productions of authenticity require a careful mediation between extraordinary accounts, which cannot be independently confirmed or disconfirmed, and ordinary expectations about the primitive, the savage, or the exotic. In this work of mediation, successful frauds in the study of religion have acted as intercultural brokers speaking in the name of silent partners who bear the burden of authenticity. In some cases, these intercultural mediations of authenticity are relatively easy to expose as fraudulent, as in Eugen Herrigel's (1953) representations of the Zen Master Kenzo Awa (see Needham 1985: 188-218) or Carlos Castenada's (1968) account of the Yaqui shaman Don Juan Matus (see De Mille 1978; 1980). Both are transparently fake. In other instances, however, the mutual complicity of reporter and informant in the production of indigenous authenticity has made the exposure of fraud extremely difficult if not impossible. If we critically review the exchanges between John Neihardt (1961) and Black Elk or between Marcel Griaule (1975) and Ogotemelli, for example, we have to conclude that these accounts of indigenous religion were produced out of specific intercultural mediations rather than through any extraordinary, unmediated access to authentic Sioux or Dogon religion (see Arnold 1999; Van Beek 1991).

Against this background, Credo Mutwa poses an extremely difficult problem. Speaking for himself, as well as for Africa, Credo Mutwa asserts an indigenous authenticity that has been acknowledged all over the world. In his native South Africa, however, he has often been described in the popular media as a fake, a fraud, and a charlatan. "He has been called an old fraud, a charlatan," as journalist Angela Johnson observed (Johnson 1997). Alluding to Mutwa's complicity with apartheid, the apartheid regime of the National Party, and apartheid structures of South African Bantustans, journalist Hazel Friedman reported that Credo Mutwa has been widely regarded as "a charlatan and opportunist who consorted with the enemy" (Friedman 1997). Within South Africa, therefore,

Credo Mutwa has not always represented indigenous authenticity. In fact, when he has not been entirely ignored, Mutwa has primarily appeared in popular media stories about his failed predictions as a false prophet who nevertheless continues to predict the future. But how does such a fake produce real effects in the real world? How has Credo Mutwa emerged globally, if not locally, as the supreme bearer of South African indigenous authenticity?

As we will see, during the 1990s Credo Mutwa was celebrated not only as a Zulu shaman but also as an environmentalist, healer, prophet, teacher, and authority on aliens from outer space. The new religious space opened up by the Internet has been crucial to this development. On his own website, he appears in cyberspace as "Credo Mutwa, A Small Ray of Hope for Africa" (Mutwa 2001). On many other websites, however, he appears as one of the world's most important shamans, the High Sanusi of the Zulu nation of South Africa. In what follows, I review the historical production of this indigenous authenticity.

African Origins

Born in 1921 in the South African province of Natal, Credo Mutwa grew up in a household that was religiously divided between his father's Roman Catholicism and his mother's adherence to African traditional religion. In 1935 his father converted to Christian Science, the American church founded in the nineteenth century by Mary Baker Eddy, who understood God as "Divine Mind" responsible for healing the body, mind, and spirit. Undergoing a serious illness, Mutwa was forbidden conventional medicine in keeping with the avoidance of modern medical practice among Christian Scientists. Instead, his father read to him from the book, *Science and Health*, by the "American holy woman" (Mutwa 1996: 3). Rejecting his father's "holy woman," Mutwa turned to his mother's family during his crisis. Under their tutelage, he learned that his illness was not an illusion, as the teachings of Christian Science held, but an entry into a new and special role within African indigenous religion. As Mutwa later recalled, his initiatory sickness signaled his calling to become a *sangoma*, an indigenous healer, diviner, and seer.

In 1954 Credo Mutwa found employment in a curio shop in Johannesburg that specialized in providing African artifacts for the tourist market. Mutwa's employer, A. S. Watkinson, relied upon him to authenticate these objects of African art. Besides developing detailed interpretations of the meaning of African artifacts, Mutwa emerged as a gifted and imaginative storyteller, recounting elaborate tales that he insisted were drawn from the authentic repository of Zulu tribal history, legends, customs, and religious beliefs. Sponsored by Watkinson and edited by A. S. Brink, an academic with the Institute for the Study of Man in Africa at the University of the Witwatersrand, a collection of Credo Mutwa's stories was published in 1964 under the title, *Indaba, My Children*. A second

volume, *Africa Is My Witness*, was published in 1966. As editor Brink explained, the term, *indaba*, referred to a Zulu tribal council at which different views were presented "to have their authenticity or acceptability evaluated." Ostensibly, therefore, Mutwa's stories were presented to the reading public to test their authenticity. In making such an assessment, however, the historical and ethnographic record provided no help, since the wild, extravagant, and imaginative poetry and prose of these texts bore little if any relation to anything previously recorded in print about Zulu religion. Nevertheless, rendering his own judgment, Brink advised that these tales were authentic because they revealed the "strange workings of the mind of the African" (Mutwa 1964: xv; 1966: i). Three decades later, reviewing the British republication of *Indaba, My Children*, Randolph Vigne could only agree that the entire point of Credo Mutwa's account of Zulu tradition seemed to be "to project an African culture wholly alien to and unassimilable with any other, least of all that of the Europe-descended millions who share South Africa" (Vigne 1999).

This construction of indigenous authenticity certainly fits with the tribalism of apartheid during the 1950s and 1960s. Under the auspices of its policy of separate development, the ruling National Party tried to create new African nations, with their own traditions, histories, languages, cultures, and religions, which would reinforce the establishment of separate homelands or Bantustans that were geographically within the territory of South Africa but legally outside of the Republic of South Africa. In the case of Zulu nationalism, the Department of Native Affairs, under the direction of apartheid ideologue H. F. Verwoerd and anthropologist W. M. Eiselen, sponsored the first Shaka Day in 1954 to celebrate Zulu tradition. They convinced the Zulu King Cyprian to dress up in a traditional costume of leather loin covering, leopard skin, feathers and beads that neither Cyprian nor his father, King Solomon, had ever worn before. For this recovery of tradition, they had to refer to an illustrated book about Africans that had been published in 1855 (Klopper 1989; Chidester 1992: 204-212). In this context, indigenous authenticity was constructed as a tribal continuity with a traditional past that allegedly prevented Africans from integrating into modern South Africa.

Although Credo Mutwa has claimed to have an "unashamedly unpoliticized conscience," his writings in the 1960s clearly reinforced apartheid, a political system that legally excluded all black Africans from citizenship within the Republic of South Africa, but incorporated them as exploitable labor (Friedman 1997). Like the architects of apartheid in the National Party, Mutwa argued that apartheid was not racial discrimination but racial separation that was consistent with divine and natural law. "Discrimination is to distinguish and decide which is best," Mutwa wrote. "Apartheid is to distinguish without deciding which is best." Insisting that Africans in South Africa actually wanted apartheid and were not interested in equal rights, Mutwa declared, "Apartheid is the High Law of

the Gods! It is the highest law of nature!" Racial integration, according to Mutwa, "is as abhorrent as extermination." Praising H. F. Verwoerd, who by then had become president of South Africa, Credo Mutwa maintained that the "White men of South Africa are only too right when they wish to preserve their purebred racial identity. And what is good enough for them is good enough for us, the Bantu. . . . Separate Development . . . is the clearest hope that the Bantu have thus far had." Under apartheid, Verwoerd's National Party promised to protect independent African homelands from "Communists or militant Bantu rebellion-mongers" such as the African National Congress (ANC) (Mutwa 1966: 318, 319, 323). Into the 1980s, Mutwa continued to lend his support to the apartheid regime, even writing the foreword to a book published in 1989 arguing that the United States should not impose sanctions on South Africa. Instead, the U.S. should embrace South Africa and consider making the country its fifty-first state. As he argued in the 1960s, Mutwa insisted that such protection would save Africans from communists, militants, or rebels such as "the ANC terrorists" (Mutwa 1989: 13). Under the apartheid regime of the 1960s or the neo-apartheid regime of the 1980s, Credo Mutwa was only concerned that Africans should be free to preserve their distinctive tribal customs and their traditional way of life.

In his publications of the 1960s, Credo Mutwa declared himself the guardian of Zulu tribal tradition. Referring to himself as a Zulu witchdoctor, Mutwa related a bewildering array of traditional tales, which Mutwa himself characterized as "a strange mixture of truth and nonsense," showing a remarkable facility of literary invention. Mutwa's presentation drew its authority from a careful balance of transparency and secrecy. On the one hand, Mutwa claimed that he was relating common African folk traditions, the familiar "stories that old men and old women tell to boys and girls seated with open mouths around the spark-wreathed fire in the center of the villages in the dark forests and on the aloe-scented plains of Africa." If this assertion were true, then the authenticity of these stories could presumably be confirmed by every African man, woman, and child. On the other hand, Mutwa claimed to be relating secrets that were only revealed during the initiation of a witchdoctor. "If ever you pass what you are about to be told today on to the ears of the aliens," his instructor had warned him during his own initiation, "a curse shall fall upon you." By publishing these stories, including a word-for-word account of all the secrets conveyed during his initiation, Credo Mutwa had clearly broken his sacred tribal oath of secrecy. As Mutwa put it, he had made a "terrible choice to betray my High Oath as a Chosen One." Although this betrayal apparently violated the dual source of his authority—shared tradition, secret initiation—Credo Mutwa nevertheless asserted his role as traitor as if it underwrote the authenticity of his accounts of Zulu folk religion (Mutwa 1964: 429, xiii, 455; 1966: vii).

In the 1960s, calling himself a Zulu witchdoctor, Credo Mutwa traced his lineage back to his maternal grandfather, who served as the "High Witchdoctor"

under the Zulu King Cetshwayo (c.1836-1884). During the 1990s, biographies of Credo Mutwa traced his lineage back to his great-grandfather, the High Sanusi of Zulu King Dingaan (c.1745-1840), and observed that in 1963 Credo Mutwa had been "officially declared" or "officially proclaimed" the High Sanusi of the Zulu people (Ringing Rocks Foundation 2001a; Payback Press 2001). As Mutwa noted in 1964, the term, *sanusi*, which designated an "Unmarried High Witchdoctor," was etymologically related to the Sanskrit *sanyassin*, an "Unmarried Holy Man" (1964: 439). Nevertheless, he eventually appropriated this title for an inherited role transmitted from his maternal grandfather. Although the "official" structures through which this title was bestowed upon Credo Mutwa have never been specified, in 1963 they could only have been official apartheid structures, such as the Department of Native Affairs, which was busy installing new chiefs and traditional leaders for the Bantustans. Unlike the public declaration of Shaka Day in 1954, however, there is no evidence of any public ceremony proclaiming Credo Mutwa as the High Sanusi of the Zulu people. Instead, capitalizing on his reputation as an author and building on the authority of his texts, Mutwa found a public role in South Africa as an African tourist attraction.

Culture and Nature

During the 1970s, Credo Mutwa was employed by the South African National Parks Board as the attendant of a traditional African tourist village located in the black township of Soweto outside of Johannesburg. Designed for the entertainment of foreign visitors, this display of authentic African religion, culture, and traditions was generally ignored by Africans. Above the entrance, Mutwa inscribed the warning: "ALL LIARS, ATHEISTS, SKEPTICS AND FOOLS MUST PLEASE KEEP OUT!" As journalist Joseph Lelyveld observed, anyone who passed through the entrance found "a shrine that seemed to derive its inspiration partly from the cult of the avenging Hindu goddess Kali and partly from Disney World" (1986: 249). Struck by the eclectic and idiosyncratic symbolism on display, Lelyveld called into question the authenticity of this tourist attraction. Like his writings, Mutwa's African village in Soweto evoked the strangeness of Africa. During the black-consciousness uprising of 1976, African students attacked Credo Mutwa's shrine, burning its huts, carvings, and other artifacts, because they saw his tourist village as promoting the tribalism of apartheid and separate development. Although Mutwa eventually had to abandon his shrine and leave Soweto in 1978, the Credo Mutwa Village remained on the tourist itinerary into the 1990s, with its burned and blackened features, as one tourist agency declared, "lending the village an eerie atmosphere" (Excite 2001).

During the 1980s, Credo Mutwa established a larger and more ambitious tourist attraction within the South African Bantustan of Bophutatswana, an African nation that was not recognized by any other nation in the world, except by

the apartheid regime in South Africa. At Lotlamoreng Dam Cultural Park, beginning in 1983, Mutwa supervised the construction of small adobe villages, each representing the traditional culture of one of South Africa's tribal African peoples. Traditional villages were built for Tswana, Zulu, Ndebele, Xhosa, and Southern Sotho groups. Around these displays, Mutwa erected clay statues of African deities, most prominently a twenty-foot tall African goddess. Praising Lucas Mangope, the president of Bophuthatswana, Credo Mutwa declared that "Anyone who gives me the opportunity to rebuild the African past knows what he is doing" (Republic of Bophuthatswana 1987: 19). Following the first democratic elections of 1994 and the reincorporation of Bophuthatswana into South Africa, the cultural park was deemed to belong to the National Parks Board. Credo Mutwa was expelled. By August 1995, as anthropologists Jean and John Comaroff found, the cultural village had become an informal settlement in which people lived in and around the various tribal displays (1997: 1-5).

Moving to the Eastern Cape, Credo Mutwa was employed by the Shamwari Game Reserve, near Port Elizabeth, where he sold African artifacts, such as sacred necklaces, headdresses, icons, and implements used in rituals. "In the Zulu tradition," according to the publicity for the reserve, "each of these artifacts must be kept alive by being used in a sacred way on a regular basis" (Ringing Rocks Foundation 2001b). Accordingly, Credo Mutwa was charged with the responsibility of performing the rituals that would keep these objects alive for the tourist market. In addition to authenticating African artifacts, Mutwa presided over a traditional African Arts and Culture Village, Khaya Lendaba, the "Place of Enlightening Talk," which was next to the Shamwari Born Free Conservation and Education Center. Even without Credo Mutwa, this combination of indigenous African culture and nature continued to attract foreign tourists.

Although he left under uncertain circumstances, the merger of culture and nature at Shamwari defined a new role for Credo Mutwa as an indigenous environmentalist. In August 1997, Mutwa received the Audi Terra Nova Award for his contribution to wildlife conservation at the Shamwari Game Reserve. The patron of the award, the conservationist Ian Player, identified Credo Mutwa as the "sole surviving Sanusi, the highest grade of spiritual healer" (Audi 1997). As this indigenous authority was appropriated by conservationists, Mutwa lent his support to various environmental causes. During 1997, Credo Mutwa spoke at the sixth international Whale and Dolphin conference, sponsored by the International Cetacean Education Research Centre, in Queensland, Australia, relating African traditions about the special relationship between Africans and whales and dolphins (Dolphin Society 1997). During 1999, he spoke at the Living Lakes Conference, sponsored by the U.S. Forest Service at the Mono Lake Visitor's Center, Lee Vining, California, recounting indigenous African traditions about sacred lakes (Mutwa 1999). Proponents of animal rights found in Credo Mutwa an indigenous African defender of animals. "Apartheid is dead," he ob-

served, but 'separatism' is alive and well," an apartheid-like separation between human beings and animals (Mutwa 1997). For environmentalists, conservationists, and animal-rights activists, therefore, Credo Mutwa lent an aura of authenticity that could be appropriated in the service of a variety of popular causes.

During the 1990s, the new medium of the Internet changed the terrain for promoting cultural tourism. While an announcement was made in 2001 that Credo Mutwa, the "visionary behind the venture," planned to construct a new cultural village, Kwavezitemba, featuring a Zulu hut, a Pedi-Tswana hut, a Dokodo healing hut, and a Digoja-Star hut, he had already established a prominent place in cyberspace (Healing Touch Partnerships 2001). For example, Mutwa's account of Zulu traditions was featured on the Kwa-Natal Tourism site; his explanation of the meaning of indigenous symbolism featured on a site, "Living Symbols of Africa," that exported a range of African artifacts (Global Trade Centre 2001); and his artwork decorated TheAfrican.Com, the "website of the African diaspora," which claimed two patrons, the ancient Egyptian hawk-deity Heru and the Yoruba deity Shango, who were depicted on the website in a painting by "His Holiness Credo Mutwa, Zulu Sanussi [sic] of South Africa" (African.Com 2001). In these sites on the Internet, Mutwa's indigenous authenticity was employed to invite tourists to South Africa and to sell tourist artifacts from South Africa. As indicated by the website of TheAfrican.Com, Credo's Mutwa's indigenous authenticity had become global on the Internet as he provided religious legitimation for an indigenous culture supposedly shared by Africans all over the world. Although he had presided over a series of failed cultural villages in South Africa, Credo Mutwa now played an important role in a new global cultural village on the Internet.

Indigenous Knowledge

At the heart of his claim to authenticity, Credo Mutwa insisted that he possessed specialized indigenous knowledge that could be used in healing, divination, education, and social transformation. Following the democratic elections of 1994, the new government in South Africa supported a number of initiatives that involved recovering "indigenous knowledge systems" as the basis for an African Renaissance (Makgoba 1999). Throughout Africa, largely in response to the AIDS pandemic, new interest was shown in the indigenous knowledge and human resources of traditional healers. At a meeting of traditional healers and representatives of the World Health Organization held in 1997 in Kampala, Uganda, Credo Mutwa defended the importance of indigenous knowledge about healing in Africa. Recognition of indigenous healers by the WHO, Mutwa proposed, "will show the scientists that our people are not just a bunch of superstitious savages. If the world accepts many of our herbal medicines, this will help to ensure the survival of our traditional healers" (Cohen 1997). At the thirteenth

International AIDS Conference, meeting in Durban, South Africa, in 2000, Credo Mutwa appeared wearing a sacred healing necklace. As a member of the executive committee of the Nyangazizwe Traditional Healers Organisation of South Africa, Mutwa promoted the use of an indigenous herb, *Sutherlandia* (*Kankerbos*, in Afrikaans), as a cure for AIDS. Instead of relying upon expensive foreign pharmaceuticals, medical practitioners could find an effective treatment in South Africa. "It's there in the violated plains of my fatherland," Credo Mutwa declared. "It is being ploughed up as a weed" (*Cape Times* 15 March 2001). Like this indigenous herb, traditional healers were generally being ignored by the scientific medical profession in South Africa.

Alternative medicine, including spiritual healing, is a central preoccupation of New Age spirituality. Under the editorship of Bradford P. Keeney, who has been described as a psychologist, medicine man, and shaman, a book on the healing wisdom of Credo Mutwa was published in the United States in the series, "Profiles in Healing" (Keeney 2001). Keeney apparently recommended Mutwa to the attention of the directors of the Ringing Rocks Foundation, which was established in Philadelphia in 1995 with the mission "to explore, document, and preserve indigenous cultures and their healing practices." As its first project, the foundation decided to sponsor Credo Mutwa with a lifetime stipend that would "allow this treasure to live out his days free to create as he chooses." Recognizing him as the High Sanusi of the Zulu, the foundation bestowed another title upon Credo Mutwa, Ringing Rocks Foundation's "Distinguished Artist and Teacher of African Traditional Culture." On the foundation's website, Mutwa would be given space to transmit his indigenous knowledge to others. The directors of the foundation seemed to imagine their website as the culmination of Mutwa's long career of establishing cultural villages in South Africa since they intended to compile a retrospective profile of those sites on the website. "We hope to spend time with him at each of the sites he has built," they stated, "recording through pictures and his own words the background for his cultural and healing villages" (Ringing Rocks Foundation 2001a). Although he had no secure place in South Africa, the Ringing Rocks Foundation in the United States promised to provide Credo Mutwa with a healing center in cyberspace.

In keeping with the eclecticism of New Age spirituality, the African healing practiced by Credo Mutwa was equated with the healing systems of other indigenous cultures. Increasingly, he operated at the intersection of African and Native American traditions. In 1997, for example, Credo Mutwa, the "well-known Zulu prophet," and Roy Little Sun, a Native American healer who had been born in Indonesia as Roy Steevenz, but was reportedly adopted by the Hopi, performed a ceremony entitled, "Healing the African Wound." At the Wonderboom, the "Tree of Life," in Pretoria, these indigenous healers took two feathers, one from an American golden eagle representing the sky, the other from an African guinea fowl representing the earth, and tied them together to signify

the healing of Africa through the sacred union of earth and sky, indigenous Africa and Native America. Unfortunately, since they included the feather of an endangered species, the healing feathers were confiscated by U.S. custom officials at the Atlanta airport when Roy Little Sun returned to America. Although his campaign to recover the feathers, including appeals to President Bill Clinton, failed to secure their return, Roy Little Sun returned to South Africa for another ceremony in 2000 to reaffirm the healing connection between the indigenous people of America and Africa (Healing the African Wound 2001; *Sunday Times* 21 November 1999).

The indigenous authenticity represented by this fusion of African and Native American spirituality was also attractive to some white South Africans. During 2001, for example, a New Age event in the Eastern Cape of South Africa was advertised as "A Tribal Gathering," not a gathering of indigenous African tribes, but a festival attracting primarily white South African enthusiasts for Native American spirituality. Living in a Tipi Circle, participants at this gathering would celebrate Mother Earth, enter a Sweat Lodge, and perform the ceremonies of the Medicine Wheel. Promising that African ritual specialists, *sangomas*, from the local village would also visit the gathering, the advertising for the event certified the merger of African and Native American spirituality by featuring a photograph of Credo Mutwa at the Medicine Wheel (Rustlers 2001). In the United States, New Age enthusiasts tended to assume the basic equivalence of all indigenous spirituality. For example, the Heart Healing Center in Denver, Colorado, hosted a conference in 2001 of "Indigenous Earth Healers." At this gathering of indigenous healers from all over the world, Africa was represented by the High Sanusi of the Zulu, Credo Mutwa. Unable to attend in person, Mutwa was replaced on the program by his student, C. J. Hood, a "white Zulu" from Port Elizabeth in the Eastern Cape, who played a videotaped message by Credo Mutwa and performed a traditional Zulu dance. Praising his Zulu teacher, Hood declared that "Credo Mutwa will go down in history as a man who was able to bridge a gap between white and black South Africans and start a healing process." By invoking the indigenous authenticity of the Zulu healer, C. J. Hood was able to find a New Age audience in the United States for his message, as reported in the *Wellness eJournal*, "Respect all that is around us, accept all cultures as they are, and go back to our traditions" (Castillo 2001; Heart Healing Center 2001; Wellness 2001).

Back home in South Africa, new applications were being discovered for African indigenous knowledge. As a prophet, seer, and master of African techniques of divination, Credo Mutwa remained a target of ridicule in the popular press. "Soothsayer Credo Mutwa got it wrong last year," as the *Sunday Times* observed in January 2000, a feature discrediting the prophet that seemed to run at the beginning of every year (*Sunday Times* 2 January 2000). Nevertheless, Mutwa lent his credibility to divination workshops, often designed for business

executives, to teach indigenous African techniques for contacting and communicating with ancestors, divining through mediumship or sacred objects, and making long term regional and global predications (Cnoop 2001). Mutwa's authority was invoked in other ventures in business, education, and even crime prevention. The Boitjhorisong Research Centre, "a place to sharpen one's life skills," advertised its courses by featuring hieroglyphics adapted from *Indaba, My Children*, for "future, watch, and respect." African Media University, a new venture in Internet education, announced in 1999 that Credo Mutwa had "teamed up with the university to create a new subject called African Humanics" (*Daily Dispatch* 7 June 1999). In Johannesburg and Cape Town, new projects in crime prevention also drew upon the authority of Credo Mutwa. The Khulisa pilot project, a rehabilitation program in Johannesburg started in September 1997 by Leslie Ann Tintinger of Mass Media Marketing, advertised the collaboration of Credo Mutwa in developing educational programs for parolees from Leeuwkop prison. As Tintinger explained, "Our inspiration is our belief that juvenile prisoners can be rehabilitated by discovering their golden self within" (*Sunday Times* 28 June 1998; *Mail and Guardian* 14 August 1998). In 2000, criminologist Don Pinnock started a project—*Usiko*, a term for indigenous African rituals—to rehabilitate gangsters. Determining that criminal gangs were basically ritual organizations, with their distinctive rites of passage, Pinnock enlisted the help of Credo Mutwa to devise alternative rituals for initiating gangsters into "richer, more ritual-filled gang-like groups" (Pinnock 2000). In all of these ventures, the indigenous authenticity of Credo Mutwa was appropriated to establish the validity of specific projects. Whatever its origins, Mutwa's indigenous authenticity became a valuable commodity in local and global projects in the construction of alternative realities.

Alien Encounters

In his writings of the early 1960s, Credo Mutwa referred to "aliens" and "the Strange Ones" who came from outside of Africa. Beginning with the ancient Phoencians, the "Strange Ones" arrived in unfamiliar ships from unknown lands across the sea. European colonizers, also referred to as the "Strange Ones," had established alien empires in Africa. In the postcolonial era, as Mutwa advised, Africans had to resist the "schemes of the Strange Ones," which included communism and parliamentary democracy, but apparently not the divine and natural law of apartheid, by maintaining indigenous African traditions (1964: 559). In these terms, indigenous authenticity was established in opposition to the aliens and Strange Ones who came from outside of Africa.

During the 1990s, however, Credo Mutwa used the term, "aliens," for beings from outer space, those extraterrestrials that supposedly featured prominently in African myths, legends, and traditions. According to Mutwa, Africans have long

known about many species of extraterrestrials. Some are evil, bringing harm to human beings, such as the *Muhondoruka*, fifteen-foot high, cylindrical, column-like creatures who cause violence, or the *Mutende-ya-ngenge* (also known as *Sekgotswana* or *Puhwana*), green creatures, with large heads, chalk-white faces, and large green eyes, who capture people, cut them up, and put them back together again. The most dangerous aliens, however, were the *Mantindane*, who are "star monkeys" and "tormenters," the powerful extraterrestrial reptiles known as the *Chitauri*, and the *Greys*, the small servants of the *Chitauri*. The *Chitauri's* evil schemes to harm humanity included supporting institutionalized religions. "They like religious fanatics," he observed. "Ones who are burdened with too much religion are very popular with the *Chitauri*" (Martin 1999). Working through institutionalized religions, the evil *Chitauri* seek to divide and conquer human beings.

By contrast to these dangerous aliens, other extraterrestrials are good. The *Mvonjina* are three-feet high creatures, looking like a "caricature of a white person," who act as "a messenger of the gods" by bringing knowledge to humanity. Other races of beneficent extraterrestrials frequently appearing in Africa included the friendly *Sikasa*, the timid *Mmkungateka*, the beloved *Nafu*, and the ape-like *Mbembi*. Besides trying to communicate with human beings, these aliens from outer space have often mated with African women. "There have been many women throughout Africa in various centuries who have attested to the fact that they have been fertilized by strange creatures from somewhere" (Mutwa 1996: 152). Although apartheid had criminalized interracial relations in South Africa, aliens from outer space were apparently engaging in interspecies sexual relations throughout Africa.

By his own account, Credo Mutwa has experienced many encounters with extraterrestrial beings. As early as 1951, in what is now Botswana, he witnessed a falling star, a strange vehicle in the sky, and two alien creatures disappearing into the spaceship. In the bush where the spaceship had landed, these aliens had left behind extraterrestrial rubbish. Along with the local people who witnessed this event, Mutwa made sure that the rubbish was buried. "That is the African tradition," he explained (Mutwa 1996: 135). He also encountered a variety of aliens from outer space in Kenya, Zimbabwe, and Zambia during his travels in the 1950s. Besides seeing extraterrestrials, he also claimed to have eaten them, describing the smell and taste of their cooked flesh. According to Credo Mutwa, the ritual consumption of extraterrestial flesh was common in Africa, sometimes causing severe illness, but sometimes resulting in mind-altering experiences of great beauty, harmony, and transcendence.

Visiting what is now Zimbabwe in 1959, however, Credo Mutwa underwent his most dramatic encounter with extraterrestrials. While digging for medicinal herbs, he was suddenly confronted by five "little fellows," strange, unfamiliar beings, small dull-gray creatures, with large heads, but thin arms and legs, who

captured him and took him to a metallic room, shaped like a tunnel, where they probed and tested his body. The aliens then forced him to have sex with a female of their species, an experience that Mutwa reported as cold, clinical, and humiliating. "I felt like a victim at a sacrifice," he recalled (Mutwa 1996: 142). After this ordeal, he was deposited back on earth, with his clothing torn, only to discover that he had been missing for three days.

Based on these encounters, Credo Mutwa emerged as an authority on extraterrestrial beings. In a book on alien abductions, Professor John Mack of Harvard University devoted a chapter to Credo Mutwa's meetings with beings from outer space. Although he recounted his humiliating treatment by his extraterrestrial tormenters, Mutwa stressed the positive potential of human exchanges with aliens. "I just get furious," he declared, "because the people from the stars are trying to give us knowledge, but we are too stupid" (Mack 1999: 198-218). As confirmation of his global recognition as an authority on aliens from other worlds, Credo Mutwa was invited to deliver the keynote address at an international "Conference on Extraterrestrial Intelligence" in Australia during March 2001.

In establishing Credo Mutwa as an African authority on extraterrestrials, the New Age conspiracy theorist, David Icke, played a significant role. A former sports broadcaster in Great Britain, Icke developed a distinctive blend of personal spirituality and political paranoia that he promoted through books, public lectures, and an elaborate website. Although he seemed to embrace every conspiracy theory, David Icke identified the central, secret conspiracy ruling the world as the work of shape-shifting reptilians from outer space. As Icke revealed in his book, *The Biggest Secret*, these extraterrestrial reptiles interbred with human beings, establishing a lineage that could be traced through the pharaohs of ancient Egypt, the Merovingian dynasty of medieval Europe, the British royal family, and every president of the United States. Although they plotted behind the scenes in the secret society of the Illuminati, the aliens of these hybrid bloodlines were in prominent positions of royal, political, and economic power all over the world. Occasionally shifting into their lizard-like form, these aliens maintained a human appearance by regularly drinking human blood, which they acquired by performing rituals of human sacrifice. In *The Biggest Secret*, David Icke invoked the indigenous African authority of Credo Mutwa to confirm this conspiracy theory about blood-drinking, shape-shifting reptiles from outer space. Reportedly, Mutwa declared, "To know the Illuminati, Mr. David, you must study the reptile" (Icke 2001; see Icke 1999). In two videos produced and distributed by David Icke, "The Reptilian Agenda: Volumes 1 and 2," Credo Mutwa confirmed that extraterrestrials, the *Chitauri*, were a shape-shifting reptilian race that has controlled humanity for thousands of years. Icke and Mutwa appeared together on a popular American radio program, "Sightings," to explain the alien reptile conspiracy. In his lectures in the United States, Icke insisted that Credo Mutwa provided proof for his conspiracy theory, as one observer noted, in the

"pure voice of a primitive belief system" (Molloy 1999). In Credo Mutwa, therefore, David Icke found indigenous authentication for an alien conspiracy.

Folk Religion, Fake Religion

In retracing his long journey from Zulu witchdoctor to New Age shaman, I have highlighted Credo Mutwa's ongoing reinvention of himself in relation to different appropriations of his authority. As we have seen, during the 1950s Mutwa was used to authenticate African artifacts for a curio shop in Johannesburg. Through his writings in the 1960s, his tourist attraction in Soweto in the 1970s, and his cultural village in Bophutatswana in the 1980s, he was used to authenticate the racial, cultural, and religious separations of apartheid. During the 1990s, as he acquired the label, shaman, through the interventions of Bradford Keeney, Stephen Larsen, David Icke, and other exponents of New Age spirituality, Credo Mutwa's authority was invoked to authenticate a diverse array of enterprises in saving the world from human exploitation, environmental degradation, epidemic illness, endemic ignorance, organized crime, or extraterrestrial conspiracy. In all of these projects, the indigenous authenticity of Credo Mutwa added value, credibility, and force because he represented the "pure voice," untainted by modernity, of an unmediated access to primordial truth.

As I have tried to suggest, this assumption about Credo Mutwa's indigenous authenticity is problematic because of the very history through which that aura of authenticity was produced. Unfamiliar with the details of that history, Mutwa's supporters have transformed his weaknesses into strengths. For example, Credo Mutwa has been enthusiastically promoted by the African-American feminist Luisah Teish, who has her own website, *Jambalaya Spirit*, celebrating feminist myths and rituals. According to Teish, Credo Mutwa provides access to "authentic material from an elder, a wise man, a medicine man of the Zulu culture!" Mutwa's authenticity is certified, in Teish's view, by the purity of his poetics and politics. In his storytelling, she observes, Mutwa conveys "real knowledge about South Africa that was not polluted by some anthropologist's opinion" (Teish 1996: ix). Of course, Mutwa's accounts of traditional Zulu symbols, myths, legends, rituals, customs, and traditions might be unpolluted by any anthropological opinion, bearing no relation to any historical or ethnographic account, because he invented them. Not only an inventive poet and narrator of fiction, Mutwa is an accomplished playwright, featuring in the history of black theater in South Africa (Kavanagh 1981; Mngadi 1994). Although Teish wanted to suggest that Mutwa's accounts were pure because they were untainted by foreign anthropological interference, she might just as well have argued that his accounts were pure because they were purely fictional inventions.

At the same time, Teish praised Credo Mutwa for the purity of his politics, locating him at the forefront of the struggle against apartheid, even suggesting

that such an indigenous African religious vision was necessary for "filling out and complementing Mandela's political journey with Mutwa's mythology" (Teish 1996: ix). Again, as we have seen, from the 1960s through the 1980s, Credo Mutwa opposed Mandela's African National Congress as terrorists, communists, and "Bantu rebellion-mongers." By positioning Mandela and Mutwa as if they were complementary, Luisah Teish substantially misrepresented the history through which Credo Mutwa's authenticity had been produced as an adjunct of apartheid. Mutwa's mythology, therefore, cannot be seen as complementing Mandela's struggle for political liberation from apartheid oppression. Like other appropriations of his indigenous authenticity, this celebration of the poetics and politics of Credo Mutwa erased the entangled details of his history in the interest of isolating him as the living embodiment of an eternal, timeless African tradition.

These appropriations of Credo Mutwa, I would like to propose, raise important problems for any assessment of authenticity in the study of folk religion. In conclusion, I would like to highlight only two issues that require further reflection as we wrestle with the ordeal of authenticity. Let us say, for the sake of argument, that Credo Mutwa is a fake, a fraud, and a charlatan, as the South African media would have it, rather than the authentic voice of indigenous African religion as he appears in cyberspace. Even if he is a fake, we are still faced with the problem of analyzing what Credo Mutwa has really been doing in the field of indigenous African folk religion. Even a fake, as I will suggest in conclusion, can be doing something authentic.

First, even if fake, a fake religion can draw upon recurring, enduring motifs of indigenous folk religion. Folk religion is often assumed to be timeless, deriving its authenticity from the faithful repetition of discourses and practices that have persisted from time immemorial. Like any form of religious life, however, folk religion has reformers, reformulators, and innovators. Credo Mutwa, it might be argued, is precisely such an innovator in African folk religion. Like the eighteenth-century English poet William Blake, who adapted recurring pagan and Christian mythic motifs to create his own innovative, creative, and idiosyncratic religious mythology, Credo Mutwa has drawn upon recurring patterns and processes of indigenous African religious life to produce an innovative mythology that ranges from the original earth goddess to the ultimate encounters of human beings with aliens from outer space. Certainly, neither the goddess nor the extraterrestrials in this mythology simply preserve African folk religion. Instead, against the background of an indigenous religious landscape, these mythological inventions create new possibilities for African religion in the contemporary world. During the 1990s, widespread enthusiasm for these inventions has been evident on the Internet. In cyberspace, any line that might divide folk religion from fake religion has been blurred. As a religious figure representing both indigenous authenticity and innovative applications, Credo Mutwa is perfectly suited, even if he is a fake, for playing a significant role in the emerging productions of

different forms of folk religion of the Internet.

Second, even if fake, a fake religion can do real religious work by establishing the kinds of relations among superhuman beings, subhuman beings, and human beings that are worked out in any folk religion. In the case of Credo Mutwa, these classifications have been central to his ongoing creative work in redefining African indigenous religion. As a religious innovator, he has constantly called attention to the importance of these basic classifications not by reifying them but by emphasizing the creative exchanges among them. Although the basic distinction among superhuman deities, subhuman animals, and human beings might seem stable, Mutwa has always worked to put those fundamental classifications at risk. Speaking at the Whale and Dolphin Conference in Australia in 1997, for example, he urged his listeners to rethink these classifications.

> Some time during the long journey of human history, there comes a time when human beings must stop thinking like animals, must stop thinking like perishable beings, must stop thinking out of greed, fear and ignorance. The time has come for all of us to think like Gods, to act like Gods, to speak like Gods, but to remain humanly humble. (Haecker 1998)

Although he exhorted human beings to be like superhuman gods, Credo Mutwa also insisted that representatives of Western civilization, who had consistently treated Africans as if they were a subhuman species, as he noted during the 1960s in *Indaba, My Children*, had falsely arrogated to themselves a supremely superhuman status. "The entire Western civilization is based upon a blatant lie," as Mutwa told Harvard researcher John Mack, "the lie that we human beings are the cocks of the walk in the world, the lie that we human beings are the highest evolved forms in this world, and that we are alone and that beyond us there is nothing" (Mack 1999: 215-216). Mutwa's reports about extraterrestrials, therefore, might be regarded as reinforcing this challenge to the "superhuman" status of Western human beings. Consistent with any measure of authenticity within folk religion, therefore, Credo Mutwa was doing real religious work by mediating among superhuman, subhuman, and human beings in the world.

These classifications, like any religious classifications, represent religious mediations that can be situated in history. As I have tried to suggest, Credo Mutwa's innovations in African folk religion can be located in a history that stretches over fifty years from the enforced separations of apartheid to the fluid connections of the Internet. Briefly reviewing that history, I have only been able to raise the problems involved in adjudicating the authenticity of this self-proclaimed representative of African indigenous religion. If we assume that he is the real thing, we might conclude that Credo Mutwa is an exemplar of indigenous

African folk religion in South Africa that has been misappropriated in the global fake religion on the Internet. However, recalling that he has been generally dismissed within South Africa as a fake, a fraud, and charlatan, we must recognize that Credo Mutwa has achieved a greater aura of authenticity in cyberspace than in Africa. At every stage in his personal history, Credo Mutwa has found that his indigenous authenticity had to be certified by aliens, from apartheid ideologues to New Age conspiracy theorists, who have appropriated his aura of indigenous authenticity for their own projects. Throughout the long career of Credo Mutwa, the line between folk religion and fake religion has been consistently blurred through this ongoing interchange between indigenous inventions and alien appropriations of authenticity. In the end, these exchanges suggest that Credo Mutwa has been most authentic when he has been used, claimed, or even abducted by aliens.

Notes

1 On the category of "fakelore," see Dorson (1950; 1976a; 1976b) and Dundes (1985; 1989). The term "fakelore" has been applied to the invented traditions of modern nationalism in Nairn (1997) and to the appropriations of indigenous religion by New Age movements in Niman (1997: 131-48).

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