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# **DIVINATIONS, CONFESSIONS, TESTIMONIES**

**ZULU CONFRONTATION WITH THE SOCIAL SUPERSTRUCTURE**

**James W. Fernandez**

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DIVINATIONS, CONFESSIONS, TESTIMONIES

Zulu Confrontations With The  
Social Superstructure

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"The popular idea concerning this native divination business is that it is wholly and knowingly an imposture. But such an absolute and unqualified condemnation is not quite in harmony with the facts. As far as the actors themselves are concerned the whole performance is absolutely bone fide and based as it is upon their spiritistic beliefs it is perfectly reasonable and natural".

#### The Zulu Cult of the Dead

A.T. Bryant

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This is an address given at the Annual Meeting of the Institute for Social Research, University of Natal, October 1965. For facilities and many kindnesses extended to me during my research in Durban and Natal, I am grateful to the Institute and its Director Professor Hilstan Watts. For valuable comment on the substance of this paper I am grateful to Professor Eileen Krige and Mrs. H. Sibisi. To Dr. T. Cope and Mr. D. Mzolo I am grateful for their examination of the Zulu translations.

I. Since the occasion today is an annual ingathering of professionals of social research I can be allowed a confession in friendly company. My data have never done justice to the complexity or resources of my subjects! But then who among us has not felt that, whether or not his rules have been proved by his gathered data, he has yet netted but a meager portion of the reality that belongs to human existence. Of course we are not novelists recreating great chunks of life and presenting our materials as is sometimes said in isomorphism with the reality we have studied. Rather we always work with models in our mind which, though they simplify the social fabric randomly or by design, yet can show us some essentials, give us some sense of knowledge that can be counted on in assessing social problems, may even provide us with an uncertain power of prediction. Still though our method demands that we employ parsimonious constructs to stand for a far more plentiful reality I think it a portion of our particular patrimony as students of human behaviour to be constantly aware of the tension between this parsimony and that plenty, between models and isomorphism. We carry out our trade - if we carry it out well - with this disparity lively in mind.

One way in which we are aware of unrequitement in our gathered data arises from the fact that our informants are playing a role for us, fulfilling a set of expectations which may be peculiar to the social situation we have established with them and its particular pressures, suspicions, artificiality. We may not be getting to know the real Joe

Blow. Or at least we may not be getting to know the real Joe Blow in ways relevant to his behaviour outside the research situation. This patent observation has long been of methodological concern and we have laboured ceaselessly in creating techniques and tools which will be truer to the mark. We have been, in fact, quite diabolical in securing confessions and testimonies with which we can divine the real state of the society and culture into which we inquire. We work directly and indirectly by empathy, sympathy and sometimes just gall and brass to get at actualities.

In relation to these problems we have been very much enlightened in recent years by the work of the American sociologist Erving Goffmann. Goffmann has taken the role metaphor not only more literally in the "all society is a stage" sense but he has also used it with greater subtlety in discussing the presentation of self in social situations. He brings us to see that what we ought to be dealing with is society not simply as men existing in structures but as men constantly undergoing a succession of encounters in which the structures to which they belong are necessary but not sufficient conditions for understanding their interaction. More than that, Goffmann from his dramaturgical perspective deals insightfully with the fact that behaviour cannot, as we have just said, be taken only on face value. What we see transpiring on the stage of the encounter always has, in his words, its backstage dimension which must be assessed if we are to be comprehensive in our analysis. Men are busy managing the impressions they make in encounters with others from both a frontstage and backstage perspective. And these perspectives must inevitably be mutually influential if not in an actual state of tension.

In fact it is to be argued that it is precisely the relationship prevailing between backstage and frontstage that is crucial in understanding behavioural dynamics. For two different kinds of reality are involved. In Goffmann's terms participants in social situations feel themselves obliged to maintain a definition of situation - sponsor a reality - which is mutually acceptable and satisfying. To varying degrees this frontstage reality differs from the backstage realities known to the various participants. These are sedulously held in abeyance in mutual interaction because of their capacity, if introduced, to change and disrupt the definition of situation being put forth.

While there is something hyperbolic in Goffmann's argument - a too-determined application of a useful but hardly literal metaphor - it is an approach that brings us up with new insight to one of the basic phenomenon in the anthropology of religion; divination, a phenomenon which is otherwise of continuing importance in Zulu life. Now divination is many things and anthropologists have studied it from many social and cultural perspectives. We have said less about divination as a particular type of dramatic encounter whose frame of reference is the worldview of non-literate peoples living in relatively small scale communal societies. From my experience in the communal societies of Gabon and Natal, I would state that worldview in respect to divination in the following way: social relations have their natural and their supernatural aspect, their frontstage and their backstage if you will, and while one can commonly carry on in the company of others on a front-stage basis alone, one cannot afford to forget all that lies behind in the social superstructure. For this social

superstructure whatever its particular agency - witchcraft, the ancestors, chthonic or pantheonic beings - is often dangerously intrusive. It is the job of the diviner, when need arises, to determine what the relation between structure and superstructure is, what, how and why it has become intrusive and how it can be relegated to its preferred status, lofty proprietorial and benevolent. The diviner's job is an enabling one. He must provide the information necessary to bring about some kind of accommodation between frontstage and backstage for people to whom this confrontation is constant - the confrontation between the two realities.

This view of the realities of divination is not so much different from a Goffmannesque view of social realities. The requirements of social stability presumed in both views are the same - stable relationships between frontstage and backstage. If there is a difference it may lie in a greater unwillingness on the part of the traditional African, contrasted with the Anglo-American and his scene discussed by Goffmann, to accept the convention that the backstage can be held in virtual abeyance. Because of the belief in witchcraft and because of the difficulty of obtaining privacy in communal life the potential intrusiveness of the backstage is much greater than with the typical Westerner described by Goffmann. <sup>1]</sup>

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1] Goffmann recognizes the degree to which his analysis may be culture bound to Anglo-American societies with their tendency to live life indoors within carefully fixed settings emphasizing privacy and excluding everyone except specifically invited participants to the succession of encounters. Elsewhere, Goffmann, recognizes life may be conducted more casually, openly and subject to interruption. The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life, Garden City 1959, pg. 244.

One may be inclined to argue, of course, that there is a very great difference between the social backstage and the supernatural with which the diviner is concerned. And yet the difference is not so marked as our tendency to set anything religious aside might lead us to confirm. For in both cases we are dealing with more or less vaguely defined and personalized entities who are, in some sense, alter-egos <sup>1]</sup> of the personalities who are playing out their roles in succeeding onstage confrontations. The social backstage and the supernatural, in short, are both the locus of potentialities in human relationships unrealized in what we have before our eyes but clearly reflections, if often rather dark reflections, of it. Both the supernatural of the diviner and the social backstage may be referred to as the superstructural.

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1] It would be as appropriate, if not too impious, to call them altar-egos.



## II.

I would like to apply these distinctions to some of the materials I have been getting these last three months with various religious cults in and around Durban. <sup>1]</sup> These cults range from the Enakhehleri sect of Malakazi, a group who place major emphasis on healing through divination and who are carrying on the Zulu cult of the dead insofar as this is a contemporary possibility, to the various Zionist sects who enthusiastically precipitate an ecstatic but palpable experience out of Christianity and more traditional religious commitments held in suspension. <sup>2]</sup> The Zionists are well known to us all. We cannot miss them marching in their colorful uniforms on the weekends. On Sunday afternoons in Durban we see them in their circles in many a vacant lot and park. The emphasis in the Enakhehleri is upon divination - among the Zionists on prophecy and testimony. In both confession is important. I should like to consider these phenomena at work in these cults as their members are dramatically brought into confrontation with each other and with the social superstructure - that burdensome spiritual reality they at once bring to that worship and recreate in its process.

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1] Research was supported by the Social Science Research Council - American Council of Learned Societies Combined Committee on African Studies. The Comparative Studies Centre at Dartmouth College provided supplementary funds. I am grateful to both.

2] The Enakhehleri cult is located in Malakazi on the southwest outskirts of Durban (18 miles from the heart of the City) on the road to Umbumbulu. The cult was founded in the early 1930's by John Mfene who was led by visionary experience to abandon his Catholicism in favour of a return to the spirits of the ancestors. The cult is very eclectic however, and has syncretized both traditional and Christian elements along with some practices of the large Indian community in Durban.

The first question which arises concerns the distinction which we in the mainstream of western culture-history make axiomatically between the natural and the supernatural as two kinds of reality. We have inherited this quite clear-cut distinction from the long struggle between religion and science. It amounts for most of us, in the conduct of our lives, to an institutionalized compartmentalization. The dichotomy is clear. We recognize we are dealing with two distinct realms, largely autonomous, approached in different styles and explained by different logics. We act accordingly. But we should not impose our own hard-won distinctions on other cultures. In the African cultures with which I am familiar the distinction is

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2] (continued from previous page).

Mfene led the cult as chief diviner until his death in 1964. He has been succeeded by his fourth wife Francis Mfene who now works chiefly with his spirit. The cult probably has a standing membership of some 300. There are semi-independent branches of the cult in two townships (Umlazi and Kwa Mashu).

In respect to the Zionists there are a multitude of groups of this persuasion in and around Durban ranging from very ephemeral pickup groups that meet for no more than several months before disbanding to solidly established and institutionalized churches of large membership such as the Amanazaretha of Isiah and Johannes Galiilee Shembe. Our data here is drawn from the smaller groups, 15-20 members, appealing mainly to domestic servants and labourers in Durban itself. An intensive study was made of seven small Zionist groups worshipping Sunday afternoons on Argyle Road and a much larger group meeting Friday nights in Sydenham.

present but it is not as clear cut. In the Zulu lexicon there appears to my knowledge no set of terms which makes the distinction as explicitly as, for example, the terms empirical and spiritual, physical and metaphysical or, since there is a psychological distinction involved, conscious and unconscious. The Zulu language makes these or similar distinctions but it does so at greater length and in a descriptive rather than a conceptual manner. We have such expressions as "indawo yabaphansi", "indawo yamadlozi", "indawo yomoya" (the realm below, the realm of the spirits, the realm of spirit), or we have "okungaphezu kwamandla" (that which is above human power), "okungabonakali" (that which is not visible).<sup>1]</sup> In a more intellectual sense we get "okungaphezu kolwazi lomuntu" (that which is beyond man's understanding). From lexical evidence I think it fair to say for the Zulu that the two realms of the seen and the unseen, the realm of the ordinary and the everyday and the realm of the truly powerful, the realm of the living and the realm of spirits or spirit, are separately apprehended but that the potentiality of their interpenetration is much greater and the distinction more easily blurred in daily life. This probably tends to be the case

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1) It might be argued to equal effect that the distinction most accessible to the Zulu is between appearances - into ebonakala, the thing which is seen - and realities, "the thing as it really is" or "the thing in itself". Callaway translates this latter phrase - into eyona - the thing in itself - as reality. "When we say, 'A diviner has not eaten impepho' we speak of reality, impepho means true knowledge. "Uma ku tiwa, 'Inyanga a i dhlanga impepho', ku kulunywa ngento e yona, i ulwazi impela". Rev. Canon Callaway., The Religious System of the Amazulu 1870: 321.

with many communal type societies free of the processes of secularization and compartmentalization. But if one is to adopt a dramaturgical perspective towards social interaction such distinctions must everytime be indicated since this perspective implicates various stages in the presentation of reality.

In discussing Zulu religion and the realm of the unseen, the realm of power, one remarks two main agencies in operation; the agency of the dead and the agency of witchcraft.<sup>1]</sup> These agencies may have good or bad influence on the individual, the former primarily beneficial and the latter primarily deleterious but both ambivalent. In the face of misfortunes or conflicts which do not have an easy explanation or solution either of these two agencies may be involved, and it is just here that the Isangoma diviner, the principle religious functionary of the Zulu, is to be consulted. For in her method and out of her training and talent she will discover what particular agency and whom among dead relatives or envious acquaintances is causing

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1] These are the main agencies but surely not the only ones. The Zulu in former days believed in "vague powers", and personifications of natural phenomena, such as Nkulunkulu and 'Heaven'. Krige gives us a full discussion of these other supernatural agencies. Eileen J. Krige., The Social System of the Zulus Pietermaritzburg 1965, Chapter XIII.

the particular misfortune or anxiety. 1]

We will not here enter into the diviner's training which is lengthy, laborious and full of psychosomatic trials (cf. Krige, 1965 302-304). This initiation - the "ukuthwasa" or coming into stable possession of the spirits or spirit that are troubling her - teaches us that one does not offer or succeed in providing a bridge between the seen and the unseen, between structure and superstructure with impunity. It is not given to those with

1] Diviners among the Zulu go under a number of names. The generic term for religious specialist is "inyanga" (skilled one) and it may be applied to both a herbalist (native doctor) and a diviner though in my experience it was applied primarily to the former. Diviners go primarily under two names; "isamusi" (smeller out) and "isangoma" Krige 1965:299. Bryant gives us the name "umngoma" (Bryant A.T. "The Zulu Cult of the Dead". Man. Vol. XVII No. 95 pg. 141). The name "isangoma" was used primarily in my presence.

Diviners work by a number of methods; by throwing of bones, by the use of divining rods (said not to be indigenous), by the interpretation of the whistling sounds made by the spirits or simply by working within their own heads in which they bring forth the message brought secretly by the spirits. Thus we have two kinds of diviners, as Bryant pointed out (1917: 143); those that divine by device and those that divine by intuition. Callaway makes the distinction between ordinary diviners - inyanga yokubula - and those that divine by familiar spirits - inyanga yemidlozi. The latter, he implies though of recent origin is of much greater effect (1870: 323-327). The diviners with which I am most familiar are head and therefore intuition diviners working with familiar spirits. The emphasis upon the head in discussing these diviners is appropriate since one of the main objects of initiation was to produce in them a "soft head" susceptible of penetration by the spirit. (Callaway 1870: 264).

ordinary mental health to gain insight into the two realms of existence. The diviner's trade is clearly a calling in the sense that the voluntary element in becoming a diviner is almost always subverted by the oppressive feeling that one is called, in fact driven by the spirits of the dead to become a diviner, and that sickness and misery are one's lot until one accedes to their command and passes through an arduous initiation into their service. The confidence Zulus have in their diviners rests on the conviction that they are assisted by the spirits and this conviction is confirmed in the torment the spirits inflict on those they have called. <sup>1]</sup>

Once the diviner has come to terms with her own backstage, with that superstructure which has been giving her such psychosomatic problems and which she interprets as the realm of the spirits, she is prepared to confront her clients and, in effect, go backstage with them. To understand this we must examine those dramatic events which constitute the dynamics of consultation. For both parties there is some tension in the air compounded of the uncertainties of their encounter. The client comes with some trepidation at what may be revealed while the diviner is, for her part, challenged to expose the backstage existence of her clients which cannot be very well known. One does not, preferably, tell the diviner as one would a doctor all the particulars of personal history that have brought you to his chambers in anxiety and misfortune. You expect as a demonstration of her powers to be told these

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1] A sophisticated theory of mental illness is bound up in the Zulu notion of spirit affliction. It is discussed by A.F.C. Wallace "Mental Illness, Biology and Culture" in Psychological Anthropology F.L.K. Hau, ed. Homewood Ill. 1963 pgs. 281 - 283.

things by the diviner. I go to hear from the diviner and he tells me that which is troubling me - "ngisayokuzwa esangweni, uyangitshela okungihluphayo". 1]

The common phrase for divination is "ukubula" whose significance may be tied in with the method of affirming the divination by striking with a stick against the ground. A more revealing phrase if also of older and less widespread usage 2] is "ukushaya umhlahlo" - to beat or clap out in consultation with a diviner. "Umhlahlo" is derived from the verb "hlahla" - to chop up, cut up into pieces and by metaphoric

- 1] Callaway's phrase is "men go to the Diviner that he may tell them what they wish to know". He translates rather freely from "Ea ti abantu bayabula anyangeni uma i ba tshela". (Callaway 1890: 313). Callaway makes clear in his recording of a number of different sessions of consultation that the emphasis for disclosing the affair at hand rests on the diviner whose stock phrase in beginning and conducting the divination is "Ake ngi swe", let me just understand. He speaks this to the dead who are helping him to divine for his clients are mute - bayatula.
- 2] This explanation was given to me by one informant and corroborated by several others. Mrs. H. Sibisi whose study of divination has been intensive suggests that the "breaking into pieces" interpretation is not an active association for "ukushaya umhlahlo" in the minds of most Zulu, though Yilakazi and Doko give this as one of the main meanings of "hlahla". Evidently we are dealing here with a dying metaphor understood simply in its extended sense without accompaniment of its original meaning. In any case Mrs. Sibisi points out that though sometimes "umhlahlo" and "bula" are used interchangeably for any kind of divination, "ukushaya umhlahlo" traditionally applied to group consultation of a diviner on the part of a troubled kraal the roots of whose social conflict demanded divination.

extension to clear up or divine a matter by dividing it into its parts. Just so the diviner must often confirm his powers by breaking the life history of his clients into pieces and examining those pieces most relevant to the consultation. I have seen this done to sophisticated Africans, to their consternation for they can see no way that the information disclosed about themselves could have been previously known to the diviner. Divinations in respect to myself have been in some particulars wrong but in respect to occurrences with my family, at the time on another continent, later proved approximately correct. I do not undertake to explain this phenomenon here by considering what the probabilities are that I was encountering significant powers of divination. What can be shown I think is that despite the uncertainties involved in the encounter between the diviner and the client, they are both anxious to maintain the definition of situation so that the performance should not break down before its intended effects have been realised. In my own case I found myself anxious to put a personally satisfying interpretation on highly ambiguous statements offered to me by the diviner.

In one way or another, then, the diviner is first obliged to move from appearances, the frontstage of the divining situation, to realities, the backstage of the client's affairs. It is understood that he does this with the aid of the spirits who know all. But, except in the case of the whistling diviners, the client must take the presence of the spirit for granted and thus the burden remains upon the diviner to demonstrate his spirit sanctioned powers by going backstage in a convincing manner



for her client. <sup>1]</sup> It is just here that we note the mechanism that greatly eases the diviner's task and which is of real importance in maintaining the definition of situation - maintaining the belief, which may well be a fiction, that quite abnormal powers are in operation and that quite exceptional penetration is being made into the superstructural affairs of the client. This is the custom of agreeing - "ukuvuma". One is obliged to agree to the diviner's direction taking, in case of hidden articles, or to his pronouncements as to the hidden portions of his clients lives. The closer the diviner comes to the truth the louder one claps or beats the ground with a stick saying "siyavuma", we agree, and the further he departs the more dispirited is the intonation of this stock response! <sup>2]</sup>

In this way the diviner is helped in his task. One of Rev. Callaway's informants, who appears to be one of his converts, was skeptical in respect to divination because of this custom. He says "the diviner simply tells back to the people the truth which he first took from them. If, as regards that which is first done by the diviner we put all together we shall say it is the people who divine, for the diviner does not begin with anything that he has not heard from the people who come to "divine."(1870:323).

- 1] There are other ways that the diviner can demonstrate her power. One of the favourite is to rapidly discover coins or other objects hidden from her. This method is primarily used, however, to test the growing powers of apprentice diviners.
- 2] Various methods of agreeing are employed. One may also say, for example, hear, hear. "Yizwa, yizwa".

But this is an overstatement, for Callaway's data elsewhere and my own experience confirm that the dramatic thread of divination is very delicate. The diviner, on the one hand, can place so much reliance on the "agreement" of his clients and make so many false starts with which they cannot agree that he quickly disabuses them of his powers and the seance cannot go on. Callaway discusses just such a diviner with whom the clients fall out despite the number of gall bladders in his hair testifying to his prowess. On the other hand clients can be so clumsy and unperceptive in their "agreement" that the diviners can have no clue to go on and the divination must break down. Again Callaway gives us an instance of just such an affair where the clients beat the ground and agreed vigorously with everything the diviner said until at last he was led to say in exasperation; "I see you don't know how to enquire of a diviner". (1870:328).

The ideal among the Zulu may be stated in this way; "that the diviner should tell me things which I know without having asked any question". (Callaway, 1870: 228). But observation confirms that in the drama of divination there is an active co-operation between the two parties; the one shrewdly probes behind appearances so as not to offend credulity, the other party agrees to the appropriate probes in such a way as to facilitate access to the backstage, the putative reality to be disclosed in dramatic confrontation. It is a deep but important question as to why this co-operation should take place and why the definition of situation should be the product of a mutual effort. The diviner's vested interest in a successful drama seems clear enough. But what about the client's readiness to abet the processes of divulgence. One might only suggest that

in the face of whatever extremities in his affairs it is not skepticism which brings client to diviner. The client is hopeful to the point of co-operation in the production of the diviner's power and knowledge that such forces exist to relieve his anxieties and to tie together frontstage and backstage, structure and superstructure. There is in the client if not in the diviner a willing suspension of disbelief - a suspension characteristic of social life itself but more clearly seen perhaps in the drama of divination. It may be asked how one can speak of a desire to maintain dramatic definition of situation when the object of the drama is its own backstage. But the object of a drama lies in its production of an intelligence applicable beyond itself. The only requirement is that the drama should not break down before the epiphanies are achieved. That such a dramatic production as divination is not easily brought off, however, is evidenced by the considerable amount of shopping around by clients for suitable diviners.

The first stage of divination, then, consists in the demonstration of the diviner's powers to the client, with the latter's co-operation. Having legitimated himself in this way the diviner may now undertake the solution of the particular problem which has initiated the consultation. <sup>1]</sup> He may

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1] In view of the fact that the diviner was the chief religious functionary a vast range of problems were presented to him ranging from lost animals to witchcraft suspicions. Personal problems, impotency, marriage strife, anxiety dreams, bad luck, failure to find work, failure to make money, were some of the principle problems presented to the diviners in the modern syncretist cults around Durban. Since the diviner himself has conquered the ill-health imposed upon him by the spirits he is expected to be particularly knowledgeable in such matters - and may be consulted as freely as the herbalist.

undertake to account for what has gone wrong in his client's life by reference to those backstage factors unknown to the client himself. But the client already in the swing of agreeing and impressed with the demonstrated competence of the diviner will continue to clap or strike the ground thus supporting the diviner and convincing himself in the prescribed manner. Callaway discusses this transition in the following manner (1870: 325).

"Having succeeded thus far he now begins to speak also about things with which they are not acquainted, knowing that they will now believe in the things he says though they are not acquainted with them, but because he has satisfied them by the truths he spoke at first. They will not despise any of his words but all he says will be true in their eyes".

Divination as described by Callaway and divination as experienced in the reserves outside Durban almost a century later gives evidence of remarkably little change. It is true that Callaway's informants were already in 1870 complaining that diviners were no longer as powerful and as penetrating as in the former days, (1870: 34) and this continues to be a common complaint. But in most particulars, seances reported by Callaway could easily find their counterpart in the present day Nyuswa Reserve (Valley of a Thousand Hills) outside Durban. Recent research <sup>1]</sup> testifies to the continuing vitality of the

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1] J.W. van Nieuwenhuijsen "The Witch-Doctor Institution in a Zulu Tribe" The Valley Trust Journal 1960 pgs. 16-25. It is the "inyanga" rather than the "isangoma" who has suffered from the coming of modern medical practice to the reserve but as so often is the case in Africa the inyanga's claims are protected by the notion of European and African diseases.

diviner's role and its function both in respect to traditional anxieties and to those brought by such modern conditions as labour migration and high population density. The social superstructure in short remains as incompatible and as intrusive as ever and as much in need of accommodation with the everyday through divination.

## III

In the modern religious cults created by the Zulu we are witness to changes in the nature of divination and shifts, which we will now examine, towards confession and testimony. The first important shift in emphasis is from divination ("ukubala") to prophecy ("ukuprofeta"). We find diviners in the urban context undertaking to anticipate future events, whether personal or familial or even more general such as the outcome of horse races or elections or affairs of state. But such anticipation of events to come is not, strictly speaking, divining. For such anticipation of events the Zulu have felt the need to take the loanword prophecy. It appears that many would-be diviners living nowadays under the rapidly changing conditions of modern life feel they must lay claim to this power. The diviners I have encountered since the Effingham rail disaster (October 4, 1965) all claim to have forecast it in seances immediately previous. In traditional society a relatively repetitive community life laid less stress on future events, although diviners were called upon to anticipate the fortunes of regiments about to embark for war by declaring the occasion propitious. And of course divination implies future difficulties unless the superstructural agencies are appeased or propitiated and, ex post facto, can always claim prescience by referring what actually happens to the terms of the original divination: terms either fulfilled or neglected. It is of interest that it is now part of the Shaka legend to look back on him as a great prophet. He anticipated the coming of the Europeans for he foretold the coming of swallows who would build houses of clay and conquer the land. Such prophetic

predictions were also, of course, explicit in the Xhosa cattle-killing cult, but in both these cases we are dealing with one stage or another of the conflict of cultures in which the different claims made by cultures in conflict on history encourages prophecy - divulcation of the course events will actually take. Prophecy may be seen as the product of intense culture contact and resultant rapid change in which cultures find their future at stake. While diviners, particularly in the present day, also act as prophets and while the distinction between divination and prophecy is often lost in common parlance, the two functions should not be confused. Divination is the divulcation of hidden, superstructural, realities. Prophecy is prescience of things to come. Increasing emphasis upon this latter capacity in Zulu affairs explains the need for the loanword - ukuprofeta - in the language.

Of greater interest to us is the relation of divination and confession. If we will recollect the importance of "agreeing", "ukuvuma", to the divination process, we will be struck by the fact that this verb has been taken over, usually in the Christian context, to mean confession - "ukuvuma izono" (the confession of sins). In the sense in which we understand confession in the Christian context, that is a voluntary presentation to another of one's transgressions and shortcomings, the Zulu verb "vuma" is misapplied.<sup>1]</sup> For "vuma" implies not voluntary

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1] In the legal sense, of course, this notion of agreeing, admitting or acknowledging is appropriately applied in the modern context of the accused standing before his accusers who articulate his infractions in an effort to obtain his confession.

confession of sins but agreement to and acknowledgement of those hidden facts, frequently enough sins, adduced against one by the diviner - agreement to the justice of his attributions. The active party in the confessional is not the priest. But in the drama of divination on the contrary the active party is the diviner.<sup>1]</sup> Something of importance is bound up in this distinction.

I would suggest in fact that the concept of confession as it is understood in the Christian context, that is as a penitential offering up of one's backstage failings, if not entirely a new notion is an increasingly relevant one. It may be mentioned that outside the divination experience there were other procedures in Zulu life that approximate to confession. Among these is "shweleza" or the expression of regret and begging of pardon to concerned relatives and through them to the ancestors. "Shweleza" was forthcoming in cases of when, for example, a pregnant woman at term was experiencing a difficult delivery. This difficulty might best be eased by confessing any sins which could possibly be causing it and offending the ancestors. But then the difficulty must first arise which is subsequently coercive to confession. And, in fact, many occasions in which we seem to be getting spontaneous confession among the Zulu would under closer study be revealed as a form of competitive self-praising in which the individual recites the evils of which he stands accused by the community

1] An exception to this generalization would be the "oshaya umshahle" in which, as mentioned, a group of contestants, accused and accusers, go before the diviner to present their disputes. The active party in this case would, in large part, be someone other than the diviner.

only to refute them in the process of his recitation.<sup>1]</sup>

The importance of confession is strongly emphasized by the people of Amakhehleri as well as by the various Zionist groups. One might well expect this from the Catholic origins of the first and the fundamentalist and pentacostal origins of the second. I would like now to consider the importance of confession to these contemporary cults. The notion of confession, with them, is closely tied up, as it always has been among the Zulu, with the notion of purification, "ukuhlanya", washing clean, ceremonial cleansing, which is also a synonym for confessing.<sup>2]</sup> As a matter of fact among the Zionists I have been working with in Argyle Road the now accepted word "vuma", is resisted and a person confessing is said to be purifying himself, "ukuhlambuluka", or more strongly yet, "ukuphila", surviving. For if men didn't confess periodically their accumulating sins - often called in these cults frailties or shortcomings, "amaphutu", - they would die. It is put as strongly as that. The whole notion of purification in these

1] Mrs. H. Sibisi points out that at both Nomkhubulwana and Omula ceremonies women praise themselves by directly referring to gossip bruited about concerning them. One woman sang "Bathi Ngiwugegevana, Oludla abantabalo"; "It is said I am a greedy glutton who even eats her own children". This woman's first two babies were stillborn hence the gossip concerning her. But she later bore three more alive and thus was able to compose the above song.

2] Krige discusses another form of ceremonial cleansing, ukuthelalana amanzi, which implicates "confession" of that which angered one against one's relatives. (1965: 59).



cults is consequently tied in with traditional Zulu notions of keeping the physical body, free of the dark cloud of spiritual contamination, and by so doing guaranteeing "isithunzi" - a dignified and impressive presence among one's fellows which is a guarantee of desirable social goods.

The Amakhehieni cult recommends to its members daily confessional ablutions upon arising. "Impepho" - frankincense as they call it - is scattered in the form of a cross at the bottom of a basin and boiling water poured into it.<sup>1]</sup> Then covering oneself with a towel one confesses one's daily or nocturnal sins in the steam until the water is cool enough to bathe in. In the Zionist cults there is an insistence that before services members confess their sins to each other two by two. In some groups immediately after the opening song and before the praying in tongues, or blending into it, members mumble their sins outloud in a cacaphony of contrition. The sins confessed in this way are rarely of much consequence or of any very flaming shade. As often as not they are statements of disputes and insults which have recently arisen in the social relations of the individual and which are presented with something of a self-exonerating air. Occasionally we get spontaneous confession in service of the most personal anxieties of a troubled member.

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1] The importance of impepho to Zulu procedures of divination and indeed to Zulu religion generally is extensively detailed by Callaway (1870: 261 and 322). Impepho of the several kinds are omnipresent in Amakhehieni.

As we study these cults we see that though they pay great lip-service to the power of confession the phenomenon is not full-fledged. There is a hesitance on the part of members to confess and an unwillingness on the part of cult leaders to depend on confession alone to tie together the two realms of existence. In the Amakhehleri cult, therefore, the truly effective confession still must take place in the presence of one of the cult leaders (either the wife or daughter of the cult founder or an assistant) who, reminiscent of the traditional role of the diviner, probes and exposes in the company of the confessant 'until the two collaborating together lay bare all the pieces of the life. The confessant "agrees" as much as he confesses. In this cult purification and atonement with the ancestors is still mainly guaranteed by the sacrifice of animals and by the washing down with the bile, stomach fluids and stomach fats of these animals.

In the Zionist cults the pastor - "mfundisi" - relies on what he usually calls his powers of prophecy, to detect unconfessed sins in the membership and to call for their proper confession. It is not unusual in the midst of services for the cult leader to suddenly stop in the grip of the Holy Spirit. It is bringing him the intelligence of sins in the membership, which are burdening the service. Many of these Zionist leaders identify, as the chief capability given to them by their powers of prophecy, the ability to see into the affairs of their members and detect sins that would act to thwart the incorporation of

the Holy Spirit. This claim is not so much different from that made by the diviner. <sup>1]</sup> In Zionism, of course, the chief mechanism of purification remains the laying on of hands, by which the evil spirit ("umoya omubi") or spirits (as many as five or six different agencies of evil may be named) which have motivated sin are driven out of the body. Water baptism is the other mechanism of purification and we have discussed above its traditional roots. In sum, what we have in the ideal culture of these cults is emphasis upon confession, while in the real culture very little spontaneous revelation of backstage inadequacies and incompatibilities takes place. If our point of comparison is traditional divination we note a definite shift towards confession, but in studying the phenomenon itself we note a cultural lag between what is said and what is done. We will examine the implication of these facts in the conclusion.

We have included the word testimony in our title and we must mention this before we lay out our conclusions because testimonies, that device capitalized upon by Protestant fundamentalism to change the subject quality of confession into the exaltation of spiritual reunion, have become an important feature of Zionism where they are often more important than the sermon. The intriguing thing about testimonies, it seems, is that one can confess one's shortcomings in a very didactic way, - one can, in short, be highly moral about one's immorality, for

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1] There are important similarities between the way the Zionist pastors operate and the method of diviners. They themselves, however, most forcefully eschew any identification with the traditional diviner and divination. Such things appear to them diabolical.

one is testifying to how one was saved from one's errors. What appeals to the Zulu Zionist in the testimony I think is that therein confession can be combined with eloquence. What bothers him about public confession, I think, is that unless forced upon one by the ancestors or undertaken in an ecstatic state it smacks too much of egocentrism - a dangerous manifestation in communal societies. One must also note the compatibility between the self-exalting style of these modern testimonies and the more traditional institutionalized self-praising we have previously mentioned. In testimonies in any case one can confess at the same time submerging and exonerating the bald fact of confession in the attractions of eloquent language. Dramatization eases the pain the individual has in presenting his backstage. A number of Zionist leaders I have worked with, however, express impatience with a testimony that has too much of a confessional quality and fails to eloquently elaborate in an interesting way on the biblical text which they hold to be its primary responsibility. One may be permitted to be eloquent about sin. For them it is too much to be eloquent about one's own sin.

CONCLUSION  
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I have been raising questions here of ethnographic intricacy and, I think, of importance to anthropologists. But for those of you without the cross cultural animus and without an interest in African cultures what has been attempted here may well appear a reconnaissance of unrelieved tedium. Let me try again and see if I can't give these matters in conclusion a more general application. We began by trying to get a more comprehensive view of social reality by referring to its frontstage-backstage character and the emphasis in social life upon maintaining the definition of situation. We suggested a similarity between the responsibilities of the social researcher to take into account the tension between the frontstage and backstage of his informants and the responsibilities of the diviner to tie together the threads linking the seen and the unseen world. Both have a responsibility as we stated it towards superstructure. Both should have the tools to get at that superstructure if they are to satisfy the pretensions of their employment. So much for a rhetorical analogy.

Some narrow distinctions stand out in our discussion. I say narrow distinction because the difference between confession and divination does not admit of the polarization which for simplicity's sake analysis might tend to impose. When we examine divination closely we find the client himself making a substantial contribution to this dramatic confrontation - through his active agreement enabling the diviner to define the situation as one in which the pertinent superstructure is being effectively revealed. He is actor and partner to the whole

performance. The technique is such however, that the diviner seems the active party in the drama, eliciting "agreement" and creating the illusion that he and he alone is the "deus ex machina". To all appearances the revelation of backstage seems entirely his responsibility. Latterly due to the importance of the institution of confession in the Catholic and fundamentalist Christian churches which have had strong influence on the cults discussed here, an emphasis upon confession has become pervasive in the ideal culture of these cults. This emphasis if put into practice would mean a shift from the divulgation of backstage events, seemingly as the responsibility of another (traditionally the diviner), to the divulgation of backstage events as the responsibility of the self. In fact there is a lag in realizing the ideal emphasis upon confession in these cults. For one thing the Zulu have not lost their faith in diviners. It is easy to show how resistant diviners are to replacement by western style doctors because 1. they deal with matters beyond or complementary to the competence of doctors, 2. they exploit a realm of power not appropriated, as the forces of everyday life have been, by the European, and 3. their method has a convincing mystery even to the sophisticated. Only those with a very strong pragmatic bias can resist the cultivation of the mysterious. Divination, in short, is apparently a more intriguing and more dramatic way of bringing forth the backstage than confession whose voluntary insights, if they are at all meaningful, are likely to be barren and burdensome when projected into the void. Of course even in confession there is a social situation and a "persona" who acts as catalyst for the bringing forth. But from the point of view of traditional divination the staging of most Christian confession must seem barren indeed.

Nevertheless whatever effect it is having on real culture the ideal emphasis among Zulu Zionists and spirit cultists on confession responds, I think, not only to missionizing pressures but to changes in their social life. As the Zulu move into urban life and take up the multitude of roles characteristic of associational societies it becomes increasingly difficult for the diviner to break up these different kinds of lives into their segments. In traditional society, given the general awareness of lives and problems of all members of the community, the diviner has an easier time divining - in leading his client to effective agreement. In simple, the probabilities in urban life of his divining successfully the backstage of his patients is reduced. We may suppose that this, in part, accounts for an increasing emphasis upon the individual's confessing his own problems. The continuing strength of divination, on the other hand, is one kind of index of the substantial similarity of lives and problems of the township African and the limited number of roles he has taken up. 1]

As the African urbanises, comes in from the reserve, one of the principle deprivations and anxieties he faces is his removal from the extended family which has traditionally supported and defined him in such a total way. It is well known that urbanisation, modernisation, acts to individualize the African just as it acts to individualize us all. What these cults which I have been studying do, perhaps above all else, is to re-incorporate their members - de-seif them as Simmel called it - into an entity larger than themselves. For this reason we can refer to them as intermittent extended families.

1] Our discussion applies to the township proletariat and does not apply to the African middle class who offer very different problems.

Part and parcel of this de-individualization is to render up to one's fellow members those portions of oneself, those secrets if you will, which are unknown to them. For, to use Simmel again, the secret is a first rate element of individualization. The conditions of associational societies permit, indeed, produce secrecy, or large areas of backstageness, in the relations of individuals just as life in small groups makes the preservation of secrets difficult because of the frequency and intimacy of contact. The secret in other words is the sign of differentiation. If one is seeking to return to the commonality of the extended family the first thing one must do is give up one's secrets - bring those one would relate to backstage. Hence the emphasis upon confession in these groups. It is really an emphasis upon de-selfing - on recapturing what is felt to be the commonality of life in the extended family. Confession guarantees a return to communal life just as divination reinforces a primary condition of that life - the condition being that as much of that life as possible be lived frontstage and that otherwise stable and publicly known relationships be established with the superstructure.

I want to make one final point again, wholly rhetorical. We have long used in anthropology for pedagogic purposes the distinction between shame and guilt cultures. The former, it is commonly said, are cultures in which sanctions are largely external and fear or desire of social reaction is the main controlling factor in behaviour. Guilt cultures are those in which the values and norms are so internalized that the primary



locus of punishment in transgressions is the self and not society. <sup>1]</sup> David Riesman's distinction between inner and other directed societies cuts in a similar fashion and I want to suggest so does the distinction between societies in which divination is primary as apposed to societies in which confession is primary. When we use such great categories as these we cannot mean to imply that there ever was a society that operated exclusively in one mode or another; only that it may be illuminating in thinking about society to establish what the dominant mode in the encounters of individuals in that society is. Must they be shamed in their interactions or are they ever ready to feel guilt? Are they essentially inner or other directed? Do they expect to have their condition divined by others or are they ever ready to confess their shortcomings and search for atonement?

Since a good deal of our concern in social research involves questionnaire schedules I would simply propose that questions asked in a guilt culture are likely to provoke a different response than those asked in a shame culture. Perhaps it is useful when we set our schedules to ask whether this is divination, or whether we hope for confession or just testimony - standardized releases of stereotyped emotion and sentiment which tell us little about the real springs of action. From the point of view of social research South Africa offers a

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1] The analytic inadequacy of the external-internal criteria has been thoroughly exposed by Milton Singer and I make no more than a heuristic association of these two categories of culture and the categories of divination and confession which have concerned us here. Cf. Gerhart Piers and Milton B. Singer Shame and Guilt Springfield 1953 pgs. 45 - 54.

rich spectrum of different cultures. Which are the guilt cultures and which are the shame cultures? Who are those ever ready to confess their tensions, their incompatibility with the backstage and who await for circumstances to demonstrate it to them?

As for us Americans some argue that we have moved from the guilt culture of our puritan forebears to the shame culture of the business ethic. We have given up our engaging propensity to confess our shortcomings and our grosser capacity to testify to the American way of life. Perhaps we have returned to a kind of divination. The conflicts and tensions between our frontstage and our backstage, the Lord knows, are complex and difficult of confession or testimony. And we have been led to those who operate in ways similar to diviners - the psychiatrists who while appearing to reveal superstructures actually are the catalyst leading the client to expose his own. They speak with us and explore our backstage and facilitate the bringing forth of those alter-egos with which we struggle, so that we should learn to live with them and with each other in peace, having, as the Zionist Prophets call it, "ukuthula ebandleni".



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