DIVINATION, TRANCE AND POSSESSION IN TRANS-SAHRAN AFRICA

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Divination, trance, possession: three words that will not only recur throughout our discussion, but three words that we find, almost invariably, in every work on African ethnography. We find them at times separately, at times in diverse combinations. Thus, before attempting to show the relations which may exist between divination, the phenomenon of trance—or more exactly, the psychological state of dissociation—and belief in possession by spirits, it seems useful to begin by defining, first of all, the terms which we shall use.

Divination: "Chimerical art of knowing and predicting the future by magic means or false science" says Littre, which does not advance us any. In our context, we would rather define divination as a procedure employed, in the framework of certain beliefs, to bring to light certain hidden or unknown facts. Thus, it is rather a matter of attempting to discover what has happened or is happening, than of seeking to anticipate what will happen. Divination, as far as trans-Saharan Africa is concerned, utilizes a variety of methods, of which trance is one. Although in this article, it is trance which interests us most particularly, let us stress, however, that it represents but one of the traditional means employed in matters of divination.

Let us now ask what we may understand by the term "trance." What, indeed, is trance? On this point, even the ethnographic literature will not be of very great help to us. This term has been, and indeed still is, used

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indifferently to describe a multitude of psychological as well as physiological phenomena. Certain authors use it to describe states of dissociation proper, or fugue states, others utilize it with reference to cases of loss of consciousness or physiological collapse, others yet employ it as a synonym for obsessions or hallucinations. As far as we are concerned, we shall define trance as a state in which we observe a certain alteration of consciousness, an alteration which may bring about changes, in varying degree, of certain functions: changes in concepts of identity, in memory functions, in sensory modalities, etc.

At this point, we must, however, differentiate between what we shall call "simple trance" and trance which is accompanied by possession. Indeed, if trance represents the state which we have just described, a visible and observable state, "possession" represents an altogether different matter. What, then, is possession? What does it mean to be possessed? Possession is, above all, a matter of belief, a belief which is accepted and shared by a given society, in other words, a belief which is part of the conceptual system of a specific culture. To illustrate this point, let us observe an individual subject to convulsive trembling, for example. He will be considered to be possessed only in a society, where belief in possession exists, where possession is thought to be a possible occurrence. His state would be explained entirely differently in a society, where the notion of possession is not part of the belief system and his trembling would then be considered, for example, the result of a temporary absence of his soul; we shall then speak of simple trance.

We wish to insist on this distinction between the observable, psychobiological fact of trance, and the cultural concept of possession, because, unfortunately, the difference between these two levels of ethnographic data
has too often been ignored in the past. This distinction becomes one of capital importance when trance is used for purposes of divination. Indeed, if the trancer is recognized as possessed by his group, this idea cannot but condition his conduct, and the spirit which possesses him then will himself furnish the desired information, using external signs or speaking through his mouth. Once the trance is ended, the subject will keep little or no memory of the events which took place during his possession. In the case of simple trance, on the contrary, the subject remembers, and must remember, because usually it is after the trance that he speaks of his visions or of the experiences of his soul during its temporary absence.

Where possession trance is utilized for purposes of divination, the possessed, then, becomes a medium, subject to mediumistic trance. Such mediums may play a variety of social roles. He or she may be an initiate of a cult group, impersonating a spirit on a ritual occasion and as such answering questions or announcing the will of the impersonated spirit. The medium may be a "shaman" acting as a diagnostician or as a healer, again, impersonating the spirit or the medium may be the patient, whose illness is thought to be due to possession and who, in trance, announces the will of the spirit and what must be done to obtain a cure. Thus, while we deal in each case with mediumistic, divinatory activities of possessed persons in a state of trance, the social roles played in each case are distinct.

But Africa has many other means of divination at its disposal as well. We shall call these other methods "manipulatory divination," since, most often, the manipulation of objects is involved: dice, bones, sandals, nuts, shells, etc. The resemblance which exists between many of these methods of manipulatory divination and games of chance which are also widely dispersed in Africa is striking. Among other procedures in use, we may further cite: the use of poisons, the utilization of the ordeal, the observation of organic formations or malformations in bodies of animals, the autopsy of human
cadavers. The principal aim of these latter methods is the discovery, or rather the identification, of witchcraft.

These different forms of divination, which we have just listed, are not mutually exclusive, for we see them co-exist even in societies in the institutional structure of which, trance is established and is utilized for purposes of divination.

As we stated above, African divination only rarely concerns itself with the predicting of future events. It is rather oriented toward the discovery of unknown facts, the revelation of which will permit the making of decisions concerning specific actions to be taken. If an illness, for example is diagnosed as due to witchcraft, the identification of the guilty witch will make it possible to take the necessary decisions and the actions required by them. Divination, then, is not only an information agency, it also involves the decision making process. Its capital importance, however, for the understanding of a social system resides not only in its importance in this decision making process, but also in its influence on social action. As Park (1963) has very well shown, divination must be regarded as an important social factor, which furnishes means of social legitimation for actions to be undertaken, in other words, it becomes itself the justification of action. Divination, thus, transforms very often an individual and private problem into a group matter, which in turn requires the action of the group.

The Fon of Dahomey offer us an excellent example, which will permit us to see how manipulatory and mediumistic divination coexist in one and the same society. Fon religion has been very well described by such qualified authors as Herskovits (1938), Mercier (1954) and Verger (1957). Here we find very elaborate cult groups, the initiates of which go into trance on certain ritual occasions. In these trance states, they act out the complex
behavior which is characteristic of the particular spirits by which they are believed to be possessed. Their behavior is so complex that Verger speaks of it as the development of a true second personality. In the course of these rituals, the mediumistic role of the possessed person is perfectly clear, for when he speaks it is no longer he himself but the spirit, who speaks through his mouth. It must be stressed, however, that in the course of the possession, only a portion of the activities is concerned with divination. Among the Fon, we even find another type of trance as well, which is quite different. This has been described and fully illustrated by Verger (*op. cit.*, photo: 16-21). This is a prolonged cataleptic trance which occurs in the course of initiation. This state is considered by the believers to represent the death of the old personality; it is not thought of as possession, but rather as being preliminary to it. The subject, having lost consciousness, there is no question here of divinatory activities.\(^2\) The Fon, however, also have several very complex systems of manipulatory divination. The best known of these is called Fa and was fully described by Maupoil (1943). Thus, we find among the Fon, states of trance which are interpreted as possession, and which can sometimes be used for purposes of divination, but we also have here trance without possession and without divination, and lastly, we find manipulatory divination, which involves neither trance nor possession.

Divination among the Ndembu has been very well analyzed by Turner (1961). These people, who live in the border area of Zambia (formerly Northern Rhodesia) and Angola, possess a full arsenal of divining methods. The best known of these is the divining tray or basket, in which a variety of symbolic

\(^2\) It is possible, that this type of state may be produced through the administration of drugs. For a comparison with Brazil, see Bastide (1958).
objects is placed. What is of particular interest to us here, is the fact that, while the divining process involves a set of complicated rules for the interpretation of the meaning of the apparently accidental juxtaposition of the different objects, nonetheless, the diviner must be in trance to manipulate the basket. The trance, in this case, is expressed by a trembling of the diviner, a trembling which causes the objects in the basket to move about. The Ndembu explain this trance as being caused by a spirit which resides in the liver of the diviner. We are here dealing, then, with manipulatory divination, which is followed by the diviner's interpretation. This type of divination, basically, is very similar to those based on the throw or fall of objects which we find elsewhere. But in contrast to what we find among the Fon and among many other African groups, the spirit, in this case, does not speak; he simply answers questions through the diviner, by communicating to him a kind of trembling which in turn causes the objects to change their positions. Trance, in this case, can be interpreted as possession for purposes of divination, but only by means of a utensil. The diviner never impersonates the spirit. The three elements, in this case, are unified to the extent of becoming synonymous.

There are also cases where a sick person is considered to be possessed by the ancestral spirit of a hunter, which takes on the form of a tooth, which must be removed. This tooth, which is said to move about freely in the patient's organism, is recognized as the cause of his illness. During the diagnostic procedures and also during the exorcism, the patient is, at least at certain moments, in a state of trance (Turner, 1964). The natives consider the illness to be a state of possession of extended duration which is only temporarily and briefly expressed in trance. Here, divination comes into play only during a brief phase of the trance; i.e., during the
diagnostic phase.

We may consider yet another patterning of the elements of trance, possession and divination, which we find among the Hadjerai of the Chad (Puchta, 1959, 1960; Pouillon, 1964). In this society we encounter persons who are possessed by spirits, called margai. The men, who are possessed, fall ill, whereas the women are "mounted" by these spirits in the course of certain ceremonies. In states of trance, these women answer questions asked of them. We have, then, in this case, divination in the form of mediumistic activity, where trance and possession are part of the same complex. The spirits, here, express themselves directly, since they are supposed to speak through the mouths of these women. In spite of the presence of these mediums, the Hadjerai, at other times, make use of manipulatory divination, which also exists among them.

Among the Hausa there are very active spirit cults. Part of their rituals involve possession-trance and this is sometimes used for divining. (Greenberg, 1946; Smith, 1954). However, we also find here possession without trance, since persons suffering from sleeping sickness are believed to be possessed (Miner, 1960). Manipulatory divination is also found among the Hausa, but trance which is not interpreted as possession appears to be absent.

Still another combination of our three basic elements is found among the Dodoth or Dodoso, a Nilotic group among the cattle people of East Africa (Thomas, 1965). These have diviners and curers who treat illness by sucking, and who communicate with the spirits in their dreams. Although trance has not been reported, they consider certain illnesses to be due to possession by water spirits. These spirits must be exorcised, if death is to be avoided. The illness itself however, and not trance, is the sign of the
presence of the spirits. As far as manipulatory divination is concerned, sandals are used. These are thrown on the ground and their position can be interpreted, thus furnishing the desired information.

The concept of possession seems to be absent among the various Bushman groups of the Kalahari Desert (!Kung, Gikwe, etc.). Their healers are able to go into profound trance states in the course of which they treat the sick by sucking out the illness. As if unconscious, they pass through fire and finally fall in a deep faint. After the trance, they relate the experiences of their souls during their "partial death" (Marshall, 1962, 1965). Here then, we find trance associated with divination, but not with possession. The healer never behaves as if he had changed personality, and he remembers his visionary or hallucinatory experiences, which he later reports. This, then, is the opposite of what we have seen among the Fon. There, the person in trance is possessed. During the seizure he behaves like a different personality, and later he is amnesic with reference to this period. Nor have we found any evidence of visions among Fon trancers. The Bushmen also make use of bones in their divining practices (Schapera, 1930).

Although trance and possession are found almost everywhere in Africa, whether or not they are associated with practices of divination, some well-studied groups do not seem to have these cultural traits. Among these, we may mention the Marghi (Vaughan, 1964), the Tiv of the Nigerian Plateau (Bohannon, 1953, 1963) as well as the Mbuti Pygmies of Central Africa. These latter not only lack trance and possession, but also any kind of divination. This is true, however, only when we find them in their own natural habitat, in the forest. The picture is quite different when they are established in the villages of their agricultural neighbors (Schebesta, 1950; Turnbull, 1961, 1965).
In view of these few examples, we may thus conclude that the three elements, divination, trance and possession, can be combined in diverse fashions, presenting thus a variety of patterns. In the examples which we have given, we find eight different combinations, which may be illustrated as follows:

Table I

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>M</th>
<th>P</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>TP</th>
<th>DT</th>
<th>DTP</th>
<th>MTP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fon</td>
<td>x</td>
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<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ndembu</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hadjerai</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hausa</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dodoth</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>!Kung</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marghi</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mbuti</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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M = Manipulatory divination  
P = Possession  
T = Trance  
D = Divination  

x = presence  
- = absence

We do not wish to claim that these patterns are the only possible ones, or that they are the only ones which exist in Africa. They represent, however, the only ones which we have isolated in our current work. Let us look at this table more closely.

At first glance, it is striking that trance with or without possession may be used for purposes of divination, while possession without trance does
not seem to be utilized in this manner. On the other hand, trance with possession is always used as one of the possible means of divination, even if not the only one. Furthermore, whenever we find trance, whether or not it is used for purposes of divination, we also find divination in one form or another. The converse, however, does not seem to be the case. Indeed, we find societies which practice divination without having any forms of ritualized trance. As we have noted at the beginning, trance and possession are not necessarily associated. Furthermore, we have not, so far, found any society which utilizes both simple trance and possession trance in their practice of divination.

Undoubtedly, certain of the combinations indicated in our table are more widespread than others. The combination found among the Mbuti, for instance, is characteristic of all pygmy groups, while it is infrequent elsewhere in Africa. Divination, furthermore, appears to be more widespread than trance, but the latter has, to be sure, many applications other than divination.

However, in our table we have not taken account of another variable, and that is sex. If we add this new element, we once more find a great many variations, even if we limit ourselves to those societies which we have already considered. Among the Fon, men as well as women participate in the cults, but the latter seem to be in the majority with respect to possession (Herskovits, op. cit.; Verger, op. cit.). The diviners, however, are all men. Among the Ndembu also the diviners are men, and since, in this culture, manipulatory divination is in close connection with possession-trance, the three elements conjointly can be found only among men. When it is a question of patients, however—who, as we have seen, are possessed by spirits which are the cause of their illness—sex does not seem to be a relevant factor.
Among the Hadjerai, on the other hand, the diviners who operate in a state of possession-trance are women, while geomancy is the domain of men. Among the Moslem Hausa, once more, possession-trance is found only among women, sick persons once more being an exception here. Manipulatory divination, is reserved to men. Among the Dodoth, healers may be men or women, but divination by means of sandals is limited to men. The diviners among the Marghi and the Tiv are also men. Among the Bushmen, trance and manipulatory divination are male prerogatives.

What may we conclude from this brief enumeration? First of all, in the examples with which we are dealing women never seem to appear as diviners when it is a matter of utilizing an apparatus, of haruspication, of omens, of ordeals, etc. In divination, the role of women seems to be limited to that of medium. But if, almost everywhere in Africa, the role of medium is performed by women, this does not mean that they have the exclusive use of this domain. Among the Fon, for example, both men and women play this role, and among the Nuba (Nadel, 1964) only the men. On the other hand, women do not seem to have trance states without possession, but in those groups where the cult practice is based on possession-trance, women predominate almost everywhere and in numerous groups, the cult is then limited to women.

Before exploring in greater detail, what relations may exist, in Africa, between women and possession-trance, let us contrast first of all two of the type cases which we have used: the Hadjerai and the Ndembu. In these two groups, as we have seen, divination takes place in the context of possession-trance, and possession-trance is closely related to divination. Logically, then, we might expect to find an identical situation in these two examples. This is, however, not the case. First of all, among the Ndembu, diviners are always men, while the diviners among the Hadjerai are always women.
The Ndembu diviners, furthermore, use the divining basket while in a trance state, the Hadjerai diviners, on the other hand, answer directly the questions that they are asked. We could, thus, say, that these latter proceed in a typically feminine fashion, while the Ndembu diviners use more masculine methods. The spirits who possess these latter cause them to shake the basket and the objects which it contains, while the spirits who possess the women cause them to undergo personality changes and to become, in effect, the spirits themselves, who then speak by their mouths. The trance state of the Hadjerai women, which ends in unconsciousness, is, incidentally, much deeper than that experienced by the Ndembu diviners, who remember the events which have taken place during the trance. Park (op. cit.) has suggested that possession gives the diviner a freedom which he does not have when he must manipulate an object. Thus, according to Park, the Hadjerai women diviners would have greater freedom then the Ndembu diviners. Is this actually the case? Before deciding on this point, let us see whether we have other data which may help us to explain the contrasts which exist between these two societies. First of all, we know that the Ndembu diviner operates singly and that he is particularly concerned with sickness and with problems of individuals. Most frequently, he is consulted by families of patients. His diagnosis, in general, is simple: the patient in question is possessed by some ancestral spirit or he is the victim of witchcraft activities. Turner (1965) has very well shown how, thanks to the involvement of the diviner, the sickness which strikes an individual is transformed into a problem which can be solved only by a reorganization of the familial and local groups.

Still, according to Park, divination serves above all to legitimize the transformation of a private problem into a social problem, and as far as we
are concerned, to consider the problems of the single individual as symbolizing the problems of the entire group.

In the case of the Hadjerai, the female mediums who are consulted by chiefs, work together, in the sense that several mediums may be present at the same ceremony. Then, other chiefs interpret their pronouncements. It is true that some individuals may have personal Margai, for whom they consult the appropriate mediums, but here it is only the existence of Margai whose demands concern the whole community, which is of interest to us. (Pouillon, op. cit.; Fuchs, 1959). By means of the collective consultation, then, the chiefs legitimize the decisions taken by them. If, on the one hand, the Ndembu diviner interprets himself the position of the objects in his basket, the utterances of the Hadjerai women are subject to the interpretation of the chiefs. Whatever freedom of innovation the women seem to have, this freedom is limited, if not censured, by the interpretation which the men may make.

We may add at this point, that the Hadjerai are a patrilineal people, while the Ndembu are matrilineal. It seems, then, that the difference with respect to sex among their respective diviners might well be interpreted as an attempt at establishing a symbolic equilibrium with respect to the influence of the sexes in the structure of these two societies.

If we consider the Ndembu and the Hadjerai as representing two diametrically opposite systems, let us establish another comparison and see whether our conclusions are verified. Let us take, for example, the Nyima, who live in the Nuba hills. (Nadel, 1946). Like the Hadjerai, they have shamans, who, in a state of possession-trance play the role of medium. We may note, however, that while the Hadjerai mediums are women, the Nyima shamans are men. Furthermore, while divination among the Hadjerai may involve the participation of several women, the Nyima shaman operates alone. Moreover,
as we have seen, the Hadjerai mediums are questioned by the chiefs, while the Nyima shamans work with the help of spirits who are specialists in such activities as war, agriculture, medicine, the finding of lost objects, etc. Their utterances never require interpretations. Their political power, besides, was considerable and Nadel tells us that among them the shaman specializing in war came closest to being a traditional tribal chief. Their activities played an important role in the social changes that have taken place. The Hadjerai and the Nyima are both patrilineal groups, and both are also hill people. However, while the Hadjerai are headed by powerful chiefs, the Nyima are organized in a less centralized fashion and among them the political power of the shaman is considerable. In both of these societies, once more, mediumistic activity serves to legitimize the decisions taken. It serves also to channel political activity. But among the Hadjerai, supernatural intervention seems to be used to consolidate the existing political order, while the Nyima shaman himself represents political power by virtue of his relations with the supernatural. The point which we have just made, then, seems to reinforce very well the suggestions made above concerning the influence of the sexes in the structure of Ndembu and Hadjerai society. We may even add, as a hypothesis, that men may permit women to become Pythias, even while censoring their pronouncements, only in societies which have recognized and established chiefs, while acephalous societies only accept male shamans.

The table below presents a clearer picture of the differences and similarities which are found in these three cultures.
Table II

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Niembu</th>
<th>Hadjerai</th>
<th>Nyima</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Descent</td>
<td>matrilineal</td>
<td>patrilineal</td>
<td>patrilineal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centralization of power</td>
<td>present</td>
<td>present</td>
<td>absent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manipulatory possession-trance</td>
<td>present</td>
<td>absent</td>
<td>absent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divination possession-trance</td>
<td>absent</td>
<td>present</td>
<td>present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex of diviner</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diviner's manner of operation</td>
<td>alone</td>
<td>in group</td>
<td>alone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consultation of diviner</td>
<td>private</td>
<td>collective</td>
<td>private</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpretation of diviner's utterances</td>
<td>absent</td>
<td>present</td>
<td>absent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Niembu and the Hadjerai thus represent a perfect contrast except with reference to the centralization of power in the person of a chief. The Hadjerai and the Nyima are patrilineal and utilize divination in the same manner. They differ, however, on all other points. The Niembu and the Nyima, which differ on the first four points, however, have the second four points in common.

As we stated above, women appear to predominate in cult groups, where trance is considered as possession by spirits. This is true of the Fon, where they experience trance more frequently than do the men, or among the Lebu (Balandier, 1952) where the cult groups are only open to women.

Several explanations have been offered for this situation. Baumann seeks to establish a connection between possession cults and the "matriarchate." He even speaks of "demons of possession, the veritable satellites of matriarchal civilization." (1962, p. 158). Indeed, he finds cults based on possession in the following kulturkreisen: The Southern Rhodesian
kreis, the Zambezian kreis, the Southern and Northern Congolese kreise, the East Coast kreis, the latter having been particularly influenced by the Swahili of the coast who propagated the Pepo possession cult. Finally, he cites the North-East Sudanese kreis, where he specifically mentions the Nuba. While this list, established by Baumann, is surely important, it seems, none-the less to be incomplete. Being particularly interested in the matriarchal aspects of the societies which have possession, he seems to have overlooked groups such as the Hausa or the Songhay of the Sudan or even the important peoples of the Guinea Coast, where there are highly developed cult groups. Even when he mentions that among the Yoruba the ancestors reappear in the course of ceremonies, he is silent on the point that it is only through the possession of living individuals that these ancestors are able to participate in the festivities. Nor does he mention the important possession cults that exist there and in which men as well as women are visited by spirits. Finally, when he speaks of the Nuba, it is not clear whether or not he is referring to the matriarchate. Nadel (op. cit.) states specifically that in the six groups that have shamanism, among the 18 which he visited, five also have a system of patrilineal descent. The matriarchate, as seen by Baumann, must, to a certain degree, be identified with a system of matrilineal descent, although he employs the terms in a much wider sense in order to stress matriarchal influences in patrilineal societies.

Certain authors, who are particularly interested in possession rituals in East Africa, for example Harris (1957) for the Taita, Gerlach (1963) for the Digo and Messing (1958) for the Amhara, have had a tendency to see a causal relationship between illness, associated ritual and cult activities
and the inferior and dependent position of women in these societies. Balandier (1952) on the other hand, approaches the question in a different manner. He shows us that among the Lebu, the traditional ritual of the possession cults has become the affair of women, Islam having become more important among the men. Indeed, with the propagation of Islam, we observe that the cults that existed among the indigenous populations are losing, or have lost, the ties which they had with the centers of power, the result being that today these cults are limited to women. Greenberg (1946) and Smith (1954) have also observed the same phenomenon among the Hausa. On the other hand, Negro slaves seem to have succeeded in spreading possession cults almost everywhere in the Islamic world. This last point has now been demonstrated, and very fully, by Viviana Fâques in her study of the Negro brotherhoods of North-Western Africa. The same fact has also been observed by Moderassi, with reference to the zar cult, which on the one hand has reached as far as Egypt, and on the other, the Southern coast of Iran. This cult, too, was introduced by Negro slaves, and, as far as Egypt is concerned, has had a considerable success, even among white women. (Miyâ Salima, 1902). Variants of this cult are also found in the Sudan (Seligmann, 1914), among the Christian Amhara (Leiris, 1958; Messing, 1958) and the Pagan Galla (Haberland, 1960). But, once more, among these different groups, with the exception of the Galla, the inhabitants of Kuwait (Kline, 1965) and of Iran, the zar cult concerns women and everywhere, except among the Galla, it is above all concerned with therapy.

This distribution of the zar cult and of the Negro brotherhoods is particularly interesting because, as Viviana Fâques has pointed out, in a

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3 Parker (1962) has applied this interpretation on a much wider scale.
broader context we can establish a parallel between these and the distribution of the cults, based on possession-trance, among the Afro-American groups of Brazil and of the Caribbean. Without a doubt, the sources of these Afro-American cults are to be found mostly in the region of the Guinea Coast, while the cults of North Africa have their origins in the Sudan. The zar cult seems to have come from Ethiopia and the neighboring regions to the South. As far as the Americas are concerned, there has been a frequent tendency to draw on the inferior position of women as an explanation for the relation between them and the various possession cults. This inferior position is still a very popular explanation for the persistence of these cults. (Yinger, 1957; Mischel, 1958). Rather than subscribing to such an hypothesis, it seems more logical to us to suggest that women play a predominant role in the various possession cults in the Americas, because they played a predominant role in the cults in their regions of origin. In fact, as we have seen, Baumann, taking a totally opposite view, is willing to consider the possession cults as an expression of the cultural importance of the woman and of her reproductive and familial functions. Certain anthropologists, for example Landes (1940, 1947) who have studied Negroes in the Americas, have found the development of a "matriarchate" among them, and have established a relationship between it and the role played by the women in the cults, especially in Brazil.

In conclusion, we may then say that it seems that two factors explain the predominance of women in the possession cults: first of all, the ends for which a society utilizes possession-trance and secondly, the position of women in that society. This predominance thus represents:

1. a factor of equilibrium, as among the Hadjerai or the Fon, or
2. a factor of revolt, as among the Taita and the Amhara, or
3. a factor of conservatism, as among the Lebu and the Wolof.

Without going any further in our discussion of the diffusion of the cults, which is marginal to our subject, we may nonetheless stress that the Afro-American possession cults, the zar cult and the Negro brotherhoods of North Africa, each with its own particular syncretistic patterns, show us the importance, the tenacity and the vitality of a significant Negro African religious complex.

To illustrate this brief discussion, we present a map of the distribution of ritual trance and possession in Africa. Similar attempts were made by Frobenius in 1933 and by Friedrich in 1938. Neither of these authors, however, defined his terms, nor did they distinguish between trance and possession. It seems, then, that in both cases the word "possession" was used as a synonym for possession-trance. Furthermore, these authors have not given us their criteria for the selection of the societies included. The map presented by Frobenius, on the other hand, is very small, and according to his own statement, incomplete. He did not take up this theme in his ambitious Atlas Africanus.

Friedrich takes as his point of departure the Kulturkreise established by Frobenius. He makes a distinction between societies governed by clan elders, which are characterized by shamanism and possession and societies which have what has been called a divine king and which are characterized by a priesthood and temples. While he recognizes that in some areas these Kulturkreise overlap, most particularly as far as the Sudan is concerned, he nonetheless attempts to use his maps of "possession" and "divine kingship" to prove his thesis. He goes so far as to ignore possession found in the complicated cults of the Fon and the Yoruba, although he recognizes that possession exists in other societies with divine kingship, such as the
Ashanti among other. According to his maps, 15 of the 58 societies which he identifies as based on divine kingship have possession. This seems to indicate not only an overlap but even an important statistical association between these two characteristics. It is regrettable, on the other hand, that the criteria of classification employed by this author are never very clear.

Although the total number of different ethnic groups in Africa varies somewhat among authors, it would seem that 800 represents a reasonable estimate. For our map, then, it was therefore necessary to select a sample of societies. We based our sample on the work of Murdock, who, in 1957 published a list of societies in which he divided the African continent into 14 culture areas:

I. Pygmies and Khoisan
II. Southern Bantu
III. Central Bantu
IV. Northern Bantu
V. Equatorial Bantu
VI. Guinea Coast
VII. Southern Sudan
VIII. Nigerian Plateau
IX. Eastern Sudan
X. Upper Nile
XI. Ethiopia and Horn
XII. Moslem Sudan
XIII. Sahara
XIV. North Africa

The first of these, it would appear, represents a cultural level rather than a culture area, while the last four are considered by Murdock himself as
part of the Circum-Mediterranean region. In our work, consequently, we have omitted the Sahara and North Africa, but have kept the Moslem Sudan (including the Hausa and the Songhay) as well as Ethiopia and the Horn.

The sample used by Murdock includes 136 societies; he has explained in some detail the criteria which have guided him in his attempt to establish a balanced selection. Although we based ourselves on his choice, in numerous places it was, however, necessary to make substitutions and additions due to the lack of data in the accessible ethnographic literature.

We have a total of 156 societies; the aim of our map is to compare the distribution of the following:

1. Possession-trance (98 societies)
2. Simple trance (21 societies)
3. Absence of trance (37 societies)\(^4\)

As far as the absence of trance is concerned, we admit however, that we do not have the same degree of confidence as in the case of the presence of trance, for authors who specify the absence of a cultural trait are indeed rare. In most cases, then, our notation is based on an inference. Nevertheless, it seemed important to us to identify those African societies which do not have a cultural complex which is found so frequently in Africa, for the comparison of these societies with the others is of the first importance if we wish to find a functional and historical explanation of the phenomena of possession-trance and simple trance.

Possession-trance exists in all the cultural areas, with the exception of the Pygmies and Khoisan groups. Simple trance is found principally among

\(^4\)This map was drawn by Mrs. Mildred Hayman. It was established on the basis of ethnographic documents from the archives of the Cross-Cultural Study of Dissociational States, and with the help of Mrs. Jeannette Henney.
the Khoisan and in the Upper Nile area. It is also found among some groups of the Guinea Coast, (particularly in Liberia) and also among the Fang and the Kpe among the Equatorial Bantu. Absence of trance appears among the Pygmies, as well as in the Nigerian Plateau area, in the Upper Nile and neighboring areas of Ethiopia. Here, however, Haberland (1960) has shown the progressive advance of the trance-possession complex (zar) among the Galla.

Our map does not indicate the regions where possession without trance is found, for, while this is also an important phenomenon in Africa, this type of possession is never utilized for purposes of divination. Nor does our map take into account the various distinction we have made above, such as the predominance of women in the cults, modes of divination, etc.

Many writing of the 19th century and even of the beginnings of the 20th century speak of shamanism as simply being trickery used by clever natives, who, under the cover of fake trance states, pretend to be able to communicate with the supernatural. Thanks to the psychological and physiological knowledge which we have today, we are finally able to identify the processes whereby more or less profound states of dissociation may be attained. Thanks to anthropological studies, we are also able to regard these phenomena in a fuller cultural and sociological context and to understand the functional and historical importance of the cultural complex of trance. What strikes us today is no longer the more or less spectacular performance of a given individual, but the role which his activity plays in the society as a whole. Moreover, we are also able to say at present, that it is here not merely a question of superstitious, exploitative, sporadic and local activities, but rather of an important and significant phenomenon of African culture, a phenomenon which has not always received the attention it merited.
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