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Victor W. Turner

In common with a number of contemporary anthropologists, Victor Turner has been concerned with the functions of symbols in cultural processes, especially various ceremonies (not necessarily segregated as to their "sacredness" or "secularity"). He has made a series of significant contributions to the data and theory of the study of rituals and symbols, which appear in a series of books _The Drums of Affliction_, from which the present selection has been derived, _The Forest of Symbols_ (1967) and _The Ritual Process_ (1969), and many papers. For additional data on divination the reader is referred to Turner’s (1969) _Ndembu Divination_. In most of his writings, Turner’s data and interpretations are so abundant and teeming

To give an adequate explanation of the meaning of ritual symbols, one has first to consider what kinds of circumstances tend to give rise to ritual performances, for these circumstances probably decide what sort of ritual is performed, and the goals of that ritual largely determine the meaning of the symbols used in it. The switchpoint between social crisis and performance of redressive ritual is the divinatory seance or consultation.

Divination has certain affinities with judicial process, for it is vitally concerned with the customs and interests of persons in complex social situations. But it also prepares the way for the more rigidly standardized processes of redressive ritual. It is this mediating function that determines the cognitive and flexible qualities of its symbolism. Divination and redressive ritual are stages in a single process that is peculiarly sensitive to changes, and especially breakages, in the network of existing social relations. Since they are
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"naturally" so closely involved with the micro-history of contemporary groups and personalities, they must be treated theoretically in conjunction with these Life-crisis ritual, on the other hand, is less responsive to immediate social pressures and needs, since it is geared to the life-cycles of individuals, and therefore in its theoretical treatment the anthropologist may quite legitimately begin by analysing the cultural structure of these rites. This has many affinities with the social structure, but these are with social regularities which are deeply entrenched in custom, and not with those which are the product of transient alignments of economic and political interests. No recourse is made to divination to find a propitious place and time for life-crisis rites. But all rituals of affliction are preceded by some recourse to divination, however perfunctory, and it is in the divinatory process that quarrels, competition, and alignments among people are brought to light. We should therefore follow the Ndembu in giving precedence in our analysis, to the symbolism and procedures of divination.

DIVINATION AND ITS SYMBOLISM

Among Ndembu, the diviner regards his task as the practical one of revealing the causes of misfortune or death. These are almost invariably "mystical" or "non-empirical" in character, although human wishes, desires, and feelings are involved.

The diviners disclose what has happened, and do not foretell future events. Unlike many Southern Bantu diviners, they are seldom oracular or mantic. Furthermore, they do not inaugurate the divinatory process, but wait until clients come to consult them. Modes of divination are regarded as instruments which both detect lies and discover truth, although, since they are operated by fallible men, their verdicts are not always accepted without question. For witches are credited with extraordinary powers of deception, and even great diviners fortify themselves with special medicines to combat the deceits and illusions sent by their secret antagonists to baffle them. One such medicine is used at the first stage of a consultation. A clearing is made in the bush about half a mile from the diviner's village. Two poles are inserted in the ground, and a third placed on them to make a frame resembling goalposts. On this are placed three head-pads (mbung'a), similar to those worn by women when they carry heavy loads. These are made of a special kind of grass called kaw'amung waldi. Etymologically, this term is derived from kuswama, "to hide", and ng wadi, "the bare-throated francolin" a bird like a partridge, much prized as a food, that loves to conceal itself in this long fine grass. In hunting cults the grass is used as a symbol for the desired invisibility of the hunter when he stalks game. Here it stands for the witch's attempts to conceal vital matters from the diviner. I translate a text given me by a diviner, explaining the meaning of the head-pad. "The head-pad is a sign to the diviner not to forget anything, for he must not be ignorant of anything. A witch or sorcerer (muljji means both) could use medicine to deceive the diviner (chitahe or mkwakuhung'a), or hide things from him. The head-pad is medicine to prevent this, for it keeps the diviner wide awake, it is a reminder to him. The grass in it is twisted, like the witch's attempts to deceive." Under the frame must pass the diviner's clients, who may unwittingly harbour a sorcerer or witch in their ranks. The medicine may expose him to the diviner.

Another medicine used by diviners, and kept by them in small calabashes (malembu) while they divine, is a nerve from the root of an elephant's tusk. In ritual contexts this is called nsomu. Because it resembles a limp penis, it often has the meaning of masculine impotence. In divination it has the further meaning of a sorcerer, for sorcerers are believed to be able to blast the fertility of their victims. They are also believed to be able to kill them. Nsombu is also a suitable symbol for death, since impotence is regarded as a kind of death. When an impotent man dies, a black line is drawn with charcoal from his navel downwards and over his genitals, indicating that his name, and with it certain vital elements of his personality, must never be inherited by the children of his kin. This is social death. Known sorcerers are treated in the same fashion.

I have cited these texts at length, for two reasons. The first is to demonstrate how readily and explicitly diviners are able to offer interpretations of their symbols. The second is to exhibit an important variation on a theme which pervades all Ndembu ritual, that of "bringing into the open what is hidden or unknown." This variation has the special sense of "exposing deception and secret malice". The main theme of "revealing the hidden" is exemplified in all cults to cure persons afflicted by the shades with disease, reproductive disorders, or bad luck at hunting. The cure is essentially a process of what Ndembu call "making known and visible" (ku-solola or ku-mwekesa), albeit in

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symbolic guise, the unknown and invisible agents of affliction. This is brought about in various ways. One way is by mentioning the shade’s name in prayer and invocation (ku-tena ijina damukishi). The belief is that the spirit is aggrieved because it has been forgotten, not only by the victim, but also by many of its other kin. It afflicts its living kinsman, sometimes in his personal capacity, but often in his capacity as representative of a kin-group. If, however, it is mentioned, and hence remembered, by many people, it will cease to afflict and will henceforward benefit its victim, who becomes a sort of living memorial to it. Another way is through representing the shade in some kind of material form, either as a figurine named after it, or as a construction of branches covered with a blanket whitened with cassava meal. These representations are made at the end of protracted rituals in sacred sites which only cult adepts may enter, called masoli (from the verb ku-solu “to make visible” or “reveal”). It is said that when the spirit is afflicting its victim, it is concealed in his or her body. This is thought especially to be the case where women suffer from some reproductive disorder. But when the spirit has been adequately represented in symbolic form and frequently named, it is believed to emerge, reconciled with the victim and his whole kin-group.

The Ndembu term for “symbol” itself contains the implication of a revelatory process. This term is chinjikjillu, and is derived from ku-jikjilla “to blaze a trail” in the bush. When hunters set out on expeditions into the deep bush (perhaps into thick Cryptopos spatum forest), they cut marks on trees and also break and bend over their lower branches to indicate the way back. The blaze or landmark, in other words, leads from unknown, and therefore in Ndembu experience as well as belief, from dangerous territory to known and familiar surroundings, from the lonely bush to the populated village. Ritual symbols have a similar function, for they give a visible form to unknown things, they express in concrete and familiar terms what is hidden and unpredictable. They enable men to domesticate and manipulate wild and wayward forces.

When the diviner confronts witchcraft, he seeks to expose secret deceit and malice, to reveal the identity and the motives of sorcerers and witches. This aim shapes much of the symbolism of divination. Leaving aside the personal acuity of the diviner, the symbols he uses reveal how Ndembu have come to stereotype certain forms of fraudulent and malevolent behaviour. Ndembu have many types of divination. Here I am concerned with one mode of divination only, since it brings out most clearly the stereotyping of hidden malice, as well as certain other characteristics of divinatory symbolism shortly to be discussed.

This is called by Ndembu ng’ombe yakwewula literally “divination by shaking up or tossing (objects in a basket).” The diviner keeps a set of anything from twenty to thirty objects, of various shapes, sizes, and colours, in a round basket with a lid. When he divines he places these objects in a round flat open basket (ivwala), of the type used by women to winnow millet, shakes them, and throws them up so that they form a heap at the far side of the basket. He examines the top three or four objects, individually, in combination, and with reference to their relative height in the heap. His skill as an individual lies in the way in which he adapts his general exogesis of the objects to the given circumstances. For he is usually confronted by a group of kin who wish to find out which particular ancestor, sorcerer, or witch is causing the sickness or misfortune of their relative. Ndembu believe that this group itself may contain sorcerers or witches. In reality, as the diviner well knows, it may contain rival factions, one of which may stand to benefit by the death of the sick person if the latter holds office or is wealthy. If his clients wish him to divine into the cause of a death, the situation is still more serious. In the past, before witchcraft and witch-finding were declared illegal by the British Administration, such consultations took place near the most important village in the neighbourhood cluster of villages where the deceased person lived. Everyone in the neighbourhood was expected to attend, and failure to do so was a cause of suspicion. The diviner had to make a sound appraisal of the balance of power between rival factions interested in the death who were present at the public gathering. If he did not, and gave an unpopular verdict, he was likely to be in some danger himself.

Many diviners sought the protection of a chief and performed near his capital village. But I have been told of several diviners who, despite such protection, were speared to death by angry kin of the persons declared to be sorcerers.

The winnowing basket itself stands for the sifting of truth from falsehood. The diviner is believed to be possessed by the spirit of a diviner-ancestor, in a particular manifestation known as Kayong’u. Kayong’u is also said to be a “man-slayer” (kambanjji), because people may be slain as a result of a divining decision. It is the Kayong’u spirit which causes the diviner to tremble, and thus to shake the basket. Before becoming a diviner he must have
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been afflicted by this spirit, which causes asthmatic shortness of breath and makes him tremble violently while being washed with medicine. He is treated by a cult-group led by a famous diviner. Many of the symbols of the Kavongu ritual stand for the "sharpness" which he must display as a diviner. These include needles and razors, the former being embedded in the hearts of a sacrificed cock and goat. When the diviner trembles and breathes heavily, he is said to be feeling the pricking of the needle, which itself symbolizes the Kavongu spirit, in his heart, lungs, and liver. After he has been treated, the novice-diviner apprentices himself to an established diviner, who teaches him the meanings of the objects in a diviner's basket. The established diviner encourages the novice to divine himself, criticizes his performance and gives him some of his own equipment. He enlists the aid of a professional wood-carver to make others.

I have information on twenty-eight divinatory symbols. Their total range of meaning embraces the whole sorry story of misfortune, loss and death in Ndembu life, and of the mean, selfish, revengeful motives believed to be responsible for these afflictions (Jenod 1927: 571) Since so few objects represent so many things, it is not surprising to find that each of them has many meanings.

The symbolic items are called by Ndembu, tuponya (singular kaponya). Some are further designated as ankishi (singular ikishi). These are figures representing generalized human beings in various postures. The root -kishi is found in the term for ancestor spirit munkishi and in the term for the masks and costumes used at circumcision and funerary rituals, Makishi (singular Iskishi). The general sense underlying these various meanings seems to be some kind of mystical power associated with human beings, alive or dead. Here I will discuss three figures or ankishi, and seven other divinatory objects or tuponya. Both classes have reference to human activity and purpose. Some represent structural features in human life, aspects of the cultural landscape, principles of social organization and social groups and categories, and dominant customs regulating economic, sexual, and social life. Others represent forces or dynamic entities, such as motives, wishes, desires, and feelings. Not infrequently the same symbol expresses both an established custom, and a set of stereotyped disputes and forms of competition that have developed around it. It is roughly true that the human figures represent social and emotional stereotypes, while many of the other objects refer specifically to Ndembu structure and culture.

The same tuponya are used in different stages of a consultation, and the meaning of each symbolic item may change somewhat at each stage. Rather than follow a consultation through, stage by stage, I will present excerpts from texts about some tuponya and analyze those excerpts which exemplify their use at some stages and not at others.

Let us now examine the human figures, or ankishi. The most important of these is a group of three, clipped together in a band of horn, representing a man, a woman, and a child. These are called either simply ankishi, "figurines" or Akulampi, "the Elders." The prefix A- here implies that the figures are invested with some animistic quality. They are "Elders" in several senses. In the first place, they are the most important of the tuponya, the focal point of reference so to speak in the whole set. In the second place, they represent a chief and his kin. The male figure is compared with Mwaniyanwca, the title of the great Lunda king in the Congo, from whose kingdom the Ndembu, like many other Central African tribes, are said to have migrated about two hundred and fifty to three hundred years ago. In the diviner is trying to detect a sorcerer, a piece of red clay in a container of mongoose skin, representing "enmity" or "a grudge," comes persistently to the top of the set with "the Elders" - this means that the sorcerer belongs to the close kin of a chief, or might even be a chief himself. In the third place, "the Elders" might represent a headman and his kin, depending upon the question asked. If a thin circle of iron, called Lukani and representing the bracelet worn among Ndembu only by Senior Chief Kanongesha, repeatedly comes to the top with "the Elders," this means that either Kanongesha or his close kin played an important role in the situation divined into. Or if a lump of white clay (mpemba or mpeza) were to rise with them when sorcery was being investigated, this would mean that Kanongesha and his kin were innocent. Again, the diviner might himself specify that "the Elders" stood for a particular matrilineage (Ivumui), perhaps that descended from the dead person's own mother's mother. He might ask "Did the emity come from this lineage?" If then "the Elders" came to the top three times, associated, for example, with red clay and another object called Chanzo'ombi, in the form of a wooden snake with a human face, representing a sorcery-familiar called ilomba, this would be proof that a male member of that lineage.
was the sorcerer, and had killed because he had a grudge against his victim.

What is interesting in terms of social relations is that the man, woman and child, comprising "the Elders," are not primarily regarded as an elementary family, although they can be specified as such, but as co-members of a matrilineage not necessarily brother, sister and sister's child, but interlinked in any way the diviner cares to designate. All kinds of groups, relationships, and differences of status can be expressed by this symbol doing all kinds of things. Divinatory symbols are multireferential, and their referents are highly autonomous and readily detachable from one another. Ritual symbols proper are much more highly condensed, their meanings interpenetrate and fuse, giving them greater emotional resonance.

The second figurine we shall consider is called Chambutu. It represents a man sitting huddled up with chin on hands and elbows on knees. Chambutu means an irresolute, changeable person.

It is obvious that from one point of view diviners use Chambutu in their professional interest. They state firmly that, if someone falls ill, people should have speedy recourse to a diviner. Poverty is no excuse. On the other hand, the employment of this symbol asserts certain pervasive social values. People should put the care of their kin before all selfish considerations. Sins of omission in this respect are almost as bad as sins of commission, such as sorcery. Again, people should make up their minds quickly to do their duty, they should not equivocate.

Diviners sometimes use Chambutu to withdraw from the awkward situation that may arise if they cannot enlist the unanimous agreement of their clients for their judgements. One client may deny the diviner's imputation that he is a sorcerer or others may support him, others again, may say that they are not certain about it, and yet others may assert that the divination itself was false, perhaps because of the interference of a witch. In such situations, Chambutu is liable to come uppermost in the basket. The diviner asks Chambutu, "What have you come here for? Does this mean that my divination is in error?" If it appears two or three times running, the diviner "closes down" the divination (wajika jing'ombu), demanding from those who have come to consult him a couple of pieces of cloth for his trouble. The diviner tries to save his reputation by blaming his clients for the failure, and tells them that the witch in their midst is trying to confuse his verdict. This is one of the sanctions against lack of unanimity in response to a diviner's queries and statements (timutu).

The other figurine normally used by diviners is an effigy of a man in the traditional posture of grief with both hands clasped to his head. It is called Katvambimbi (from kutwa "to pound," and mbimbi, "weeping"). It means the "one who inaugurates the mourning" when someone dies. Kutwa is used here with reference to the position of the two hands on the head, analogous to hands on a pounding pole. The primary sense is "the one who brings news of death" to the relatives of the deceased.

But Katvambimbi has another and, if anything, more sinister meaning. In the words of one informant, Katvambimbi is a mischief-maker (kakabukala) who carries tales from one person to another, claiming that each hates and is trying to bewitch the other. If one of them is induced to kill the other by witchcraft or sorcery, Katvambimbi is the one who weeps the loudest at the wake, although he is the one who has the greatest guilt. In Ndembu custom a person divined as a Katvambimbi receives the same punishment as a sorcerer or witch. In the past it was death by burning, or ostracism from Ndembu society with confiscation of property, today, banishment from village and neighbourhood.

On the face of it, divinatory symbols seem to reflect explicit human purposes. They are used to enable diviners to discover the causes of misfortune, and to suggest possible remedies. The diviner, as I have said, behaves in an astute and rational way, given his axiomatic beliefs in spirits, mystical forces, and witches. He is not above an certain low cunning at times, as we saw with regard to his manipulation of the figurine Chambutu. Nevertheless, the bases of his craft are rooted in mystical beliefs, and he is himself a believer. Without belief I feel that he would not possess insight into Ndembu social life, which is governed by values with which he largely identifies himself. I say 'identifies' advisedly, since the diviner himself believes that he harbours in his body the Kuringu, the shade manifestation, which, more than any other manifestation, is believed to detect breach of norm rebellion against, or deviation from, Ndembu moral prescriptions. The shade is using the diviner's sharp wits on behalf of Ndembu society. That is why a diviner must be in a fit moral condition before he undertakes a consultation. For example, he must be sexually continent for some time before and during the period in which he is
divining. He must avoid many foods. He must not harbour malice in his heart against anyone, as this would bias his judgment.

The diviner feels that he is not primarily operating on his own behalf, but on behalf of his society. At divinations, the physiological stimuli provided by drumming and singing, the use of archaic formulæ in questions and responses, together with the concentration demanded by his divining technique, take him out of his everyday self and heighten his intuitive awareness. He is a man with a vocation. He also measures actual behaviour against ideals. As we have seen, several of the symbols he manipulates owe something of their meaning to values attached to openness, honesty, and truthfulness. One of his avowed aims is to make known and intelligible in Ndembu terms what is unknown and unintelligible. Underlying his task is the presumption that unless people bring their grudges and rancours into the open, “into the public eye”, these will fester and poison the life of a group. Shades afflict the living with misfortune to bring such hidden struggles sharply to the attention of members of disturbed groups before it is too late. The diviner can then recommend that a cult-association be called in to perform rituals which will not only cure an individual patient, but also heal disturbances in the group. But where animosities have become deep and cankered, they become associated with the lethal power of witchcraft. The malignant individual himself becomes a social canker. At this point it is little use trying to cure the selfish or envious sorcerer or witch. He must be extirpated, rooted out of the group, at whatever cost to those of his kin who love him or depend on him. I am satisfied that all diviners, at any rate, are convinced that they are performing a public duty without fear or favour. It is a grave responsibility to be possessed by the Kayongu shade and become a diviner. For henceforth one is not entirely one’s own man. One belongs to society, and to society as a whole, and not to one or other of its structured subgroups.

The diviner is a rationally individual. But the premises from which he deduces conclusions may be non-rational ones. He does not try to “go behind” his beliefs in supernatural beings and forces. That is why divinatory objects are better classified with symbols than with signs, although they have some of the attributes of the latter. He treats as self-evident truths what social anthropologists and depth psychologists would try to reduce to rational terms. These scholars, in their professional role at any rate, do not concede that spirits and witches have existence. For most of them these entities are themselves “symbols” for endopsychic or social drives and forces, which they set themselves the task of discovering.

Certain distinctions can be made between divinatory symbols and the symbolism of rituals of life-crisis and affliction. In the former, the cognitive aspect is much more pronounced; in the latter, the orotic aspect, that concerned with feelings and desires, is clearly dominant. The diviner, granted his premises—which are shared by his consultants—is trying to grasp consciously and bring into the open the secret, and even unconscious, motives and aims of human actors in some situation of social disturbance. In the public ritual of the Ndembu, symbols may be said to stimulate emotions. Both kinds of symbols have multiple meanings, but in ritual symbols proper those significata which represent charged phenomena and processes, such as blood, milk, semen, and faeces, are fused and condensed with significata which stand for aspects of social virtue, such as matriliney, marriage, chiefship, etc., or virtues such as generosity, piety towards the ancestors, respect for the elders, manly uprightness, and so on. The emotional, mainly physiological, referents may well lend their qualities to the ethical and normative referents so as to make what is obligatory desirable. They seem, as Sapir wrote, to “send roots down into the unconscious”, and, I would add, to bring sap up to the conscious.

But the semantic structure of divinatory symbols shows that the senses possessed by a symbol are not so much “fused” as sharply distinguished. Their semantic structure has “brittle segmentation”. I mean by this that a divinatory symbol possesses a series of senses, only one of which is relevant at a time, i.e. at an inspection of a configuration of symbols. An important symbol in a ritual of affliction or of life-crisis is felt to represent many things at once, all its senses are simultaneously present. Divinatory symbols may, therefore, be called “analytical”, and ritual symbols “synthetical”. The former are used to discriminate between items that have become confused and obscure, the latter represent fusions of many apparently disparate items. The brittle segmentation of divinatory symbols may be because the same symbols are used in a series of enquiries, each of which has its one specific aim—such as to discover a relationship between witch and victim, or to find a motive for ensorceling, or to seek out the precise mode of shade-affliction, and so on. The meaning of each individual symbol is subordinated...
to the meaning of a configuration of symbols, and each configuration is a means to a clearly defined and conscious end. The system of meanings possessed by the ritual symbol proper derives both from some deep and universal human need or drive and from a universal human norm controlling that drive. A divinatory symbol, on the other hand, helps the diviner to decide what is right and wrong, to establish innocence or guilt in situations of misfortune, and to prescribe well-known remedies. His role falls between that of a judge and that of a ritual expert. But, whereas a judge enquires into conscious motives, a diviner often seeks to discover unconscious impulses behind anti-social behaviour. To discover these he uses intuition as much as reason. He "feels after" the stresses and sore points in relationships, using his configurations of symbolic objects to help him concentrate on detecting the difficulties in configurations of real persons and relationships. Both he and they are governed by the axiomatic norms of Ndembu society. Thus the symbols he uses are not mere economical devices for purposes of reference, i.e., "signs" but have something of the "subliminal" quality of ritual symbols proper. With their aid he can say, for instance, that a shade is "making her granddaughter ill because the people of such-and-such a village are not living well with one another"; or that "a man killed his brother by sorcery because he wanted to be headman". With the aid he can prescribe remedial ritual measures. But he cannot diagnose the empirical causes of social "divisiveness" (Beals and Siegel 1966), any more than of sickness or death. The diviner's conscious knowledge and control is limited by supra-conscious social and moral forces and by unconscious biophysical forces. Yet divinatory symbols are as close to "signs" as they are to Jung's "symbols", pregnant with unknown meaning.

DIVINATION AS A PHASE IN A SOCIAL PROCESS

Divination is a phase in a social process which begins with a person's death or illness, or with reproductive trouble, or with misfortune at hunting. Informal or formal discussion in the kinship or local group of the victim leads to the decision to consult a diviner. The actual consultation or séance, attended by the victim's kin and/or neighbours, is the central episode in the process. It is followed by remedial action according to the diviner's verdict, action which may consist of the destruction or expulsion of a sorcerer/witch or of the performance of ritual by cult specialists to propitiate or exorcise particular manifestations of shades, or of the application of medicines according to the diviner's prescription by a leech or medicine man.

Death, disease and misfortune are usually ascribed to tensions in the local kin group, expressed as personal grudges charged with the mystical power of sorcery or witchcraft, or as beliefs in the punitive action of ancestor spirits. Diviners try to elicit from their clients responses which give them clues to the current tensions in their groups of origin. Divination, therefore, becomes a form of social analysis, in the course of which hidden conflicts are revealed so that they may be dealt with by traditional and institutionalized procedures. It is in the light of this function of divination as a mechanism of social redress that we must consider its symbolism, the social composition of its consultative sessions, and its procedures of interrogation.

We must always remember that the standards against which social harmony and disharmony are assessed are those of Ndembu culture and not of Western social science. They are those of a society which, possessing only a rudimentary technology and limited empirical skills and knowledge, consequently has a low degree of control over its material environment. It is a society highly vulnerable to natural disasters, such as disease, infant mortality, and intermittent food shortages. Furthermore, its ethical yardsticks are those of a community composed of small residential groups of close kin. Since kinship guides co-residence and confers rights to succeed to office and inherit property, the major problems of Ndembu society bear on the maintenance of good relations between kin, and on the reduction of competition and rivalry between them. Furthermore, since persons of incompatible temperaments and characters are frequently forced into daily propinquity by kinship norms which enjoin respect and co-operation among them, inter-personal hostilities tend to develop that are forbidden direct expression. Hidden grudges (yitela) rankle and grow, as Ndembu are well aware. In the idiom of Ndembu culture these grudges are associated with the mystical power of sorcery/witchcraft.

Ndembu themselves list jealousy, envy, greed, pride, anger, lust, and the desire to steal as causes of discord in group life, and these vices are by no means unfamiliar to us. Nevertheless, these symptoms of a disordered human nature spring from a
specific social structure. In their attempts to diminish the disastrous consequences of these "deadly sins" in social life Ndembu bring into operation institutionalized mechanisms of redress that are ordered towards the maintenance of that social structure. Divination, as we have seen, is one of those mechanisms, and in it we can observe many idiosyncratic features.

In the first place, the diviner clearly knows that he is investigating within a social context of a particular type. He first establishes the location of the Senior Chief's area, then that of the Sub-chief's, then the vicinity, and finally the village of the victim. Each of these political units has its own social characteristics: its factional divisions, its inter-village rivalries, its dominant personalities, its nucleated and dispersed groups of kindred—each possessing a history of settlement or migration. An experienced diviner will be familiar with the contemporary state of these political systems from previous consultations and from the voluminous gossip of wayfarers. Next he finds out the relationship between the victim and those who have come to consult him. He is assisted in this task by his knowledge of the categories of persons who typically make up the personnel of a village: the victim's matrilineal kin, his patrilateral kin, his affines, and unrelated persons. He finds out the victim's relationship to the headman, and he then focuses his attention on the headman's matrilineage and discovers into how many sub-lineages it may be segmented.

By the time he has finished his interrogation, he has a complete picture of the current structure of the village and of the position occupied in it by the victim and by those who came to consult him. Since it is common for representatives of each of its important segments as well as affines of members of its matrilineal nucleus to visit a diviner in the event of an important man's death, and since these representatives may not make the same responses to key questions, the diviner does not have to look far for indications of structural cleavages in the village. Diviners are also aware that there is a general association between the kind of misfortune about which he is consulted—the sex of the victim, the composition of the group of clients, and the size and structure of the political or residential unit from which they come. Thus only a few close kin or affines will normally consult a diviner about a woman's barrenness or a hunter's bad luck. But a large party, representative of all segments of a Sub-chiefdom will come to him when a Sub-chief dies. This association does not always hold true, however, for the death or even illness of a child may sometimes be taken as the occasion to bring into the open the dominant cleavage in a large village if the time is felt to be ripe. But diviners have learnt by experience—their own and their society's, incorporated in divinatory procedure and symbolism to reduce their social system to a few basic principles and factors, and to juggle with these until they arrive at a decision that accords with the views of the majority of their clients at any given consultation.

They are guided, however, not by an objective analysis of the social structure, but rather by an intuition into what is just and fitting in terms both of Ndembu moral values and an ethical code which would be recognized as valid by all human groups. Just as Africans have been shown to operate in their judicial processes with the universally recognized concept of the "reasonable man" (Gluckman 1955) or "man of sense", so do they operate in their divinatory processes with the universally recognized concept of the "good man" or "moral man", mutu u amuwahi. This is the man who bears no grudges, who is without jealousy, envy, pride, anger, covetousness, lust, greed, etc., and who honours his kinship obligations. Such a man is open, he has "a white liver", he has nothing to conceal from anyone, he does not curse his fellows, he respects and remembers his ancestors. The diviner looks for sorcerers and witches among those who do not measure up to this standard of morality. Indeed, he looks for them among the positive transgressors, among those whom his clients admit to be wrongdoers or "slippery customers". In the cases of illness, infertility, and bad luck at hunting, he applies the same measures of the "moral man" to individuals, although he also applies the yardstick of the "moral group", which lives in mutual amity and collectively reveres its ancestors and respects political authorities. But here it would seem he is on the look out not so much for "mortal sins" as for "venial sins": for grudges that have not grown murderous, for offences that may yet be forgiven, for quarrels that have not yet split up a group.

Thus the diviner has to take into account both the specific structure of Ndembu society and a set of moral values and norms. Both these referents are represented in the symbolism of divination. The symbols are mnemonic, reminders of certain general rubrics of Ndembu culture, within which the diviner can classify the specific instance of behaviour that he is considering. Moreover, they have to be of such a nature as to lend themselves to
configurational analysis. It is the constellation of symbols rather than the individual symbol which forms the typical unit of interpretation. A symbol may appear as a substantive, and in this role it may possess, say, half a dozen basic senses. By noting the reactions of the clients and attenders, the diviner can make a guess, or "formulate a hypothesis", which will enable him to establish the particular sense of the substantival symbol: he can then allocate senses to the modifiers. Here the vagueness and flexibility of the series of referents of each symbol leave him free to make a detailed interpretation of the configuration of symbols corresponding to the diagnosis he is making of the state of relationships between his clients and the deceased, and between the living kin concerned in the matter. And once he has established a chidimba, a definite point of divination, and obtained agreement on its veracity or likelihood, he has a point of departure for further enquiry, something firm to go on. He may then deduce logical consequences from the chidimba, regarded as a set of premises. Furthermore, he has established a certain psychological ascendancy over his audience, so that they tend to become less guarded in their replies, for with growing credulity in his divinatory powers they become more eager to give him the hard data he requires. I believe that this is one of the reasons why a basket-diviner tries to find the name of the deceased quite early in the seance. Diviners, as we have seen, have learnt that the vast majority of Ndembu names can be classified under relatively few main heads—"water", "hoofed animals", "chieftainship", etc., after the manner of the English party game, "Twenty Questions"; they can quickly proceed from the general to the particular. In a society not specially remarkable for its power of abstract thinking, the diviner's ability to do this must appear little short of miraculous. When the diviner names the deceased, therefore, he has won the credulity of his audience to such an extent that he can elicit key information without much difficulty. In other words, the logician is felt to be a magician.

It may be said in conclusion that the diviner occupies a central position with reference to several fields of social and cultural relationships. He acts as a mechanism of redress and social adjustment in the field of local descent groups, since he locates areas and points of tension in their contemporary structures. Furthermore, he exonerates or accuses individuals in these groups in terms of a system of moral norms. Since he operates in emotionally charged situations, such norms are restated in a striking and memorable fashion. Thus he may be said to play a vital role in upholding tribal morality. Moral law is most vividly made known through its breach. Finally, the diviner's role is pivotal to the system of rituals of affliction and anti-witchcraft/sorcery rituals, since he decides what kind of ritual should be performed in a given instance, when it should be performed, and sometimes who should perform it. Since diviners are consulted on many occasions, it is clear that their role as upholders of tribal morality and rectifiers of disturbed social relationships—both structural and contingent—is a vital one in a society without centralized political institutions.