

By Azzo Ghidinelli  
Translated by Walter Krochmal

Shamanism manifests itself in Honduras among the Miskito, the Pech, the Paya, the Toropán or Jicaque and the Garífuna. These cultures hunt, fish, and supplement their diet by foraging and growing tubers. They differ from the Mesoamerican cultures, represented in Honduras by the Chortí and Lenca, among which we can't speak about shamanism proper.

As matrifocal horticultural societies gave way to patrifocal agrarian societies, shamanistic functions grew more specialized while institutionalizing themselves as attributes of the priestly elite. Shamans properly speaking, who derive their art from the group's earlier horizons, become "witch doctors," that is, persons who possess the magical powers of a medium but who act together with evil spirits, and to ends that the community fears.

Thus with the Mesoamerican priestly elites during the Classical period, a clear diversification of functions already existed: priests of the agrarian rites, astronomer priests, diviner priests, and therapist priests, the latter most likely with diverse specializations including defending the patient from the evil powers of the witch doctors. After the Spanish invasion and with the accelerated extinction of the Pre-Hispanic priestly elite, among the Chortí and Lenca there remained, on the one hand, religious specialists (those who pray) and those who hold civic powers (principals) and elsewhere, the therapists with their specialized healers, bone-healers, masseuses, diviners and midwives.

According to Massajoli (U. 1967:1060) the elements of shamanism are quite distinct in the Toropán culture, whether through the practice known as *soplo* (literally "blowing") or through divining. In the blowing ceremony the sick person is locked up in the home of the ethnopsychiatrist, who walks around the patient twice counterclockwise, then blows *pinol* (toasted, ground maize) into the patient's mouth. With the breath he transfers the magical powers he possesses against the illness from his body to the patient's. Magic practices become more evident in divinations the shaman carries out using *henequén* cords. Divination alludes to death, to the outcome of a hunt, to illnesses and to the search for lost objects. For our purposes here, the patient holds the ends of the four cords, each of which differs from the other in the number of knots and which you tie in a knot at the opposite end. The shaman carries out specific ritual movements, utters magical words according to prescribed ritual and throws the cords, then interprets, foreshadows and diagnoses illnesses according to the shapes they assume.

Coelho describes several magic practices among Honduran Garífuna and mentions the existence of prayers among the multiple purposes of which we count divination and health recovery (1981:118-21). The complex process of transculturation which the Garífuna have experienced (Ghidinelli, G.I. 1972:5-8) has resulted in a series of specializations. First among these stands the *buiei*, which can be either a man or a woman, who serves as the lead shaman and who oversees ancestor rites and cures illnesses provoked by spirits, which we would consider psychosomatic. Second stands the *gariahati*, cited by Coelho (1981:152-3), meaning the diviner who does not yet possess auxiliary spirits, but uses a calabash full of water and looks into it in darkness broken

only by candlelight. Some believe that after uttering a magic incantation the gariahati can diagnose an illness or tell if the patient will heal. Then they have the surusie, meaning those who know the healing properties of plants.

Shamanism among the Pech and Miskito of Honduras was first documented by Conzemius (1932) and later reported by Massajoli (U. 1968:774-5). According to this author there exists a belief that the shaman possesses the spirits during his divination and ethnopsychiatric activities. They call it sukia on the Moskito coast.

The sukia are fairly widespread and have many customers. They consider them to possess superior intelligence with outstanding knowledge of medicinal herbs, and interest in all things considered mysterious by the natives: healing disease, divination, magical offerings and reading the stars. Each settlement or community seems to have a sukia. What's more, some sukia they consider evil and others benevolent, with a strong tendency to consider the local sukia good and the one in the neighboring community evil.

Sukias become so through casual revelation: under the influence of a spirit, they carry out acts of seeming insanity. As soon as he recognizes these signs of destiny he begins to prepare through fasting and watches; during this preparation period he serves under the tutelage of a guide spirit. Once he initiates his activities, he must reinforce his powers with a special diet, fasting and abstinence. Often these revelations occur within the same family, which leads us to believe that the institution of shamanism may be hereditary.

Among the Sumu, according to Massajoli (1968:774), it seems the sukia must test their powers by walking naked on hot coals. Conzemius (1932:43) also tells of having seen a lady shaman walk among the Miskito with the same purpose, a fact remembered by one of Velásquez's informants (1980:305).

The shaman carries out his activities as a general rule at nighttime, adhering to methods inherited according to tradition. Healing consists of whistling over the patient. Sometimes the sukia sinks little sticks into the ground around the patient's body, in order to keep the spirits far away, then dances around him singing sacred verses. He also issues negative prescriptions, for example asking the patient to abstain from eating certain foods or from doing this or that or the other. Neither is it rare for the shaman to become a surgeon when needed and practice minor operations with special instruments such as obsidian knives or glass shards. The sukia are feared because, even though their normal functions may be beneficial, when they want to they can inflict harm on their own and other people's enemies through magic and the use of poisons.

In 1980 a work by Rony Velásquez was published in Honduras with the title "Miskito Shamanism in Honduras," apparently the most exhaustive to date. We recommend it for its accessibility to those who would like to deepen their studies. The importance of the sukia derives from the fact that community members approach the shaman in case of illness and, additionally, he also guides the souls of the dead to the dwelling place of the shadows. Beyond strictly theoretical considerations of the shaman as a specialist of the soul, certain sets of problems exist that we consider of first priority in ethnopsychiatric research.

The study of the shamanic institution is important in order to understand the stabilizing role it plays in traditional societies and the imbalances that occur when this stabilizing element ceases to exist as a consequence of the acculturation process. Research of the shamanic institution can offer this contribution to the broad problem of

cultural and social change. What happens in the absence of the stabilizing function of shamanism as a result of acculturation? What happens when the group no longer has anyone to heal its soul? The need human groups have for the shamanic function does not seem to abate with the processes of artificialization, miscegenation and acculturation. What does diminish in such cases is the operational capacity of pertinent patterns that no longer constitute a functional system. This happens in many miscegenated, or mestizo communities where the shamanic function is a necessary one, as the persistent need to resort to diviners, healers witch or bush doctors and any specialist of the soul proves. The shamanic function can even persist in highly urbanized communities.

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