

Global Shamanism in Context: *Itako* (from Osorezan, Aomori, Japan) and *Mikishi* (Lake Mweru, Katanga, Democratic Republic of Congo)

Felix Ulombe Kaputu

Introduction

The concept shamanism owes its existence to the word shaman largely commented upon by many scholars. Neil S. Price,¹⁾ along with Mircea Eliade²⁾ and many other researchers, view both concepts, shaman and shamanism, as alluding to magico-religious rituals, medicine men, sorcerers, magicians, ritualistic performers also identified under other many different names associated with ancient, and modern geographic and linguistic areas. Both concepts are often used interchangeably to designate a character attributed with extraordinary, unlimited, mythical, and magico-religious powers. In addition, the magic considerations and the religious dimension are often coupled with highly ecstatic behavior associated with trance, soul journey in the heaven or the underworld characterized many times with complete memory loss, or mind instability allied with different kinds of madness in psychoanalysts' classifications.³⁾

The above mentioned characteristics and attempts to define both shaman and shamanism largely recur in research around the world whereas at the same time, more and more, local names strive to depict specific identities and distance from the popular concepts.⁴⁾ The obvious possible confusion from different definitions and attributes raises questions about the authenticity of many shamans, their powers, and socialization capacities. In the past, in many instances, very quick conclusions led, unfortunately, to view shamanism as primitive magic, primitive mysticism, or, again, a very simple medical diagnosis related to paranoia. Thus, modern studies of human behavior such as Ohashi⁵⁾ and many others tend to look at the ecstatic state from a medical perspective or from a psychological orientation, thus excluding it from a holistic consideration that would take into account many other approaches. Through the use of modern technologies screening heartbeats, brain attention, and empirical experiences, psychiatrists and medical agents generally consider that while in trance shamans would not be responsible for their actions. As proof, they notice that heartbeat graphs testify of a brain level similar to sleeping in deep low consciousness. The same technicians would however face a dead end in explaining the transfer of the same behavior from the shaman to his/her customer.

Quite often in many places, when the shaman enters into the trance, the customer also gradually behaves in the same way and quickly develops a trance. Theoretical explanations are at a loss when it comes to what could be considered as proof of betterment, healing, and social reintegration of patients submitted to the shamans' trance treatment. If shamanistic situations studied by modern scientists do not seem to fol-

low any coherent, logical, and empirical explanation as would be expected, it is worth mentioning that shamanism involves several kinds of societies and does not seem to have said its last word. On the contrary, under its various manifestations, shamanism moves from one generation to another, from one civilization to another, both in the so called “uncivilized” and civilized societies.⁶⁾

Apart from the above mentioned attempts to access shamanistic secrets and failures to build coherent explanations from shamanistic cores, shamanism, as pointed out in both Eliade and Clark Chilson and Peter Knecht, is depicted with a specific and important resistance through ancient magico-religious and ecstatic movements.⁷⁾ It resists against any kind of time ousting effect. For centuries, it has moved from one civilization to another comforting in “primitive” as well as in “advanced” cultures, updating its contours, and never engaging in any vanishing process. In regularly adapting new subtle forms, it accommodates with new environments, reinforces its responsive capacities, and imposes its presence to modern and postmodern people in spite of largely impressive media coverage, medical resources, global ideologies, and religions, on the one hand, and global extraordinary economic improvements, even if unequally distributed, on the other. Shamanism simply defeats the belief that it could be much associated with poverty and development criteria. It is present everywhere, and in different cultures and civilizations.

If clashes can be observed on their main contents, shaman and shamanism are filled with a general agreement. The latter concurs at least on their origins *per se*. Like Eliade, many scholars refer to the Russian orthodox dissident priest Awakum. In 1682, he reported his discoveries of different strange phenomena and human behaviors met among Siberians since his presence among them in 1650. He had observed magico-religious leaders getting in trance and seemingly leading at times a second life impacting on their own and the community’s daily existence. Generally, Siberians referred to such men with much respect and with a special name, Shaman. The Shaman, later altered to shaman, at first was seen as an “ensouled” man in whom everything was alive and who considered everything surrounding him/her as alive. In the same vein, they were thought able to channel different kinds of energy from one source to another with the empowering possibility for the humankind in order to permit resistance against diseases, disasters, and evil spirits.

During ecstasy, such shamans had the capacity to maintain or manage relationships with spirits for the profit and welfare of the human community.⁸⁾ Betterment, health, wealth, prosperity, and well-being could be negotiated through their mediation. They were, thus, performing rituals that Eliade considers as renewing the world by calling on the creator in order to again put people in their paradisiacal origins, formulae observed, in fact, in many global religions.⁹⁾

The shaman is rather considered as a mediator between human beings, on the one hand, and gods and good spirits, on the other. Whatever the external signs, clothing, rituals elaborated, and locations selected for their rites or societal responses, shamans elaborate the best ways to ensure connections with gods for the benefit of living communities’ welfare, prosperity, and security from any evil. In many regions where the ecstatic experience is considered as a religious phenomenon *per se*, shamans stand for priests whose only sacrifice and rituals permit communications with the divine that

brings about blessings. These priests play a central religious role and make sure that a human community can reach its physical, metaphysical, and organizational visibility through horizontal connections among community members and vertical relations with deities. To perpetuate these relations, the shaman specializes in rituals and especially in trance during which, in Eliade's words, "His soul and body ascend to the sky or descend to the underworld," thus constructing physical and spiritual boundaries needed on an every-day scale and putting humankind at the center of the universe.¹⁰⁾

The outcome of the shaman's trance spiritual journeys to the heaven or the underground often changes, it is believed, in a claim of spiritual presences. Spirits come to the human community and manifest their presence. In some regions of the world, such as Sub-Saharan Africa, India, and Korea, shamans are possessed, their possession referring to the mind state that allows them to have a closer relationship with a given spirit or given spirits or again to act as a medium or a tool-like body used by the spirit(s). It is also believed that the closer the relation with the spirit, the more the shaman is likely to exercise power over it or, in rare cases, to identify with it, thus justifying bearing the same name as the spirit. In the same vein, the time required for calling the spirit and letting it speak grows shorter and shorter as the shaman develops an identity formation process with the spirit; a process supposedly ending with a very close or perfect identification. In many regions in Africa, shamans bear the name of the spirit they identify with. In other parts of the world, spirits are referred to differently. Shamans declare themselves to be possessed by spirits. In this case, when they enter into a trance, their actions are rather guided by spirits. The latter would lead them to the solutions needed by the community in providing it with the right healthcare pharmacopeia, or in expelling the evil spirit that may have found residence in the community or within a community member. The ecstatic shaman can also heal suffering souls through wise and religious-like words that bring the community together and console it over many different issues.

Nevertheless, it is not excluded that in some isolated cases words that would be expected to appease suffering rather lead to confrontation, accusations, and opposition all together depending on the understanding, considerations, and place given to some spirits. Such accusations often turn around witchcraft, evil possession, and subsequent personal capacity to endanger social community life. Palavers organize community decisions often resulting from listening to a report from the shaman's consultation. An elder would report on the process that led to the shaman's diagnosis on a given community issue and its causality. If the causality in question is in one way or another associated with a community member, even in a very large understanding of the concept family, or if it is on the contrary clearly linked to community outsiders, the palaver assistants decide on the steps to take in order to restore their moral, spatial, and ethnic integrity often in resorting to violence. The outbreak of hostilities, forced exile from communities, and forced poison administration often take place within communities that strongly believe in witchcraft powers and the personal capacities of the witch to wrong the group or targeted individuals. Australian aboriginal communities and many Sub-Saharan groups still excel in such violent eruptions that condemn their community members accused of witchcraft to forced exile, public exposure, and mockery. In addition, these victims of public vendetta are often administered poison

in order to put an end to their life under the pretext that they have killed or attempted to kill innocents. In other cases, they are exposed to the same punishment of death when the community leaders take for granted their implication in poor harvests, short rainy seasons, or other natural disasters such as killing hurricanes, thunders, or sudden invasions by grasshoppers.

Whatever the form agreed upon or discussed, many shamanistic rituals join global religions and creeds through the omnipresent considerations of offerings of different kinds. Many traditions look at offerings as gifts to gods. For this reason, the most important donations are often measured in terms of what goes to the spirits and gods. Gifts that go straight to gods and spirits are very often the ones that can easily turn into air, that is, like smoke. Thus, some people burn their offering, or at least part of it. In other cases, especially in Asia, they burn candles and incense whose smells perfume the place and are believed to ascend to gods. The unburned sacrifice goes to the shamans and their service team for their work, their own survival, and the survival of the poor people often visiting shrines. However, more and more offerings rather stand for the payment for the service given by the shaman and a sign of humility to gods. In the same vein, prayers offered by shamans fill the functions attributed to offerings and build up a bridge-like communication with gods. In fact, prayers are metaphorically looked at as the very perfume and incense offered to gods.

Considered as presented here, shamanism signs its generic presence in many societies around the world and does not limit its borders to countries once called primitive, less developed, or again known today as developing countries. Its influence and presence covers the world in taking, quite often, many different features and axes of interest. In spite of linguistic and cultural differences, shamanism gets into the social tissue in order to offer an alternative to social challenges and issues, often considered as the best way out.

To illustrate the above statements, we have decided to compare two very distinct forms of shamanism from two different societies in order to outreach the global dimension as intimated in this paper's title. At the same time, the global pretension remains a microcosmic sample reflecting the wider world. The first, the *Itako*, are from a very developed country, Japan, in the northeastern part, Aomori Prefecture, accessible through tarmac roads and speedy trains with the possibility of spending nights in modern hotels. The second, the *Mikishi*, are located in a rural area, some five hundred kilometers from the nearest large city, Lubumbashi, in the southeast of the Democratic Republic of Congo. It is accessible through a very dusty road, full of mud and big holes in the rainy season and full of dust and accidents in the dry season. Only old big trucks fetching salted and smoked fish from Lake Mweru spend time on these roads and need about two days to cover the distance.

Geographically, the *Itako* we are interested in are located in different places in Aomori Prefecture. However, they meet at least twice a year, in May and October, for their festivals held at Osorezan, a Buddhist temple. Here, they exhibit in a given way their science and are visited by many customers, and in some occasions by scholars among the accustomed customers. Both festivals coincide with national calendar holidays that extend through the weekend. Both days coincide with Japanese cultural days also reserved to show respect to the dead and to take care of burial details.

Osorezan is located in the very north of Japan, by the sea. It is an extremely remote area that seems very close today thanks to modern means of transportation and to Japanese attachment to cultural history. It is on a mountain, one of the highest altitudes and believed for centuries, and certainly from 1650, to be the dead people's mountain. Dead people's spirits are thought to dwell on the mountain, whose surface is subdivided into a place reserved for children, a purgatory fire place, a transitory location, and a paradise all sharing a cloudy environment resulting from volcanic sulfuric emissions. These locations can easily be identified through the offerings brought by family members willing to assist their deceased members in the long journey that will definitely guide them to everlasting peace and joy in the paradise. These gifts vary, and include clothes, coins, candles, dolls, and other objects, and they are all expected to facilitate the dead person's journey toward paradise while providing them with the most important needs.

Osorezan is a temple built and managed by Buddhist monks who spend their entire life there and welcome different people willing to listen to Buddhist sermons or other lessons. The presence of monks clearly marks the border between the secular and the sacred and warns the visitor of the character of topics dealt with in that place. In fact, all visitors are submitted to the monastery discipline of silence, food, chastity, and a prefixed schedule. On the holidays mentioned above, holidays coinciding with the Itako gathering, visitors come either for the temple only or for the Itako, or for both. In the latter case, they would rather use the monastery's facilities for rest, food, and prayers. They leave very early and quickly at the next dawn for the main monastery entrance where they queue for a chance to enter as swiftly as possible into an Itako's small shelter for personal or family consultations. As a matter of fact, Itako, who are blind women seers, live in villages and cities all around Aomori Prefecture and go twice to Osorezan Mountain for public consultations. The place is very quickly crowded as buses coming from the city increasingly bring clients taking profit of the days off to "get in touch" with their deceased family members through the Itako. These visitors come for "Kuchiyose" or contact and talk with deceased family members through the medium, the Itako.

It is worth mentioning that by choosing to lead their consultations on the sacred mountain, the Itako raise their work to the level of the sacred. The religious dimension of their intervention does not leave any doubt of their capacity to dwell in the divine realm. Their work also performs a miracle on their own beings in so far as they are likely to see what their visitors can not, thus changing their blindness in a mask-like technique permitting them to see spiritual sources and get in touch with dead people's spirits. The Itako can call dead people's spirits, talk with them and diligently recommend that they listen to their family members, bring them support, or again get spiritual assistance from these family members. The miracle thus performed may be situated on two levels. The Itako's blindness could stand only for a mask that falls down during the ecstatic time and the journey toward spiritual realms. It is also a miracle for the visitors in so far as they believe and take for granted that it is possible to be in contact with their deceased family members. Both miracles are somehow attested and witnessed by the presence of the temple. In letting the Itako perform the consultations within their premises, temple monks recognize a kind of brotherhood in

their religious field. They grant the Itako access to the sacred and the possibility to carry it in daily life and in the profane.

It is important to look at the Mikishi as a largely generic concept if precision is not provided. It is in use in many areas of the Democratic Republic of Congo with variants connected to local customs and cultural changes. Thus, in some specific areas, taking indistinctively males and females, they do not put any difference in seeing either a man or a woman serving as a "Mukishi." In some districts of the Katanga province in the Democratic Republic of Congo, however, the concept Mikishi would refer to initiation, dance, and ritual masks that represent given spirits and have the power to act in the name of spirits. Thus, apart from the generic term Mukishi, such masks are also called by the name of the spirit they identify with, especially in the large Lunda area that was in the expansive sub-region covering Zambia, Botswana, Malawi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Congo, Angola, Gabon, Cameroon, and Mozambique. Whatever the location, however, all Mikishi stand either for mythic or legendary ancestors recorded throughout time because of their dedication to their people and their intervention whenever they were needed. In specific locations, female Mikishi are the most important mediums that relate human beings to their ancestors and are mainly the most important communication channels used by protective spirits working all the time for the benefit of a given community.

The Mikishi in question here are located in the Katanga province, in the southeast of the Democratic Republic of Congo, precisely in the Pweto area by Lake Mweru, within the community identified as Bashila, or fishers. The village selected is Mweshi, speaking the Kishila, a mixture of Kibemba and Kizeela languages classified by Guthrie within African languages between groups L. 30 and M. 40. To have access to Mweshi village, about 500 kilometers from Lubumbashi, three possibilities are offered. The first possibility, and the one used most, is finding out the schedule of trucks traveling toward Pweto, the main government representative city of the area. The camions carry smoked and salted fish to the provincial capital city, Lubumbashi. Choosing this transportation facility means starting off early in the afternoon and arriving on the next day, again late in the afternoon, if not some time at night or even later. The second transportation possibility uses at first a truck for the first part of the road, about 600 kilometers to the city of Kasenga, and a lake ferry for the second. This transportation combination mode is obviously longer compared to the first. Its second part, however, is granted the advantage of a better quality far from road bumps, dust, or mud even if rare water hurricanes may be a serious nuisance. The third way also consists of a subdivision of the distance to cover. It begins on a very small mining company plane flying toward Mweshi, to a new mining company, Anvil Mining, and a bike cab to the village. However, as these flights are scheduled for the company, they do not offer any guarantee as far as time respect is concerned or acceptance of any travelers. In Mweshi and in the immediate surrounding places, it is useless to think about welcoming housing facilities and other motels. Nevertheless, through negotiations with the village chieftain or a host family, the visitor or visitors may be freely offered a small village house of their own.

As for food, if the visitors are vegetarian, they will certainly enjoy different kinds of dishes. If, by chance a visitor happens to be on salt diet, he will enjoy time as salt is

still a very rare ingredient imported from distant cities. If, on the contrary, the visitor is on a very normal diet, he or she will enjoy fresh fish, and fresh and dried meat. Fishers exploit the lake whereas hunters from the mountain bring meat and obtain fish in exchange. More and more, however, transactions use money and the urban populations are bringing urban lifestyles. Anvil Mining Company has built some facilities for its employees, whose lifestyle more and more influences natives.

Mweshi village can be seen from the lake as the slope to the shore is very abrupt. It is a community of several small houses of mud brick grouped around the same local and traditional chieftain standing for the first domestic issues' referee. Whenever problems require more than traditional competences, he reports to the central administration representative in the city of Pweto, about forty kilometers away. To assure as much as possible his traditional authority alleged to come straight from gods, the chieftain facilitates villagers' ancestral creeds and, if necessary, works closely with Mikishi and other traditional creed organizers. As the pillar of this society, he finds much interest in facilitating harmony, social understanding, and coexistence built around the Mikishi's spiritual recommendations. At the same time, he manages ethical norms in order to decide on social faults, possible punishments, and payments to impose upon his village people. He looks at the Mikishi as his partners as far as they bring into the social community the magico-religious dimension needed in everyday life and responding to the causality relationship that is supposed to explain all social events and their impact on the Bashila community. Diseases, death, incomprehension, and sudden changes in natural forces are all linked to causality effects often comprehended through relations, obedience, or disobedience of spiritual and ancestral recommendations.

From their locations, northeastern Japan and the southeastern Democratic Republic of Congo, different access possibilities with obvious modern implications on the one hand and so much still related to "primitivism," on the other, the reader could rightly ask if it is worthwhile in any way to compare such evidently different realities. The reader may quickly draw the conclusion that if a reflection originates from weak, strange and indefinable contours, and different times and customs, the conclusion should also be fragile, inconsequential, forcibly meaningless, and incoherent.

This comparative research has chosen the generally forbidden way and classifications in order to re-concentrate on the concept of shamanism, its survival throughout time, and its visibility today in different societies, that is, on a global dimension. In choosing the Osorezan Itako and the Bushila Mikishi, I wish to propose a shamanistic reading drill based on indicators that lead to a better knowledge of both. By the same token, differences will reveal themselves. The sum of similarities and differences in shamanism, both in the Itako and in the Mikishi, stand for conclusions that will certainly better clarify their respective natures and possible resemblances despite their various locations, cultures, and development evolution, and openly professed creeds.

The indicators building up the research revolve around the most important features that set up gradual comprehensive structural connections leading to each type of shamanism. By the same token, the very indicators highlight possible disconnections and differences while linking them to different social backgrounds, historical motivations, and religious considerations. A process pinpointing major indicators will bring the

paper to raise features related to shamanisms and including definitions, candidates' recruitment, training, relations to other local religions, *modus operandi*, examples of consultations, and future perspectives of both shamanisms. On the completion of this tour, the reader will surely comprehend how shamanism copes with modern times, maintains its links to older times, and bridges or disconnects completely two completely dissimilar epochs, regions, peoples, and cultures located on very different continents and carrying along apparently, at least, two very dissimilar histories. Apart from descriptive presentations, the paper elaborates on the reasons that justify shamanism continuation throughout time and space in both societies here depicted.

1. Definitions and Shamanistic Characteristics

Itako and Mikishi are the main concepts articulating this research. The Itako from Aomori Prefecture are blind females that work as mediums. They call for the spirits of the dead and let visitors engage in a dialogue through the medium mouth. Family members have then the opportunity to listen to their dead parents, to ask questions eventually, and to take the deceased members' wishes and advice on life continuation in their absence. With a consideration of the Japanese social evolution through past centuries, the concept Itako and its social implications offer comprehensive religious features clearly alluding to the sacred and the profane.

Northern Japan, exactly like many other regions around the world, was repeatedly a victim of measles. In past centuries, a very interesting article entitled "Rubella and congenital Rubella Syndrome in Japan: Epidemiological Problems" by Terada Kihei, like many other scholars before him, points out that Japanese health care facilities could not face measles pandemics and many victims were counted especially among the northern poor populations. In spite of so many obvious medical achievements all over Japan and throughout the past, an important parameter—parents' freedom to use their own medical expertise or to avoid medical expertise—continued to reinforce the presence of measles for many years in the same area. Parents were indeed free to have their children vaccinated or not. Consequently, measles could still progress its ravages. The disease is particularly famous for the vision incapacitation imposed on victims. Many became completely blind and some would still see though not enough to lead a normal social life.

Measles became a social issue in so far as it aggravated the social status of a population already economically and socially strongly fragile. A social solution was required in order to rebuild some kind of family stability. At a time when everybody's assistance was needed in order to survive decently, it was necessary to find a paying occupation for the blind or half blind. Fortunately, this category of citizens still presented a memory capacity that could be channeled in the recitation of Buddhist sutras, if not in other religious consultation fields. By the same token, measles victims would have a religious dimension at the border of the sacred and the profane and could, thus, communicate with the spiritual world as well as with their compatriots. If their services could respond to their citizens' needs, they could also get in the Offer and Demand Law and could thus consider a price for their services. With the payment imputable for the consultations they conduct, the once neglected or suspected unproductive blind population would live decently. Their family members would no longer feel

much weight due to the presence of the unproductive people. On the contrary, the entire community would share the income and the fame of well-known mediums. Payments and other offerings received by these mediums could save family from daily preoccupations and basic needs, and thus be a solid economic asset. In mixing the economic and the religious dimensions equally wanted by their community, the mediums enter into a social dynamic that inserts them at a very visible and important level of their society.

Thus the Itako, the once neglected women, came along a social paradigm closely linked to a general social misfortune, but were eventually able to draw their community attention given the socio-economic and religious relief they still represented. They created a job responding to people's magico-religious fear, emotions, uncertainty, relations with deceased parents, and profound needs to be connected to them in one way or another. In doing so, the Itako started playing a role once only reserved for priests and other monks spending their lifetime in prayer for the sake of humankind and offering sacrifices to gods, but also keeping the sacred far from people associated with the profane. The Itako were wise enough to respect monks and their work and also to openly show their connection to the same main religions lines, thus bringing the sacred closer to human communities.

Quite more easily and in response to their way out, even still though in a very stigmatic area, males handicapped, whether blind or semi-blind, who were victims of the same measles rather seemed luckier than the females. They found somehow easily their way in another productive area, music production, for which their audience paid them. In a number of cases, these musicians came across other desperate blind women ready to engage in marriage, fight together the social stigma often imposed on them, and challenge their society with a new image of the blind. In some cases, couples were formed of a musician player and an Itako, both gaining decently in their life and traveling from one area to another. Such cases were often frequent and successful when one of the partners had some vision and could serve as guide. Thanks to these blind couples, increasingly, community members were aware of these handicapped people's social presence and impact on religious beliefs. At the same time, their socio-economic independence drew everyone's recognition and respect. It goes without saying that Japan presents other similar forms of shamanism that also respond to human needs to be connected to the sacred, to deceased parents, and to people's fortune. However, in many cases, these other mediums are not blind and consider their work as turning around their capacity to enter into trance and connect with spirits.

In the Bushila land, Mikishi are presented as spirits that dwell around people's villages, protect them, guarantee their lineage continuation on the right path, and eventually punish them whenever they leave the right norms for whatever conduct that may endanger the community. Whereas good conduct and actions are rewarded with personal recognition and ascension in social status, misconduct and bad actions are completely condemned and punished. Bad actions are perceived as diverting personal energies—and mainly the Vital Force that God gives human beings for their integral development—from community growth and gods' blessings. The Mukishi is educated to be involved as much as possible in community life, progress, and religious comprehension. Regarding the concept Mikishi, its presentation shares some ambiguo-

ity of the concept of shamanism itself as it concerns the spirits *per se* and also tends to look at the medium in exactly the same way. As a matter of fact, in many instances, the Mikishi stop being masks or mediums, but are the very presence of the spirits and the guardians of the community. The latter considers them as daily guardians, pioneers, and society builders. Because of the confusion mentioned above, mask wearers or mediums are often called by spirits' names. In many places, mediums are quite often perceived as the very spirits *per se*.

Compared to the Itako, many Bashila Mikishi are women and only a few are men. However, they are not blind and do not suffer from any obvious health problem or problem resulting from health even though they are likely to have undergone serious illness and an exceptional health situation prior to their integration in the Mikishi. Their "blindness" should rather be perceived as a metaphorical representation of their social inability to lead any other life of their choice except working daily and living with spirits in the purest way excluding any personal involvement in profane issues. Their eyes are open on the spiritual field, their vocation, and their contribution to their society as well as on their pathway to ancestors and gods that offer them the opportunity to take in hand their socio-religious contribution. As such, the Mikishi do not face any economic issues as far as their survival is concerned because of the kind of society they live in, revolving essentially around community values and community life. Mikishi are full members of a social community with which they share their life in times of joy or suffering. Consequently, the entire community makes sure that they are well treated and never starve as they are looked at as family members and socio-religious leaders. In fact, family understanding, contrary to its definition in the western world, includes almost all ethnic members. Apart from their social and community recognition, the Mikishi are venerated for the blessings that come to the community. As such, they rightly deserve daily offerings.

Similarly to the Itako, the Mikishi are considered as the main partners in the Bashila world vision as far as magic, religious, and supernatural connections are concerned. The Bashila's philosophical, religious, and world vision was firstly seriously studied by the Franciscan priest Placide Tempels in his book *Bantu Philosophy*.¹¹⁾ Tempels lived with these people and was, in fact, the first western intellectual to coin and tackle meaningfully the concept African philosophy. Tempels managed a meaningful understanding of different relations developed within the human community through the Chain of Being as a whole, and mainly through the Mikishi seen as ritual organizers channeling the Vital Force to different destinations. Whereas countless gods are venerated through different rituals, they play a large part in the traditional religious life, and at the same time they make unquestionable survival after death. In fact, in such an environment full of gods, Geoffrey Parrinder observes that magic only comes at a very low level as it is taken for granted that all power comes from God, gods, and spirit.¹²⁾

Tempels strongly believes that the Bashila Chain of Being displays large structural representation connections of all elements, metaphysical, physical, human, animate, inanimate, material, and immaterial that come into consideration in their social existence understanding. The latter offers a vision that includes God, spirits and divinities, ancestors, elders, and society, and extends to nature, natural visible forces, and invis-

ble forces. With God, the omnipotent, omniscient, the creator at its top, the Chain of Being portrays him as somehow distant from daily realities and questions though definitely the owner of the lands, seas, the skies, and their occupants whatever their nature. In the same vein, he owns spirits and has absolute control over bad spirits and can leave them free in order to punish human communities for bad behavior and disobedience. Consequently, different channels of communications insert God's presence and will in any visible or invisible, living or dead, natural and material items filling the world. God, it is believed, works from afar but through his many agents, essentially gods and spirits, sharing power, knowledge, secrets, and competences with him. Among God's agents, Mikishi play a central role in the human community as they make possible the circulation of its Vital Force and its benefits to every community member according to personal virtue, need, responsibility, community dedication, and divine devotion. The Mikishi contribute to social growth, cohesion, material prosperity, and spiritual prosperity. At the same time, they are looked at for their contribution in the detection of possible dangers in order to divert them from the community.

The Chain of Being locates dead ancestors very close to God. Death is indeed perceived as a journey that leads the living toward the creator for sharing with him a new kind of life—still a continuation of existence—that allows omniscience, omnipresence, and the capacity to assist, punish, or forsake community members. If death brings sadness because of the loss of a parent, it is all the same the most appropriate way to have access to the Vital Force and an opportunity to channel it to living community members living according to the norms of gods and ancestors. It goes without saying that the ancestors honored and counted in this group are mainly those whose courage, sacrifice, self-mortification, and denial permitted total and happy life to their community. This means that these ancestors qualified during their life by going through different initiation sessions and ordeals that changed them completely from egotistic beings to community-devoted builders and servers. Their names are perpetuated in common memory, oral narratives, myths, legends, epics, proverbs, riddles, and other chants and songs recorded in folk art productions. In other words, such individuals have progressed, thanks essentially to the Mikishi's assistance, guidance, and their community structural configuration, from ordinary individuals to extraordinary resources and God's helpers. Such individuals are included in van Gennep's classification based essentially on initiations, group insertions, and evolution from one social group to another and are the major references of a community history.¹³⁾

The respect given to this category of dead elders is reflected in the relationship developed with living ancestors, very old people but still consulted for many reasons. In many places, they are referred to as the living encyclopedias on their way to gods. In spite of the explosion and development of modern education, these living ancestors are still referred to as living encyclopedias on the top of the social hierarchy for the simple reason that they are the ones mastering life secrets and sharing them with youngsters. Life knowledge can not be reduced to writing and reading or to skills gathered from books or collected from modern sciences; it is rather the capacity to face challenges, repeatedly question time, space, beings from their origins, and social conventions so to put people at the center of everything as the "Axis Mundi."¹⁴⁾ Liv-

ing ancestors perpetuate the community culture through ages and negotiate its meetings with newcomers, cultures, and lifestyles in selecting the ones that can be easily inserted in the group without changing its fundamental nature. Thus, the Mikishi make sure that the Bashila live in their times and carry on their distant origins. Understanding such simplicity and complexity at the same time amounts to placing the Mikishi in their social functions as community adjuvant agents around whom life takes its different features and builds its full meanings.

It is from living ancestors, who are encyclopedias, that active elders receive instructions and moral codes that they distill in the growing community. They learn among so many things how to welcome visitors and how possibly to look at them as brothers and sisters, or eventually conclude with them blood pacts changing them into brothers, sisters, and clansmen around ontological values. Thanks to the same encyclopedias, elders also fix norms to be followed in all social relations, especially in the case of family building, sexual behavior, marriage, divorce, trade, farming, birth, death, and widowhood. Above all, they ensure that natural elements facilitating daily life be available all around all seasons and annual cycles. The elders are also in charge of the planning of different initiation sessions addressed to both male and female youngsters. They try their best to follow the pattern of initiation received from their neighbors, once enemies, mainly the Lunda/Chokwe, whose initiations and social organization have largely influenced the Bashila and led them to completely revisit their world vision. The Bashila insist in a special way on maternal respect and the social and progressive integration of youth as community builders around the same values referred to in the Chain of Being.

To illustrate such a unity, the Bashila traditional education system is mainly collective. From his/her birth an individual stands in the Chain of Being which links him/her to his/her ancestors and he/she has the duty to perpetuate them. His/her very name determines his/her inclusion in the Chain, and gives him/her an identity, protecting him/her from occult forces and other evil-like people. In the past, the same individual could have several names testifying to his passages in different social groups, initiation sessions, and successes in initiations. Mikishi have an important place in the Chain of Being. Whatever their age, they are believed to move around their community, protect and empower everyone, from early age, according to social needs and responsibility. The same Mikishi persuade the community on the necessity of the common good through an education consisting of an effort to integrate the individual into his/her environment. From age seven to age fourteen, the boy's education is provided by the clan, from which he learns different rules to incorporate into his life. Songs, tales, proverbs, games, dances, and sanctions advance his intellectual, spiritual, moral, and ethical training. The young man starts sharing meals with elders as he learns to follow a common discipline in work and to assume slowly growing responsibilities. At the same time, the boy learns how to put spirits, the Mikishi, at the Center of the Bushila, that is, life, growth, community building, and social participation in the Bashila world vision.

As for young girls, they gradually enter women's groups, learning their future social roles through their mothers and aunts in helping them perform various domestic works and listening to their advice on different topics. They gather from time to time

to mark their integration into the clan—through symbolic gestures.¹⁵⁾ In addition, they slowly gain access to various secrets related to keeping a house, marital conventions, and clan relationships based on a dual organizational society within which the parochial expression only seems to be a simple formality. Women control daily life and contribute highly to building a common vision. Girls gradually enter women's groups. As mothers, they have childbearing as their main social responsibility, giving life to the world as their most important function. They also learn the ethical value of motherhood as they have to lead kids to their first steps in daily life as well as in men's groups. They learn to think of a total life in which men and women join together to build their world obeying ancestors, god, gods, and spirits.

The Mikishi come from this very dynamic group. The latter grants them with additional and sacred functions only peculiar to them and only scarcely shared with exceptional men. As shamans, Mikishi carry along the totality of female functions as life bearers, organizers, spiritual guides, and connectors to divine and spiritual forces in order to guarantee Vital Force presence and growth. They also live as referees thanks to whom the borderline between the sacred and the profane is made possible and discernible throughout their participation in everyday life.

In the same vein, men and women are invited to play different roles so that the balance between them facilitates their contacts with gods and progressively, thanks to spiritual assistance and the social contracts, becomes increasingly attractive and advantageous for social growth and cohesion. This harmony is essential and nurtured during their respective initiations into the clan. To achieve their social construction, nature also offers absolutely revered references such the Lake and the Mountain. Whereas the Lake represents the location where the evil can be drowned, it is the place from which its fury provokes water whirls that destroy boats whenever hurricanes and other violent tornados devastate huts, houses, villages, or homes as punishment for the misconduct of community members. However, the Lake comes in a duality where evil and good coexist. If hurricanes destroy, waters offer fish, a daily food in the normal daily diet of the Bashila. It is understood that only pure men can dwell in waters and bring back fish to the community. The lake corresponds with the lowest altitude where gods, good spirits, and evil spirits battle.

They are also present on the highest visible level, the Mountains surrounding the Bushila land. From the mountains, they descend in order to assist or punish the Bashila. These mountains also separate the Bushila land from the Bazeela lands. The presence of the lake or the sea, the mountains, the gods, evil spirits and good spirits give a picture similar to Osorezan and easily lead comparisons of shamanism or rather of the roles of such locations in initiation in ascetic life.¹⁶⁾

In the Bushila land, the young boys' first departure to the sea takes place within a chaos. Things are turned upside down through the surprise which takes almost everybody at random, especially mothers who are not informed in advance. This initiation is often organized in the dry season, a period of time characterized by cold, violent winds and whirls coming from Lake Mweru and continuously blowing on the land. Turning winds raise dust and dead leaves. At the same time, winds blowing in trees produce different horrifying sounds. All the vegetation has dried up and does not show any sign of bursting out again. It looks completely dead.

Here and there, trees are uprooted; grasses and vegetable are completely dried up. Only Lake Mweru can still provide with rare fish that have not joined the deepest warm waters. No farming work can be thought about, and everyone stays indoors as much as possible, leaving only to fetch dead wood or water, and to visit the granary for some important and exceptional palavers. When there are some sun rays, men come out and share some traditional beer around the traditional chieftain while discussing useful topics to the village and the clan. In this cold time, from the mountains, dangerous, hungry, and skinny wild beasts wander aimlessly and devour whoever dares to go alone toward the forest or the mountain. These animals of prey do not have the chance to easily kill game as all beasts have either migrated toward better places or have hidden in hotter places not readily accessible to big animals. The novice initiates are informed of this and can not under any pretext leave the group to wander in the wilderness where a lion would happily devour the errant. All initiates are guided toward the Lake, the only safe place despite security issues mainly linked to skills and also largely believed to be dependent on good conduct. Quite often sacrifices are offered to reestablish harmony and avoid ancestors' anger. From his childhood, the young man is educated to look at the Lake as a dwelling place of spirits and the location where manhood can be reached. Rituals, taboos, and dances are organized with regard to the central place the Lake has in the community.

During their isolation around wine and palavers, men study in detail when the event, the first young people's passage and work on the lake, can be scheduled and coincide with the beginning of a new moon understood as a special entrance in a new cycle, the initiation into novelty that will lead the youth to the center of community interests. The initiation to different skills to be used on the lake aims at changing initiates into new beings without the approval of their mothers, who are not informed of the day or the time their children will join their elders. The initiates are carried from childhood to manhood and have through initiations chances to climb higher and higher in the social hierarchy, access to physical and potentialities in order to defend their social community, and finally to join the ancestors commemorated as social references. The Mikishi are often consulted before an initiation as they stand for the background configuration opening to self-reliance and community responsibility.

The community must transit from its degradation, lack of communion with nature—the nature which has suddenly become hostile through destructive violent winds, horrifying sounds, and beasts feeding on careless community members—for its re-creation through a living mythic process to creation time. This re-creation idea joins Eliade's explanation¹⁷⁾ on how many people, cultures, and civilizations believe in regeneration impossibility but rather consider how it can be re-created through repetition of the cosmogony in curative rituals. In the recitation of the cosmogonist myth, the cosmic creation repeats itself. The Bashila fishing ritual is in this process of re-creation from degradation to a cosmological equilibrium through temporary cycles, human sacrifice, ascetic life, and the uplifting of personal spirits to gods. The fishing activity behaves as a catalyst force bringing back to life a dying community in providing it with food, religious, and spiritual energy.

The chaotic situation observed all around takes a religious meaning understood only by some initiated theologians and masters of initiation of the Bashila religious

world. Food, generally speaking, comes as a gift from God and ancestors, eaten at their command for the survival of humankind. Initiates are the only ones able to interpret signs and guide the community on a safe path and thus avoid remaining in a chaotic, apocalyptic situation. The entire community is invited to participate in the process either by just looking at its evolution—the case of mothers who can not participate in the ritual but can still provide the initiates with food—or the case of men who are involved in the secrets but must not reveal them to their household. Wise men organize meetings to think about details and to make sure that the event clearly shows the strong relationship linking life to death as well as death to life. It is strongly believed that lake operations are safe and productive only when associated with the sacred and, *ipso facto*, with the Mikishi's prayers and interventions.

Everyone taking physical part in the fishing activity or benefitting from it freely forsakes personal involvement in sex. For the youth, the main sacrifice is perceived in the capacity to leave out daily habits unworthy with community interests. Through such sacrifices, the initiate learns gradually to understand his role in community life while constructing his personal character and personality. The future depends on an institutionalized behavior which should be called, following Thomas F. O'Dea, as the true meaning of the concept religion.¹⁸⁾ As a matter of fact, the future is built on the acceptance of values, ideas, and orientations which have a strong impact on personal and community behavior. It is essentially a question of complete personal submission to the sacred order that leaders present. The sacred is expected to adjust personal ambitions in order to progressively insert them in a larger perspective that places the Bashila community in the first position. Indeed, every Mushila quickly learns that every human action has to deal with its contingent character, and also with its disappointment due to time limitation and humankind's power illusion, everything being absolutely ephemeral. Only God, gods, and good spirits last forever and provide strong protection. It is therefore in everyone's interest to stick to the everlasting spiritual realm that changes death's fear into a joy to reach gods' omniscience and omnipresence.

In the face of such an incapacity to master times and events, the Mushila feels and lives daily his/her impotence whose outcome resides in a complete but gradual submission to ethical norms inherited from the *illo tempore* and likely from God and gods. Logically, this personal impotence opens psychological and social spaces to interpersonal communications and sublimation of personal ambition for the interest of the community at the example of community builders and pioneers. Joseph Campbell locates the community life quest in the beginning of humankind's need to understand people's origins, evolution throughout times, and possible explanations of different phenomena and events surrounding daily life.¹⁹⁾

The initiates face the most important physical suffering when they are at sea. Their bodies are not yet sufficiently developed to endure physical exercise and they do not yet know how to skillfully use paddles and nets, and to find their direction. Lost far from the shores and the land, the initiate is in a symbolic representation where he sacrifices his entire being, accepts to be but a "nothing," and *ipso facto* transforms himself in a sacrifice dedicated to gods' wills. The first experience with the lake, when fishing under the guidance of elders, is often remembered as the one that turns upside

down personal lives. It also leaves much space to the Mikishi, as above everything else they stand in the background and offer the needed support to face the waters and their mysteries.

On a psychological level, facing the lake and challenging its hardships looks like the sacrifice that removes everything that reduces man to a chaotic state, confusing good and evil, light and darkness, pleasure and displeasure, male and female, in short, leading man to confusing the life binary system. It is a process of individuation where the initiate goes toward the Self and to the communion with nature, and the creator. At the same time, the initiate is enabled to consider positively all values which contribute to full life and its harmony with nature. Thus, given taboos and interdictions will be observed toward given behaviors, food, trees, water, and animals in order to receive in return much vital force, peace, life, manhood, and good relationships with neighbors, that is, with human beings and natural forces.

In spite of the suffering, the fishing camp does not have a special program of rest reserved to the initiates. On the contrary, they are expected to participate in daily activities and must be very careful to avoid hurting themselves. The first experience with paddles often results in muscles aching and complete fatigue. However, the initiates are not spared from their social obligations to their initiates' community. They are supposed to look for firewood to somehow limit the cold or to dry fish. They also learn more about birds, foxes, lions, and tigers as connected to their community through folklore and taboos. They go into the woods following their guide. During their walk in the bush, they are also taught all secrets about trees, from their names to their curative and nutritive principles. They are also taught to know more and more about planets, especially the sun, the moon, and stars often used as a compass to find different ways on the lake. At the same time, they learn more of the Bashila's history and war strategies. In the evening, as they look carefully at the drying fish exposed to fire and smoke, specific lessons are given on women, their central role in family building, and collaboration with men in community activities. Initiates are taught to vow an absolute respect to women. Sexual activities are presented as reserved to a social group that can provide the community with different means and can also enlarge it through procreation. Whereas the lines above describe a fishing camp onshore, it may also happen that the camp is built of boats anchored in the same location on a calm part of the lake.²⁰⁾

Considering the Bashila's general evolution through time, thanks to their religious vision and social vision that have matured in the process, they have succeeded in keeping their community living and surviving through rather difficult times. Elders are the center of the Bashila society and guide their society in such a way that it can receive as many blessings as possible from the ancestors and protection from all spirits. The dead are indeed looked at as never dead but continuing full life though invisible to human eyes, and sharing people's daily life. To ensure that the spirits do not go far and leave people alone, elders have another obligation of making sure that the other actors and sectors of their society have their own place in the Chain of Being, comply with the ancestors' hierarchy, and work to educate the youth to stay on the ancestral path. The Mikishi, whatever their age, belong to the dynamic group of the youth not only for their religious consultations, but also because they stand as the expression

of the permanent contact with ancestors and the Vital Force provided by the gods.

Apart from the very large and dynamic group of the youth, the elders negotiate their links with the living nature. As a matter of fact, animals, trees, fish, and other aquatic resources are all called upon to help in the survival of the human community. However, natural resources are not used at random since they also share—though at different levels—the same Vital Force channeled by God. In fact, community members usually request permission from gods in order to use natural resources. The nature of the permission requested from gods leaves space to a natural equilibrium so that different species are not threatened with extinction. The same attention is also given to the dead nature considered as a source of several kinds of forces. It is within this group that thunder, rainbows, and rain hurricanes dwell and could be used either to reinforce life or sometimes as punishment to communities that might have left the right path and neglect the presence of ancestors. To ensure connections to all different levels of the Chain of Being, God shares a communication strength that gives life and ensures the community future. This communication strength is otherwise called the Vital Force. It is present in all living elements and may increase or decrease people's self-training, sacrifice, and growth in the ways prescribed by ancestors and God.

To ensure that the ways of the ancestors are respected and followed for the interest of the entire community, elders organize several rituals and encourage everyone's participation around the Mikishi. As men spend much time busy looking for community survival and sometimes for its defense against external enemies, women became more and more the guardians of traditions and advisers on ways that lead to gods. In addition, women's silence and sacrifices are perceived as contributing to reinforcing relationships with gods and with spirits. That is the reason why in many places all around the Bushila land, women are the ones spending much time in prayer and devoting much respect and devotion to gods. It is also assumed gods and spirits choose among such women the ones to represent them among the community members. Such women are called Mikishi and are recognized either by elders thanks to their traditional experience or by other Mikishi who welcome them in their daily work and life. One understands why the Mikishi are from this important female group and why their actions, consultations, and prayers are scaled among the most important spiritual assistance in personal and community welfare. On another point, one would understand why the Bashila society is highly maternal and women are given much respect.

Thus, both the Itako and the Mikishi are people chosen by their community and led to a work that builds a bridge with spirits and especially with the dead. However, if the Japanese seem to concentrate much on emotional contacts with family members, the Bashila are more likely to rely on the Mikishi to ensure their daily life success through Vital Force reinforcement and its connections with God, gods, ancestors, and the spirits of the dead assumed to continuously dwell in human communities. The Japanese do not stress much the impact of the dead on their daily life. On the contrary, more and more, they explain their relations with the Itako as mainly a way to ensure that the dead have whatever they need to have a safe journey toward a restful and peaceful paradise. The living community members make sure that their deceased siblings can achieve their long journey to peaceful locations. At the same time, advice and warnings coming from deceased siblings through the Itako are highly valued. In

the Bushila land, at the center of their village, the Bashila locate virtually or in a real presence the Mikishi. Every life aspect is in one way or another dependent upon the Mikishi's facilitation or links with gods and ancestors. The Mikishi are presumably controlling Vital Force circulation within the community.

2. Recruitment: Itako and Mikishi

In the previous section I have shown how measles were a great catastrophe in the past in northern Japan. The disease made family life impossible in so far as it enlarged poverty and did not permit an easy socialization of their victims or an easy social comprehension of the endemic. Despite their poor family conditions, in light of the possible social and economic improvement of their daughters, many households decided to send their blind girls for the Itako training. The reasons for such choices and decisions were documented in the previous section and can be summarized in the family guarantee that their daughter would have a chance to lead an economically independent life without the need of permanent family care attention. In addition, once an Itako, if she happened to gain notoriety and fame, she could even help some other family members in need of socio-economic assistance. The Itako training was also an easy way to address the question of marital status. With the acquired skills, they would easily get a companion for marriage and start a family that would lead an independent life. Quite often, they married blind musicians and had, thus, an opportunity to go around the country. The musician would sing for the public and the Itako would give public consultations.

In taking such a decision responding to socio-economic needs, those families, that is, those microcosms of Japanese society, better identified as members of Aomori Prefecture, were, all the same, leading their society on a "religious" path. They were providing their society with an occasion to satisfy its religious and emotional needs in permitting possible links with their deceased family members and in stressing the spiritual and sacred influence in daily life activities. The spiritual dimension particularly opposed good to evil in a binary system addressing questions related to death and possible relationships between the living and the dead. This was also an opportunity to experience the presence of spirits and spiritual powers, and mainly was an occasion to lead dead family members to a place of eternal rest.

Hence, thanks to the Itako, the living community can perceive several opportunities. Communication with the dead is no longer considered impossible or only reserved to some masks and rare ascetics. The benefits of such contacts include assisting the dead on their way to heaven for their everlasting happiness and peace through prayers and offerings. The living people also take into account warnings and advice given by dead people's spirits. The dead are believed to admonish their family members on possible dangers to come and on the dates they should in particular be careful. By the same token, several religious representations gain a better understanding as their presence is perceived, rather, throughout the process facilitating contacts between the sacred and the profane, spirits and humankind, and dead people's spirits and their families. Monks, ascetics, and other religious figures are associated with their social roles.²¹⁾

However, in Japan the entire process leading to the selection and the work of the

Itako occurs in an economic structure of a society. The Itako takes a social position that offers services to the community. At the same time, this position provides her with means to support entirely her life through a socially recognized work, completely enmeshed in the commercial Demand-Offer Law. Today, despite a terrible decrease observed in the number of consulting Itako, the imperative linked to the Demand-Offer Law imposes their presence. That is why despite serious reasons advocated to see them disappear already from the early 1960s, the Itako have survived and are likely to continue living and leading their consultations. Their present generation composed of old ladies may eventually vanish. However, new women, perhaps gifted with sight, will make an exception to the rule and will progressively build up a new tradition very similar and very close to shamanism as still present in other parts of Japan, yet distinguished through their identifications with the Itako and their specific links with human communities through the Osorezan Buddhist temple.

Such a presentation of the Itako allows an understanding of this shamanism throughout its evolution, accommodation to different times, and social environment that have led to its successful entrance in a global society and in post-modernity. The recruited girls become the bridge between different social spheres, religious practices, and times. The social suffering undergone by most of the blind, and specifically by blind girls, through measles stands for the very recruitment substratum that leads to a social change and religious continuation. The measles still force the girls to select a strategy that will ensure their social environment while giving a new meaning to their life. Their suffering easily changes in a call, better a vocation for public services, even in a religious vocation to serve their community while securing their own life. The recruitment may be summarized in a situation where the social impact of measles leads parents to think about the best way to protect their daughters and secure them the best social integration. Parents engage their daughters in a socio-religious structure that opens a possibility for continuation of people's emotional traditions and occasionally religious behavior. At the same time, the blind girls join the ascetic traditions that have always proved their involvement in community welfare even though operating from perspectives whose social impact may not offer straight and measurable indicators.²²⁾ Monks are known for their ascetic lives and social commitments whereas the Itako do not seem to have any background that would reinforce their presence as well as their connections to the public.

The measles is often interpreted by many as the call that these girls receive to serve as Itako. With such an explanation, the consequence of this recruitment system concentrates on exceptional people called upon to serve their society in very exceptional ways. Thus, in spite of their vision problem, the victims of measles feel the obligation to memorize as many sutras as possible so to be able to recite them without hesitation and integrate them in the chants. Sutras taken from the main religious frames, Shinto or Buddhism, somehow legitimate the Itako's progress in the religious sphere and offer a common ground shared with monks. Whereas the latter spend their time within the religious area, mainly in temples, the Itako, on the contrary, are very present in human communities. Even though the Itako do not become monks, they are, all the same, perceived as facilitators of people's understanding of religious works.

In addition, the Itako recruitment repeats a necessity often linked to the sacred and

the religious only accessible through ordeal and exceptional personalities. By suffering from measles, yet still able to memorize sutras and offer social solutions, the Itako follow the recruitment and evolution scheme often reserved to exceptional monks and other ascetics who go through terrific suffering and personal mortification in order to reach an exceptional social and spiritual level accountable through outstanding behavior, social service, community integration, and communications with deities.

With the tremendous progress observed since the twentieth century in science and technology, on the one hand, and education and government consequent investments in research, health care, and integration areas, on the other, the Itako presence has decreased very much. Every indicator based on their number throughout time clearly shows that they will be replaced in this profession by sighted shamans. However, with regards to the Demand-Offer Law and equation, the Itako's social functions will still be filled as many Japanese still believe in life after death and possible contacts with the spirits of the dead.

The Mikishi initiators consider recruitment from several perspectives that allow good candidates to become excellent mediums, that is, any chance that grants them the capacity to mingle with spirits, protect the community, and above all increase or decrease the Vital Force according to the necessity in presence. As the end is very important, different strategies are put in use in order to get the rare pearls, mostly girls that will serve the community and ensure connections with ancestors' spirits and gods. Several possibilities are considered in order to get the public servants and ensure continuation throughout time and the ages. Quite often when someone, say, a community member, falls sick and can not be healed through easy and daily medication, parents consult with the Mikishi, who may ask for the physical presence of the concerned. The Mikishi will then call for ancestors and request protection through a ritual so well retraced by Eliade.²³⁾ Through their songs and invocations, the Mikishi are concerned with a world re-creation process. They will call upon God and gods to restore harmony. Peace, health, understanding, and compassion are provided as the only ways through which humankind and nature can cohabit and fill their respective roles and obligations within the Chain of Being. In such conditions, creatures are believed to enjoy every abundance, growth, and social insertion. Life, health, communications with other creatures, food, and security put humankind at the center of the world. The journey back to the origins stands for a *sine qua non* condition to rebuild people's health and restart a new and important life after a very quick or miraculous healing. When parents refer to the Mikishi for medication, spiritual healing, and social recommendations through consultations, they embark on a journey toward the *illo tempore*. Eliade looks at it as a long journey to the sacred and reversible time,²⁴⁾ a primordial mythic time made present and whose re-actualization is made possible through rituals organized by the shamans, the Mikishi.

Apart from ritualistic songs and words, fire, smoke, and water are also used to ensure a journey through the times. The Mikishi take for granted that if they carry the patient back to the creation times and conditions, at least spiritually, they fill the conditions needed for a re-creation. A new being completely healthy physically, psychologically, and spiritually is readjusted at the contact with Gods, gods, and good spirits. Quite often, roots, tree bark, leaves, special selected soil, pebbles, water from given

sources or the lake, prayers, magic charm, heavy smoke, and incense are also utilized, mixed in concoctions and in pharmacopeia that would reduce fever, heal mental disorders, or again stop impotency or barrenness. The smoke engendered from burning specific tree bark, incense, or given sacrifices—chickens, goats, fish, or other food-stuff—usually partially burnt along with drum beating and rhythmic dances largely contribute to smoothing and speeding the journey. The concept of sacrifice explained in this way offers a very good comparison with the Hebraic “zebah” referring to the slaughter of animals for both religious and ordinary consumption purposes as explained by Jill Robbins.²⁵⁾ During the entire process, the Mikishi and the patient(s), both often in trance, reach out to gods, spirits dwelling in the highest or the underground realms where the healing (or the re-creation) process takes place. At this occasion, the illness reason is revealed. It may turn out to be from different origins, such as a spell, a curse, witchcraft, an evil spirit, body change, and fatigue. However, the sickness or poor health conditions may also be from the very divine source addressing a particular call to a chosen creature. In this case, the illness becomes a call and the way through which gods lead a chosen candidate to fill the Mikishi functions. Such candidates are noticed through the spontaneous way with which they enter into trance, spontaneous physiological response to the therapy, straight capacity to communicate with gods, and eventually their ability to give their spiritual name during the consultation. It is indeed taken for granted that spirits may occasion some people’s illness in order to give them the opportunity to call on their attention in order to find out spirits’ presence and will.

In joining the Mikishi community in the way described above, the newcomer usually enters into trance and is believed to be completely and spontaneously healed from his/her own suffering. His/her life is completely transformed, thus dedicated to the community and is closely related to the Mikishi that have discovered the true reason of the illness. The leader of the Mikishi will also work as the mistress who will lead the newcomer in different important secrets. The mistress will also make sure that the newcomer in the profession gets recognition as she works within the Chain of Being. However, before anything, the candidate goes through a very serious training opening the human mind to the spiritual presence. Through complete isolation, drum rhythms, songs, and recitals she is exposed to trance practices, and mainly through trance practices she becomes acquainted with after a long time the newcomer changes into a new being, into a Mukishi in order to serve the community.

During specific rituals and ceremonies such as harvest gathering, pregnancy recognition, brotherhood presentation, puberty, name giving, funeral gathering, and welcoming of twins, drums are played and dance steps performed. When the rhythm reaches frenzies and the public responds with frenetic movements, it is often a signal that people have entered into trance and start rolling on the ground. Some even leave the village and seclude themselves in the fields, the forest, by the lake, or on the lake. The community may think that they have become crazy and are bewitched, and may either contribute to their complete seclusion, or again interest the Mikishi in the cases in order to rescue them. Once again, the Mikishi will deal with such cases in order to learn the will of the spirits. However, very often the people who enter into trance make demonstrations of what they are up to in solving some enigma still present in

the village. They may also heal people or speak in other tongues to show their new spiritual evolution. The Mikishi will contest their ingenuity and community inclination. It is indeed believed that extraordinary phenomena such as trance, language gift, and miracle operation may also come from evil sources. If discovered, these evil forces have to be completely expelled from the community. The Mikishi, through prayers, sacrifices, and invocations, are able to generally liberate people and, particularly, community members from the evil presence. After very careful scrutiny, the Mikishi decide to welcome successful candidates and introduce them into the secrets linking humankind to God, gods, and spirits.

A further recruitment system takes into account dreams. These dreams may be premonitory as far as the entire community is concerned or just on behalf of some community members. Spiritual sources will give the dreamer different instructions to follow and to absolutely respect. In the case of illness, the dreamer would be instructed on the pharmacopeia to be used and the dosage to be given to the sick person in order to start the healing process. The dreamer may also be instructed to organize a special ritual ceremony led by the Mikishi and that should lead to the healing of a given patient in the community. Once again, if the Mikishi find out that the capacity thus acquired by a community member is not temporary but is rather likely to continue for years and has completely changed the person's life, they welcome her within their circle and initiate her into more important secrets.

The following recruitment system is the easiest even if it is not the most frequent. The family that has a Mukishi may consider training a daughter. The invitation in this case will consist of making sure that the youngster is often, if not always around the eldest Mukishi and thus learns whatever the Mikishi are involved in. This method allows the passage of the Mikishi from one generation to another within the same family. There are indeed families identified as such. Nevertheless, the understanding of the concept family should call for much attention. It may consist of members of the same close family or it may include close relations, still called family members, within the same community or ethnic group. This method testifies that many community members placed in training conditions can change into Mikishi. However, many communities believe that it is only an exceptional, genuine divine gift that leads some individuals to Mukishihood.

On top of these different recruiting methods some exceptions impose themselves. They are of various natures and are considered through their striking presentations. Some long suffering people may suddenly die. However, instead of passing away completely, they may come back to life, some hours or days after death, with the messages of spirits. They may also easily enter into trance and connect with spirits. People often suffering from mental disorder, psychological disorder, and a state of mental helplessness might have disappeared for many days on the lake, in the wild forest, or in the mountains without any protection and may suddenly return, safe and bringing spiritual messages. Their skin is said to be changed and to have taken the clay color. They may join the Mikishi, especially if they are females, or, in some cases, the group of fortune tellers, the Nganga, if they are males. The latter, apart from their connection with spirits, are rather known for their lucrative business with people. They pretend to arrange at will fortunes according to the way they are treated and the respons-

es they get from the conditions they give. They may ask a community or a community member to collect gifts and to organize public rituals sometimes turning around accusations. These conditions bring large benefits to such charlatans as they go around showing their wealth and by the same token attracting more people to magic gains. As for Mikishi, they are likely to work smoothly and to lead a somehow silent life except for rituals and other gatherings where they are expected to lead prayers.

In light of the above, it is obvious that both the Itako and the Mikishi are recruited from their respective communities. They are expected to get involved in community services and in bringing the sacred, the religious close to the daily profane. It is however evident that the Itako have undertaken an important mutation in order to adapt to modern times and to the main religious movements. The Mikishi recruitment systems work for the continuation of a community life revolving around the importance of the Vital Force within communities and villages. They are recruited at several occasions provided that their presence in the community contributes to the betterment and welfare of everybody's life, and brings closer and closer good spirits as they enter into trance. Because the Itako have successfully negotiated their integration in other times, they are likely to continue to do so for many generations even if blind shamanesses will scarcely be found given the government capacities to deal with handicapped people in general, and in particular with the blind and partially blind people in giving them appropriate education, training, and easier social integration. Sighted Itako—or let us use the example of other kinds of shamans prevailing in other regions of the world and Japan—will become more and more visible and they will be consulted for the same social functions needed by people throughout history: possible connections with the dead and their spiritual assistance.

The Mikishi also will continue, and their recruitment will be facilitated by the socio-economic and political environment that has left the Bushila land far behind and underdeveloped for many years. The lack of appropriate socio-economic answers and the prevailing ignorance on many modern topics will encourage the continuation of the Mikishi especially in an environment where new religious faiths do not threaten shamanistic practices. If by any chance modernity has to force its presence through mining companies and other political presences and projects, the Mikishi will still bring social solutions to people afraid of the unknown and convinced of ancestors' support. The Mikishi will continue to be at the "center of the city," that is, the focal point for all questions concerning relations with gods and good spirits in order to secure good fortune and will, eventually as noticed in many cities, infiltrate modern religious circles. Their practices will reach prayer groups and will find strategies to differentiate such groups from original Mikishi groups. They will mention saints' names and religious miracles in big cities. However, all around Lake Mweru, with the lake dangers on the one hand and the mountain and wilderness on the other, Mikishi will be consulted and will protect life even in the newly born cities. Thus, the Mikishi will again be perceived by the first reasons of their presence, which is largely linked to Vital Force intensity, presence, and opposition to any kind of evil.

3. Training

In Japan, once the family decides on their daughter's vocation as Itako, the next

step is to find an Itako willing to welcome the novice. Parents also consult to acquire food and other primary necessities that the novice will need. They leave the girl in the hands of the mistress who is supposed to take care of her until she is ready to practice.²⁶⁾ The training revolves around memorizing sutras, chanting, and entering into trance. Every day a number of sutras are learned and they are supposed to be reproduced on the following day. It is the novices' responsibility to continue reciting them during the entire night—at least as long as they are awake—to ensure that they reproduce them when asked by the mistress the next morning. However, apart from this memory responsibility, the trainees are also in charge of kitchen work, cooking their meals, cleaning dishes, general house maintenance, and life organization. They therefore work on the basis of a schedule under the direction of some of them. They count very much on the novices that still have some vision capacity to lead them wherever their presence is needed in order to fulfill different work as scheduled by their mistress.

Early in the morning, they wake up, clean the house, and wash themselves before cooking breakfast. They then get ready to join the mistress in the morning sutra chanting that is followed by a quick revision of the sutras learned the previous day. Generally, the nights seem very short since the trainees keep repeating what they have been taught in order to ensure faithful reproduction once the mistress starts her check. The lesson will stop at a point to leave them time to cook their lunch, eat, and eventually take some rest before continuing with their main activities in the afternoon session.

At a given level, that is, after many months of training, when they have progressed enough in the memorization of sutras, the mistress starts training them to chant. Many references concur on the insistence of the mistress that the chant must go straight to the heart of the client and must thus bring the client closer to the work performed. The chant must show that everything is done in order to give satisfaction to the visitor's request and eventually easily lead to payment. Accordingly, the melody is repeated several times and the trainees must make sure that they reach a satisfactory level of communication and attraction. It is also during this time that they are invited to follow the example of the mistress in order to reach an excellent level of trance and communication with spirits and gods. This training may take up to three years. The voice is seriously trained as every candidate knows that clients are attracted by the Itako whose voice enchants them and put them in a very special atmosphere that can eventually plunge the visitors into trance as well.

For the last step of the training, much stress is still put on trance. The trainees are submitted to a special training in very drastic conditions during the last three weeks or so. The weather may be very cold but they are all the same supposed to wash in cold water, to undergo successive ablutions for several times every day, and to fast. At a given point, following such conditions of the body and the mind, they reach a mental state that does not have full control of their total being. Many times, hallucinations put trainees in euphoric conditions.

At this time, they may enter into trance and chanting at will until the mistress instructs them to stop. They are then informed that they have reached the highest level of training that enables them to work independently. They can therefore choose to go

and start their own business in servicing their community members. The latter would be attracted by the beauty of their chants, but essentially by their capacity to call for dead people's spirits and bring satisfaction to their family members' anxieties in giving them the opportunity to listen to their recommendations through the appropriate medium, the Itako. However, before completely leaving the mistress, the initiated may need to pay debts contracted during the training. It is recognized that the new Itako may work for a period of time that will permit her to repay the mistress. Payment is often through food commodities. With the general poverty in these days, the new Itako choose to pay debts when they have been granted permission to lead consultations by themselves. Most debts are linked to fee payments and sometimes to food. The initiate may not have enough money to cover the complete tuition fees as she may not have brought enough from home due to general conditions of poverty. Whatever the case, such situations are decided upon when the new Itako is likely to leave and has officially completed training sessions. The decision taken usually considers the possibility of staying longer with the mistress in order to pay debts through consultations performed together until the mistress believes she has received enough payment.

Once they have agreed that candidates have reached a satisfactory level, the mistress will agree with the family members on a day when achievements marking the end of the training will be publicly celebrated. Families will bring different gifts to the mistress and to the new Itako, and will celebrate with much joy the achievements of their daughters. From that day, the families will do their best to insert their daughter in their society through the Itako job. In fact, this level also testifies of social insertion. The Itako is a social product and enters into the Demand-Offer Law whereas the community and the close family also perceive their benefit at different levels of responsibility and management.

In the Bushila land the training is essentially linked to the recruitment processes explained above. Once the mistresses have welcomed the newcomers they share every day life with them. The newcomers absorb the learning of the nature surrounding human beings and its different secrets. Thus the initiates learn the names of trees, their pharmacopoeia properties, magic instruments, pebbles, possible healing concoctions, and entering into trance in order to let spirits safely operate. The main objective of this training turns around the fact that the new Mikishi must be ready to bring appropriate solutions to the community needs.

The novices are taught songs that they use to call good spirits, the Mikishi spirits. They also learn other songs that help to expel evil spirits known as "Ibibanda." Throughout their learning, the trainees consider their own conditions, that is, the state of their bodies and minds, and their purification in order to deal properly with spirits. The purification of trainees is in many cases seen in the fact that they can not lead a completely free life. They are submitted to interdictions and taboos that normally bring much understanding to everyday life. Given food and beverages on the one hand, and life self-direction and free communications with every community member on the other, they are rather seriously reviewed and selected. Mikishi may get married only if the spirit authorizes them. Otherwise they will lead a celibate life dedicated to the spirits that are seen as their husbands. Their marital condition no longer depends on their community, but rather seems attached to the will of spirits. Spirits are

often all the same presented as their husbands.

In the case they do marry, however, the husband often comes from the same circle. It is a man generally dedicated to the work done by the Mukishi. He will be in charge of appointments and ritual management, looking for tree bark, roots, rare stones, and aquatic plants in order to put everything at the proximity of the Mukishi and especially in response to their demands. In some rare cases, such a husband can reach the Kitobo role, which is the capacity to listen to the messages given by the Mukishi and interpret them for the visitors or the entire community. Still, these people become very important as they contribute to the Mikishi's work in transmitting different messages and executing their wishes. They also play the role of memory keeper as they know the names of gods and spirits as well as their properties, profiles, and locations, and can identify several messages coming from visitors who are in trance. They also testify regarding the work done throughout the years, progresses achieved in fighting against different diseases, and evil forces. In many cases, local chieftains negotiate with the Kitobo in order to get several rituals for the benefit of the kingdom and their temporal power. Chieftains count on Mikishi in order to justify why the local power would be safe in certain hands. Thus, some Mikishi groups are very much supported by the chieftain.

During their training, the novices also learn the ethnic tree so to memorize the names of heroes and the roles they play in the history of the clan. They do their best to integrate the names of heroes into the songs they learn or compose. Sometimes, they work closely with musicians and lead them to the best productions. From the words shared with the Mikishi, their helpers compose the best tunes and rhythms that can engage people either in meditation or in direct connections with the spirits. With the contribution of trance open to all able people, and the presence of good spirits and ancestors, the entire community considers its presence in a straight relation from the daily life of this world to the atemporal divine realm. The latter draws the meeting point of the profane and the sacred. The community looks at life as a gift from God and ancestors. In this perspective, the community is called upon to cooperate and take together the destiny of their people. The blessings coming from the Chain of Being are distributed to the community, whereas the evil is put aside. Such a vision of the world and its inhabitants finally invites everyone to consider on a daily basis how the sacred stands over the profane, commands over it, and eventually swallows it in a process leading to everlasting life in the sacred realms inhabited by God, gods, spirits, and ancestors.

4. Qualifications and Consultations

We have seen that once both the Itako and the Mikishi have completed their training period with its different ordeals, obligations, and physiological, physical, biological, psychological, and spiritual changes, they enter into a transition time that will definitely determine their future. This section will indicate the particularities related to this period and which pinpoint important shamanistic features. It will then extend on a consultation grill in order to determine the specific relations that the shamans construct with the consulting people, and precisely with the patient or the shaman to be. Examples will be helpful and illustrative.

Before the Itako begins the one hundred days—or sometimes more—during which time she will work for the mistress, she goes through a period of fasting and ablutions. It is obviously striking that this symbolism of water and cleansing repeats an archetype found in many other civilizations under the presentation of baptism or floods. Eliade pinpoints this symbolism.²⁷⁾ “The waters symbolize the entire universe of the virtual; they are the *fons et origo*, the reservoir of all potentialities of existence; they precede every form and sustain every creation.” This time lasts some twenty-one days, and may be extended to twenty-eight days or more if the girl menstruates during this time. It goes without saying that the time is very short for younger girls and they cover their obligations within twenty-one days only. During this period, a very small hut-like building (*gyoba*) is erected in front of the mistress’ house for cold water ablutions. Three times a day, often during cold weather, the initiate is completely secluded and repeats the ablutions as many times as she is seen by other people. She has to make sure that this practice remains a strictly personal, secret matter.

On the completion of that period comes the initiation ceremony, or Kamitsuke, which is often scheduled at night and attended by other Ogamisama (another kind of Japanese shamans) and family members. The latter are not present for the entire ceremony as the first part is restricted to invited shamans gathered in a separate room. Many symbols appear during the ceremony, such as chromatic cloth banners show purple, white, and black colors associated with death and resurrection. First, the four world directions are purified with a white banner before inviting different Japanese deities to attend the ritual. Red paper strings are used to bind the initiate’s hair. Her clothing offers the image of a dead body as she is in white garb, gloves, and leggings exactly in the way a body waiting in a morgue would appear.

Sutras and songs are repeatedly executed because the possessing spirit is expected to arrive at any time. The latter comes through trance and is asked to introduce itself through a name. Once again, everything will depend on the candidate’s capacity to respond to the situation in entering quickly into trance and naming the possessing spirit. This is a very difficult time for the family that has to wait and often witness how their daughter is undergoing hardship and suffering up to the last moment. In some cases, the ritual may be very long. It is completed with a question asked to the initiate on her needs, including a new name, a rosary, a hand bell, and a bow. She is then clothed like a bride and is allowed to join the family members waiting in the next room. It is worth mentioning that during the training period, especially the period prior to the initiation, a special stress is put on fasting. Foodstuff is reduced to the extent of imposing the minimum possible upon the body and making it very frail.

From this day, the initiate begins the one-hundred days discipline. This period coincides with the time during which the Itako is taught skills in order to perform exorcisms, divinations, and other healing issues. The initiate may also make use of the time to start repaying the debts due the mistress. In the case that there are debts, the new Itako may need much more time before gaining complete independence to lead her own work.

The last step of training seems much easier for the Mikishi to be. They are disclosed to the public that may have not heard of them. They came of their own Mikishi initiators and were hidden from the public throughout their training. However,

during the consultation and treatment, they have been found worthy for inclusion in the Mikishi group. They have been secluded from their close relatives, and trained in very harsh conditions in order to manage their identity with given spirits or gods. They have the advantage of living close to their masters or mistresses so that they may share their anxieties even if they are alone for their ablutions under cold weather. They are alone to train their memories in folklore, history, songs, and specific tunes that easily connect them to identified spirits. They are expected to reach the level that shall permit them to gain senses that other human beings can not dream about and which will lead them to discover things and situations otherwise unexpected by the entire community. They finally reach an exceptional life situation that justifies how much the entire community cares for their daily needs, food, clothing, music instruments, and housing facilities. They will spend their entire life ready to care for their community religious and spiritual requests. The latter are rather valued in terms of life importance and cannot represent any economic figure comparable to anything done in order to ensure the Mikishi's daily life.

The training evolution from special diseases that families cannot heal, and the mysterious and spontaneous cure and healing thanks to the Mikishi's intervention and therapeutics together dictate a new life conception to the initiates. They are grateful to gods for a safe life and believe that the only appreciative way toward the benefactors should be found in total dedication to spiritual guidance and to community service. In such conditions, living far from their close family members, or spending, sometimes, a life of celibacy, or, again married to spirits, seem the best ways to thank gods.

As for community service, both the Itako and the Mikishi have popular consultations that fall within a grill subdivided into ten coherent steps. The Itako mainly concentrates on the *kuchiyose*, or a consultation that will permit their client to get in contact with family members and feel still connected in many ways to those who no longer live. When the client meets the Itako, greetings are exchanged. One main question is likely to be raised by the Itako in order to find out the reason for the visit. Quite often, the name of the parent who passed away is likely to be given with the date and the year of the death. The Itako gives gratitude to spirits and thanks them for the visit. The second step turns around peace and reconciliation as in her words the Itako calls for the dead man or woman's spirit to come and respond to the invitation of family members.

The third step coincides with the presence of the dead man or woman's spirit that manifests through trance and speaks through the medium, the Itako. The first words tell of the dead's sorrow for a sudden death at a time the family needed his/her presence. The dead spirit expresses grief as the beloved ones have to ask several questions on what happened. It extends peaceful words to the family and wishes the surviving members to help each other. The same spirit takes this opportunity to warn his family members on disasters they may be involved in around given dates and ensures them of his/her protection. Before saying goodbye, the spirit advises his family members to visit Osorezan again in order to have such an entertainment and a family reunion. The visitors feel released and believe they have achieved something important in their contact with a deceased parent. At the same time, they take this opportunity to leave on the mountain whatever they think will be needed to ensure their family member's

safe journey to paradise or to everlasting peace. Clothes and dolls are offered, and prayers and other offerings are presented to make sure that the journey is as smooth as possible.

This phase shares many similarities with a Mikishi practical consultation session. Singers chant gratitude to gods and spirits, mentioning their names while drumming is reaching a frenetic rhythm. At first, the Mikishi are silent, concentrated, listening carefully to the singers' words, and letting the drum beat move their innermost. They then open their mouths joining in the chant they know from rehearsals and other ceremonies and slowly enter into trance to announce the arrival of a given spirit whose name they mention several times. From that level, it is taken for granted that the spirit talks through the medium and analyzes the issue brought up.

The spirit thanks the visitors and shows gratitude for gifts brought. The speaking tone may be threatening from the beginning in order to condemn any aspect of religious and social life that the community may have neglected and which may have exposed it to dangers and the present issue. The spirit continues on the issue and may explain how such cases happened in the past and how they were treated. It asks the Mikishi's helper, the Kitobo, to prepare a medication based on concoctions that are dictated by the spirit.

It is also at this level that the spirit may indicate the issue, especially if it is a disease suspected to be caused by a spell, witchcraft consequences, or an evil spirit work. Unfortunately, these words instead of reinforcing social cohesion accelerate disharmony, and quite often scapegoats suffer much from the community. Indeed, people identified as responsible for a disease or other disaster are often expelled from their community to wander in the wildness until they are welcome elsewhere or start their own isolated village. That village will carry a poor reputation and will continuously be referred to as an evil place. Many villages sharing the same beliefs are believed to have started after incidents such as these forced individuals to leave and wander around until they decided to settle down elsewhere. Such villages develop enmity over the years and refuse wedding offers from their respective community members. However, it is not impossible that through forgiveness, cleansing, and reconciliation rituals the villages once opposed will rebuild their fraternity and agree to move ahead on new terms.

As may be noted, this practical session phase presents many similarities between the Itako and the Mikishi. However, the major difference stems from the attitude developed toward calamity, disaster, disease, and social conflict. Whereas the Itako stresses the dead spirit's journey to paradise, the assistance of family members throughout the journey, and the deceased family member's contrition on the suffering his absence imposes upon the family, the Mikishi insists on the community's responsibility in whatever catastrophe. As pointed out earlier while describing African philosophy, everything is explained through causality and the community is blamed for lack of vigilance and a kind of friendship with the evil. If diseases are cured, the community is satisfied of its contacts with spirits. It is also obvious that Mikishi sessions often lead to social disharmony and lack of social cohesion. Community members identified as responsible for any evil are often made scapegoats of any social failure and are expelled from the community. Whenever there are such difficult conditions essentially involving witchcraft accusations, village community members often rely upon arbitra-

tion by the chieftain, and in very rare cases upon decisions of government representatives. The latter are very often kept at a distance to avoid their judgments, which oftentimes result in the payment of fines.

5. Segmentation and Literary Understanding of Shamanistic Consultations

In order to deepen the comparison of the work done by the Itako and the Mikishi, I have found it interesting to make use of folklorist approaches to oral narratives and their application to both shamanisms under study here. The Russian folklorist Vladimir Propp initiated research on tale narratives in the early 1930s and was the first to use structural analysis theories mainly focusing on structures and modularity of language constructions. The Proppian Fairy Tale Generator considered several viable tales that could result from a combination of different functions. While such an understanding does not put much stress on other literary features such as voice, tone, atmosphere, point of view, and their respective interventions in the construction of fairy tales, it has, all the same, the merit of stressing similarities that can exist between fairy tales from different origins or again the fact that many fairy tales can originate from the same motifs before taking different directions. With a consideration of folk narratives as an open expression of local wisdom and culture, understanding structural constructions, role divisions, and character profiles will lead to the comprehension of social structures and shamanistic impact on social visions.

The Proppian approach to the world of fantasy helps in understanding many narratives that took form prior to, during, and after the Itako phenomenon in Japan. The same understanding applies also to the Mikishi. Functions lead in understanding extraordinary tales and their insertion into social communities that place languages at the center of communication and people's projections in their daily lives. These narratives reflect different beliefs sometimes called superstitious or religious and often characteristic of many people. Thus, in both societies tales constructed around foxes, wild dogs, talking animals, princes emerging from tombs, a princess magically married, and miracles performed by phantoms in order to save human communities are recorded.²⁸⁾ In the same vein, people condemned for their wickedness, witchcraft, and magic killing powers, and sometimes even burned alive, can be found in the historical records of both societies. However, both societies also stress the role played by shamans in eliminating bad spirits, in liberating spirits, and in purifying entire communities. Both societies place the shaman/shamaness on a pedestal at the boundary of the profane and the sacred while recognizing in him/her the authority and the power to dwell in the whereabouts of the highest divinities and receive powers from gods and spirits. It is within this context that using Proppian theory or structuralists that followed upon this research will be of great assistance in grasping the modularity system to the extent possible for a better analysis of the main data explaining the training process in both shamanisms. Proppian theory—viewed as a structuralist theory—indeed is recognized for its capacity to reproduce many structures out of a single frame.

In the very way that Propp comes to the conclusion after a comparison of approximately one hundred tales that there is essentially only one tale structure even though several details might differ, I believe that it is possible to frame and study a basic structural representation of the Itako and the Mikishi shamanisms. The central role is

played by the function, “an act of character, defined from the point of view of its significance for the course of the action.” In taking into account the stable elements of stories that focus on the meeting with the Itako or the Mikishi, the functions lead the reader in the very progress and growth of the shamans going from one initiation to another while facing very difficult choices in a continuous binary system opposing good to evil, villain to hero. A succession of good choices in spite of hardships leads to the victory of good over evil and to the construction of exceptional characters, shamans.²⁹⁾

Proppian structural analysis was very helpful for other structuralists. Though not intending to pass over the contributions of so many in the review below in order to grasp the evolution of the Itako and of the Mikishi, it seems, however, interesting to mention first among so many van Gennep, and A. J. Greimas. Others too will be mentioned below. Arnold van Gennep is famous for *The Rites of Passage*.³⁰⁾ In an analysis of this book with regards to rites in primitive societies, Fiona Bowie considers it as marking the transition from one stage of life, season, or event to another³¹⁾—going a step further in materializing the main point in Proppian theory, the functions understood with regard to the roles, changes, novelties, and community incorporation undergone by a character in order to permanently cope with social obligations. In this book van Gennep draws possible progressive lines that lead to the profiles of exceptional shamanistic personalities. With Bowie, it is also worth noting an evolution in theory presentation that moves from mainly fictitious narratives to social implications and human beings often insisting on possible passages from the profane to the sacred via an intermediate stage. The sacred looked at as the highest target in any human life justifies motivations, sacrifices, mortifications, and self-seclusion that result in comprehension of personal betterment based on community progress and partaking in the sacred and also in the personal capacity to communicate and share the sacred with other community members. The evolution constructs the body of literature, oral and written, that deals with rites of passage in steps including separation and transition, and the incorporation of all present in rituals performed at different occasions, such as initiation, birth, death, rebirth, pregnancy presentation, childhood, betrothal and marriage, funeral, farming period, harvest, healing diseases, and purification.³²⁾

With regard to the above, both the Itako and the Mikishi are in the frame presented by van Gennep and commented upon by Bowie. Indeed, both the Itako and the Mikishi undergo separation, facing a long transition period before their incorporation. Joseph Campbell, another famous scholar in Propp’s line, as is clearly seen in his *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, follows the same perspective as he presents steps included in a hero’s life evolution. The Hero is separated from his community in order to undergo several ordeals before joining the same community again, different and completely transformed into a new being. The latter is often referred to for exceptional spiritual, religious, psychological, and religious experience. It is precisely for their exceptional socio-spiritual-religious features and perspectives that both the Itako and the Mikishi, even though they are not called heroines or heroes, are recognized and valued within their respective societies. They are referred to in the light of the discussion above as they bring solutions to their community issues and suggest complete profiles of social and religious leaders.

In their descriptions, both van Gennep and Campbell deal with characters involved in initiations, ordeals, and rituals and are presented in a continuous change permitting them to reach a level of self-denial and complete the gift to superior community causes. They undergo a complete metamorphosis that goes beyond simple physical growth, and deals rather with dimensions involving an outreach to spiritual values, to social responsibilities, and, mainly, to leadership. In this vein, these shamans when compared to political leaders and social organizers rather tend to present a ground where the profane and the sacred meet and proceed for humankind's welfare.³³⁾

A further step in both shamanisms observed from a literary perspective considers Claude Bremond's structural presentation that includes fairy tales, myths, and the growth of characters within such narratives and social contexts.³⁴⁾ Bremond separates himself from the Proppian function understanding, van Gennep and Campbell's ordeals, mortification, gradual socialization, and progressive spiritual attention and self-representation. He looks rather at the narratives in terms of sequences, of different structural frames that finally construct either successful stories or failures. The main frame still repeats the main three steps in the Proppian approach as well as in van Gennep and Campbell's approach, including separation, transition, and incorporation.

Bremond's sequences depict how beginning a shamanistic evolution would concern particular individuals and not everyone. This is the reason why speaking of a vocation would not be an exaggeration, as pointed out above in the cases of the Itako and the Mikishi. Both face situations that expect an answer that would involve their entire life for the best and for the worst provided that they continue succeeding at every step. In presenting the first sequence as a "situation opening a possibility," Bremond points to personal or sometimes community responsibility in taking a step toward masters and training. This step foresees self-denial, complete submission, and a very strong will to be guided toward knowledge and skills introduced by masters. By agreeing to enter into training, a threshold is crossed and total seclusion from family life and personal independence is accepted.

The second sequence questions the first one in so far as it does not suffice to show one's will to follow the master and become a good disciple. The best learner is perceived through progressive learning and growth of skills. Thus, the second sequence raises the actualization possibility in so far as it assesses the candidate's capacities, and deals with the involved character's capacity to cope with several ordeals, initiations, and learning capacities. Their outcomes stand for the visible proof of the fitness of a candidate or an initiate. Proof to the contrary leads either to self-exclusion, official exclusion, or again to a further chance to begin a new training process, that is, staying with the masters for longer than previously planned. Thus, this sequence portrays the initiate in his/her capacity to access shamanistic powers.

The third sequence seems like a logical consequence of the second. The initiate undergoes sets of skill acquisitions that slowly change him/her into a new being on several life dimensions. Physically, the initiate reaches the level of coping with physical suffering and endurance, and persistence in daily body efforts in order to deal with social issues and to put an end to instincts' prevalence. The body is physically changed; it is strong and can face physical challenges. By the same token, the mind frees itself from egotistic issues as it considers a growing number of philosophical issues relating

to life and to religious and spiritual presence as a necessary and self-imposed need throughout daily life, as well as to eternity perception, community cohesion, and personal insertion. The religious dimension embodies the entire personality in opening it to work responding to given divine ideologies.

The success of any training as such is reflected in the new shaman's capacity to satisfy community needs often related to questions unsolved by the usual structure and skills. The shaman, thus, stands for a social alternative or, in many cases, for the *sine qua non* condition whose assistance develops human personality, balances profane and sacred influences, and heals and connects human beings to gods. It goes without saying that the shaman's failure is still possible at this level, especially in the case that the community does not feel connected or satisfied in one way or another with his/her work. In the case of ascetics, the failure often results from "dryness" otherwise presented as the inability to lead an expected life. This dryness happens when the concerned has either neglected continuous training or has considered himself/herself to have reached the highest point forgetting the necessity of continuous self-updating. Bremond's sequences may be summarized in this Chart 1:

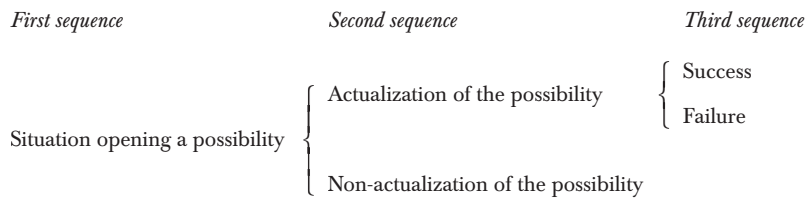


Chart 1

Bremond's sequences illustrate the training of the Itako and the Mikishi. The initiates in both cases face a choice that comes under given circumstances due essentially to incurable and poorly treated diseases. In the case of the Mikishi, the family incapacity to face the illness leads to Mikishi known for their specific diagnosis and therapeutics essentially linked to the creator alone able to restore full life. Whereas the Itako profession is seen as a way out of the social embarrassment and impediments due to measles, the illness does not put the blind girl in a comfortable position for any kind of social insertion, competition, and success. Parents rely on the Itako to project their daughter's social independence and, at the same time, recognition of the spiritual dimension. It is also an opportunity to revive emotional reasons for wishing to have contact with the dead. The suffering undergone by both the Itako and the Mikishi turns out to be a question whose answer gives or stops the possibility to move along the three major sequences that Bremond considers.

Thus, Bremond's theoretical frame fits both the Itako and the Mikishi. Several details and differences might be found and understood in narratives related to individuals or to specific cultural features. However, the main lines constructing the narrative body as well as the training process accurately concur and testify to a personality construction from a given point to a higher one, though not in a linear progress, but rather in a circumambulatory process gathering several details. The latter progress depicts a

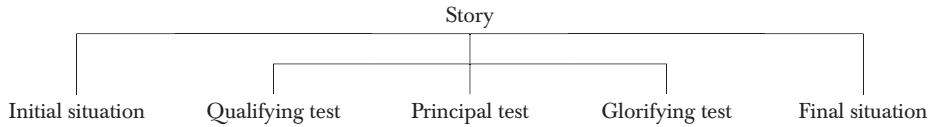


Chart 2

selection process followed by training in seclusion, total transformation, and community services.

A further step in the use of structural theories in the comparison of the Itako and the Mikishi may focus on Greimas' narrative analysis involving the shaman—or the hero in the case of folk narratives—in tests whose success brings excellent shamanistic practice and social radiance. For clarity and conciseness, Greimas considers the narrative—or here the evolution to shamanistic status—to revolve around five main levels as represented in Chart 2.

The initial situation repeats in many ways Bremond's understanding. A lack in the normal evolution of daily life puts an end to social harmony and raises questions for a possible restoration. Having merely the will for change and social harmony does not suffice. The hero—or in this case the shaman to be—undergoes several tests that qualify him as the harmony restorer. The first test also resembles Bremond's second sequence. It qualifies the hero to be or the initiate for further ordeals and initiations. The next steps go through the principle test and finally reach a glorifying step that opens onto harmony restoration. The glorifying test should be looked at as the arrival point—though not definite—that enables the newly-trained shaman or hero to accurately deal with social issues and to grant society what it needs the most.

Clearly, Bremond's presentation offers a pattern in three different steps. The first depicts the early situation that poses a social problem. That problem does not lead directly to a solution, but requires personal skills and capacities in order to face challenges through actions that will slowly lead to new possibilities and, eventually, toward a change. The second step depicts a process including transformations essentially related to physical and psychological personality aspects that may lead to complete human growth. This step depicts the summit attained in the hero's personality development. All possibilities when well selected and followed lead to a final step that can be considered as harmony restoration or, again, as a total presentation or manifestation of a new personality. The Diagram 1 summarizes the hero's evolution.

Both the Itako and the Mikishi face an initial situation characterized by a sudden public issue that leads to the social impossibility of any normal family or community life. In the case of the Itako, it is an outbreak of measles resulting in blindness that turns family life upside down and fair socio-economic projections. In both cases, family members—and sometimes community members, too—help in different ways especially in providing social assistance, guidance, food, and love. However, the victim of measles, that is, the blind girl, is the main actress in a long process that will eventually change her misfortune into a source of personal and community pride and benefit. In the same vein, the Mukishi to be stands for the main actor in a long process that includes personal healing and personal involvement in social and community issues. As a matter of fact, the Itako initiate's capacities to accept her physical handicap in tough

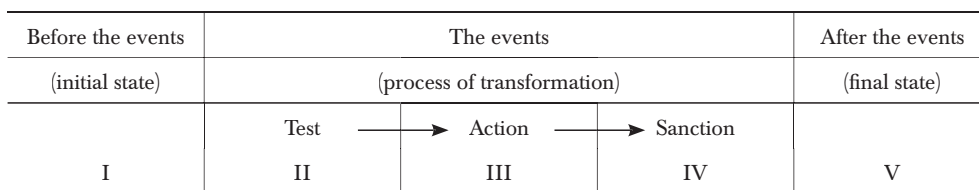


Diagram 1

training and her memorization skills so to be able to enter a trance state are decisive for the entire process. It is with regards to these personal decisions and capacities that the initiate is able to accept to lead an ascetic life characterized by several food and moral restrictions, body mortifications, and an absolute obedience to the mistress and spirits. Both these personal decisions and the ability to stand by them construct the premises that pave the way to many transformations that finally perform a successful alteration and metamorphosis in a new being, a new Itako. The metamorphosis solves the social issue, blindness, that the family considered a serious social impediment. It is no longer a barrier to social insertion and personal successful life. The new Itako can start her practice, give consultations, and accumulate enough means to live by herself in economic independence from her family. In addition, her new status gives her the possibility to get married and start a family life. More important, however, this new status offers the community a chance to contact dead people's spirits and eventually have conversations with them. These communications turn essentially around concomitant benefits for community members' daily life as well as for the journey to paradise as far as the dead family members are concerned. The community is very much interested in this last aspect.

The same process is found in the evolution of the Mikishi initiate. The family is unable to find good treatment for its daughter. After trying several known treatments, it comes to the conclusion that the physiological, biological, mental, or social problem should be brought to the attention of the Mikishi whose medical skills offer treatment possibilities far beyond daily pharmacopeia or social expertise shared within the community and advised by leaders. In the presence of the general failure and impotence to counterattack the sudden disease or social disequilibrium, the only possibility and direction remaining is to turn toward the Mikishi. The Mikishi use their expertise to diagnose exceptionally difficult and rare health and social issues. They label them under different names related either to diseases, pandemics, plagues, or social disorders caused by bad spirits. Sometimes, they also learn that the exceptionally sudden disease happens to be a call to attention or an invitation to go closer to gods. Whatever the case, the Mikishi find and initiate a required healing process aiming at a better, if not a new health condition. To reach such results, Eliade informs us that through different rituals and sacrifices the shaman accompanies the patient on a spiritual journey back to the creation day and implores God to repeat his creation operation characterized essentially by love toward his creatures, a gift of very good health, other useful attributes, and, especially, a complete life.³⁵ At the same time, humankind enjoys its special position in the creation hierarchy in so far as the creator highly appreciates them and grants benefits from the presence of many natural resources. The return to

the sources explains the belief largely explained by Eliade that humankind might have the possibility to lead an eternal life provided periodic healing rituals are observed in order to restore life in its complete original candidness.³⁶⁾

Throughout such rituals and spiritual journeys back to the *illo tempore* and the creation day, the trained Mikishi learns the will of gods. Divinities may have, for instance, chosen a particular child, man, or woman for their services and contacts with human communities in order eventually to lead them on the wise paths that increase both social cohesion and Vital Force. Such chosen and exceptional people are ready to join the Mikishi profession. The Mikishi will devote their time and different resources in order to give to the selected candidate the best possible training. Not only that, the training masters find out the real reason for any social dissatisfaction and disequilibrium, and they assist and help as much as possible along the way to the production of a new shaman.

Actually, the masters and mistresses transform the entire process into a quest attended by the disciple. They help the initiate to discern a mission and fulfill it. The complete process changes in so far as the initiate believes to have a mission to complete in the training whose success depends much on personal achievements, accomplishments, and self-transformation in a medium vehicle or residence of given benevolent spirits. Perceived in this way, the Mikishi training changes itself into a mission execution whose victory depends much on the candidate's capacities as well as on gods' will and guidance at all levels. The masters and mistresses stand for the envoys of gods and grant as much assistance as possible.

In concentrating on the initiate, Greimas' structural analysis of such kinds of narratives notes six different actants represented in the Chart 3.

The initiate, the Itako or the Mikishi, stands for the subject, that is, the main actor, character, hero, or heroine. A special relationship, mainly a psychological link, connects the subject to the object presently, becoming a shaman with the intended objective of solving personal and community issues. The mission is described and believed to be initiated by gods and spirits. The latter are classified as senders, whereas the community—and the initiate—stand for the receivers. It is in this perspective that the masters or mistresses stand for helpers or adjuvant characters, whereas social actors of diverse orders that impede on the evolution to the targeted issue and personal limitations often play the opponent role in so far as they construct obstructions. They are looked at as opponents since they do not facilitate the subject's progress throughout the training.

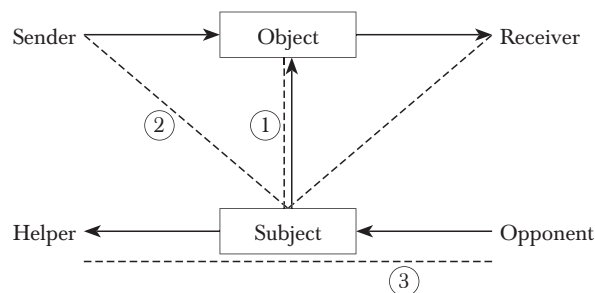


Chart 3

In an overview of such a personality development, Greimas considers several very important axes. He calls the first one “Axis of Desire,” and depicts it within a specific link relating the subject—or the initiate—with the object standing for the aim and the end of the quest. It is indeed through a personal perception, will, and capacity that both the Itako and the Mikishi go through training hardships, privations, and ascetic evolution. However, the special link itself and the profound desire are primarily perceived rather as a gift from the sender(s) given the selection of the initiate among so many people who could so aspire. The chosen candidates—the initiates—are given a mission that closely connects them to the sender(s), that is, gods, and whose benefit goes to the receiver(s), that is, human communities. Thus, the communication axis goes from the sender, transits through the subject, and finally reaches the receiver(s). The initiate stands at the center of a process originating from the senders, gods, who give the very contours of his/her mission. Gods are also looked at as filling the chosen one with sufficient will and physical capacity needed to face ordeals. The third axis concerns power and puts in position the subject restricted in his/her evolution by opponent forces. The latter are of different kinds. They may be physical, psychological, or metaphysical. However, they are balanced by the presence of the helpers—here masters—who come with good advice and teach several secrets of spiritual growth. The outcomes of the evolution depict the profile and at the same time the job description of a new shaman. It is rather an exceptional human being sharing daily human conditions in several points, born in a family and sharing social cohesion, but called upon by gods in order to serve the entire human community.

Very often, the ascetics are called to lead a life similar to the training time and to stand by the same standards throughout this life. For the sake of social welfare, personal recognition, and identification, the shaman goes from one triangle conflict to another in order to follow the circumambulatory evolution line. Different opponents will stand for impediments in communications with gods, whereas helpers, divine and human, will enable the Itako to fulfil social expectations. In the same way, the Mikishi will remain available to lead their communities whatever the social conflict. Thus both the Itako and the Mikishi follow a progressive line where different opponents continuously challenge them but meet with their growing resistance. Further, they are aware of negative forces that try to keep them away from their mission.

In his description of such a journey, Daniel P. Kunene insists on a permanent triangle conflict that keeps opposing the subject to opponent forces. Spiritual and physical resources received from gods and spirits reinforce the subject and permit him to go on a trip toward the needed target while going through personal transformation. Kunene repeatedly considers the outward journey passing through a succession of triangle conflicts and the homeward journey that also goes through other similar conflicts but that ends with bringing back home harmony. The triangle conflict can be represented as Chart 4.

The triangle conflicts are present along both the outward and homeward journeys that Kunene describes as an evolution from a good environment (1) that quickly changes in difficulties due to important social challenges (2). These problems oblige the concerned people to leave their community and find a place of exile elsewhere until they are able to return and restore harmony in their community. That is exactly

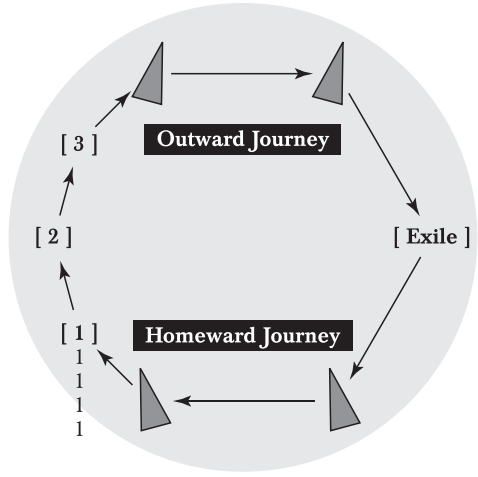
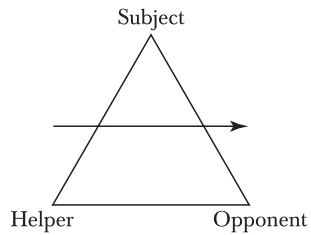


Chart 4

what is expected from the Mikishi and the Itako, whose isolation for their training stands for a time they acquire resources to bring back to their community in need.

The initiate goes through training sessions where several actors play different roles in order to lead him to a given profile. It is, nevertheless, the major responsibility of the initiate to negotiate progress with the characters around him either in openly opposing them or in again accepting their help in order to be able to continue. If such a triangle presentation can easily apply to heroic situations, to characters presented in folktale narratives, it also leaves space for daily situations where humans have to face choices and make decisions in order to reach an expected level of personality, welfare, or social consideration.

Thus, for instance in Africa today, as the HIV-AIDS pandemic spreads and challenges medical expertise, the Mikishi offer an alternative that challenges medicine while stressing social aspects and death understanding through shamanistic presentations. Death is believed to be caused by evil forces that attempt life and enjoy its destruction. However, in a dualistic perspective, death is at the same time the meeting point with ancestors. Quite often when HIV-AIDS patients reach the Mikishi, much time has been wasted. Shamans consider that these patients can only ensure their life continuation by ancestors and gods.³⁷⁾ Such a presentation of the HIV-AIDS patients is rather ambiguous as it does not bring the expected solution as such, that is, good health, but strongly alludes to life continuation after death, changing the Mikishi to counselors accompanying sick people to their last day. These patients participate in

long healing sessions. Sacrifices, incense, and offerings are presented as the opening to the primordial times where gods are expected to perform a re-creation miracle in order to grant them a new and complete life. The new life does not have anything to do with HIV-AIDS. With such a belief in healing possibility, many move from one shaman to another in search of the one who will perform the miracle. At the same time gifts, money, and other offerings lead the HIV-AIDS patients to a very poor death. Their condition is interpreted as their preparation for the return to ancestors liberated from any human burden. They lose everything sacrificed at different opportunities as they are trying to get healed.

Robert Scholes,³⁸⁾ quoting Greimas, concentrates on syntactic structures of folk narratives inherited from Propp. He underlines the fact that performing tests and struggles, contractual tests, and disjunction sequences offer the most important syntagms that permit the construction of different narratives. With regards to the Itako and the Mikishi, the evolution to shamanism takes different stories and different details that lead to a specific profile needed by the community and that answer personal needs.³⁹⁾ Both cases sum up illustrations of shamanistic initiations and social implications with similarities and differences that lead to their identities.

Conclusion

The comparison of the Itako and the Mikishi has provided the opportunity to dig deeper into global shamanism as well as into ancient and modern religions. In spite of their locations in different countries, areas, cultures, and development levels, both the Itako and the Mikishi share much in common in their motivations in shamanism and social implications. Both shamanisms permit questioning definitions, and reserves recorded throughout history provide an excellent opportunity to study shamanistic origins and their development through global perspectives. This paper has tried to demonstrate how the analysis of shamanism necessarily goes beyond borders to include personality development, social behavior consideration, philosophy and family conception, human community constructions, the frontier-like line between the sacred and the profane, and their understanding and persistence throughout human history.

The Itako finds its birth within social limits to counter diseases and maintain family cohesion. Challenged by measles and its blinding power on children, especially on girls, families search for the best way out. The families search for the best possibility to change the misfortune of blindness into a social opportunity to reverse and change blindness from a simple plague to a catharsis for purification as well as a possibility to become closer to spirits and to play major social roles. By the same token, not only do the Itako's capacities recognized by the community offer the occasion to organize an economic structure and an improvement of one's socio-economic life through regular offers and demands for public satisfaction, they also construct a socio-religious understanding of social phenomena and their implications in community organization. As a matter of fact, the Itako challenge social and scientific opinions on life continuation, communications after death, trance possibilities, and ancient religious meanings in modern life organization. It takes positions and offers satisfaction to community members regarding issues that psychology often puts in question but for which it does not offer satisfactory explanations for understanding the unknown, and the invisible,

and its impact on daily life.

The Itako's challenges offered an easy comparison with the Mikishi in so far as the Mikishi also are a product of strong social and community implications. When the community faces failure in the presence of health challenges never met before or very difficult to deal with, family members realize that their last recourse goes to the spiritual nature, to which they leave total responsibility over the patient. This "gift" turns out to be an opportunity that will offer the initiate and the community a chance to deal with personal and community issues from spiritual perspectives. Thus, the initiates, once abandoned to the will of gods, bring back solutions to the community in offering solutions to daily life and community cohesion. In the perspective of a general world vision, the Mikishi have offered a prospect in the comprehension of African philosophy, which locates human beings within a Chain of Being that channels Vital Force from the creator to all creatures, though with different intensities depending upon need, power, the location in the Chain of Being, personal training, and social responsibilities. The more people grow in age and access to different social responsibilities, the more they are likely to receive and use much more Vital Force.

Thus, living and dead ancestors believed to be very close to gods are also in possession of quantities of Vital Force that permit their social prominence within their society. Their words bring about life or death as they also build a social philosophy. They also construct the relationships that connect the humankind to the animate and inanimate creatures filling the world while depicting benefits that can come out of such different connections to gods, spirits, and natural forces. However, a very important stress is put on justified uses that increase personal and community chances to survive in any kind of surrounding. Natural resources are used only as far as needed, with parsimony and with permission granted from gods. One could perceive there the wisdom that is nowadays increasingly global, though largely late, that is, the call to green development, clean power, and sustainable development. Relationships also pinpoint the ambivalent characteristics of forces. They may indeed be very positive or negative depending upon the purposes to be served, the users, and their origins. Evil spirits or forces are not left with any other possibility but destruction and wrong doing. Good spirits stand for fighting them and bring back normal life.

Getting to know the Itako quickly changes into a lesson in the history of northern Japan. The current situation stands for a result of a very long progress, especially from the early seventeenth century. Similar to many cultures around the world, Japanese have very rich folk narratives reflecting community lives. Superstition, fear of the unknown, and social poverty have contributed much to the birth of different beliefs and their impact on social life. Thus, night foxes, walking phantoms, spells, incantations, curses, and misfortune in different families are often mentioned in many narratives, tales, legends, myths, and riddles as the logical result of curses on given families, villages, and territories. While bad years and poor harvests are often attributed to spells, curses, and the influence of bad spirits wishing for people's death, conversely, luck, good years, and prosperity are often seen as a result of the blessings and protection extended by gods, good spirits, and ancestors pouring on creatures set apart.

However, the technological progress and scientific skills in many fields have over the years reduced many superstitions based on ignorance. In the same vein, the re-

sults of new technologies have eliminated useless fear and uncertainty. It became obvious that the possibilities of having light at night changed so much darkness and fear similar to many other beliefs linked to insufficient knowledge. The application of new technologies to farming permitted greater production, the end of starvation, and useless superstitious beliefs in the impact of bad spirits on famine, starvation, bad harvests, and death. Similarly, the Itako institution is suffering greatly as it can hardly ensure the succession of its members since people are not likely to continue sending handicapped, blind girls to such professions. The blind, like other handicapped people, are much more easily attracted by modern education and different facilities that ensure their social insertion. It is all the same very striking to find that in spite of obvious facilities given to the blind and other handicapped people—mainly to blind people trained as Itako—and their gradual disappearance in the consultation area, the public curiosity, interest, and attachment to this particular shamanism still persist and attract both people in need and visitors. The public, persistent need for the Itako will definitely facilitate the arrival of a new kind of Itako in the absence of measles catastrophes, though blindness will not be a *sine qua non* condition and being of the female gender will no longer be compulsory.

Today, measles is rare, if non-existent, and its impact has almost disappeared from northern Japan. In addition, the government is offering many possibilities in order to take care of the blind and other handicapped people. They are offered adapted education and a chance to lead an independent life. This was exactly what families aimed at in the past in sending their children for training with the Itako. These families needed their daughters to have an occasion to lead an independent life and therefore offered them a chance to be trained as Itako. The consequence of this evolution can be perceived through the continuously decreasing number of Itako. Generally, many families are no longer interested in the Itako profession, with its hardships and severe training, despite the presence of a market showing continued interest. As there are people still interested in the service offered by the Itako, the institution will go on and will set new criteria for selection, training, and enrollment of new Itako.

It is, all the same, obvious that interest in the dead, the possibility of having a conversation with the dead, and the opportunity to benefit from their counsel and protection have not disappeared and have not simply been forgotten from the collective unconscious. When a close relative passes away the same kind of questions are still raised, and the same expectations are still in vogue. Many if not everyone would wish to hear the departed or at least to make sure that they are in peace wherever they may be. In the same vein, and even more important, the Mikishi facilitate contacts with the dead, spirits, and God. They play that role in a society that has not yet been able to eliminate many superstitions as development and scientific progress have not yet been able to bring answers to very simple daily questions. The Mikishi are likely to continue and even to find ways to be active in modern institutions linked to religions and religious spheres.⁴⁰⁾

It remains of great interest to notice that a developed society attested by several economic and social indicators, Japan, and a developing country, the Democratic Republic of Congo, which is still fighting ignorance and poverty, on the other, both share many points regarding shamanistic influences and presence. In fact, people wherever

their location share in common magico-religious beliefs that seem to bring answers to the fields and social spheres hardly considered or solved by scientific progress. Human emotions and specific relations with living and dead family members often depend on personal capacities to cope with death and socio-religious expectations. As long as moral ethics give specific attention to humankind, place it on the top of nature and science, and consider reaching out to human eternity, the human being will need specific emotional relationships in order to explain the unknown, principally life and death by relying essentially on dreams and shamanistic approaches. As a matter of fact, unconscious activities, precisely dreams, have repeated the same patterns for centuries, as Eliade noted. “As for the activity of the unconscious—dreams, fantasies, visions, fabulization, and so on—it is presumed not to have differed in ‘intensity’ and ‘scope’ from what is found among our contemporaries.”⁴¹⁾ This observation can explain why modern people often follow the same patterns of reaction as ancient people searching for answers and consolation from unscientific sources. Similarly, Eliade underlines how religion maintains the opening toward the supernatural, the superhuman, and divine beings that are believed to command over many events and times. Humankind has throughout centuries shown attachment to and need for these occult and religious forces.⁴²⁾

Apart from a pure empirical observation of the Itako and Mikishi’s *modus operandi* in their respective environments and their shamanistic features, this paper has offered a possibility to add to structuralist theories in order to grasp and appreciate both shamanisms and their social impacts. In fact, this research offers an opportunity to build a theoretical and analytical frame that includes Vladimir Propp, Arnold van Gennep, Joseph Campbell, Claude Bremond, and A. J. Greimas, among many other structuralists interested in the analysis of folk narratives and their social impact.

These scholars’ theories have contributed to frame the reading grill that has permitted us to understand both shamanistic training as subdivided into five main components. The first component depicts harmony in family life and the joy shared by every family member. This component also alludes to the harmony shared with every community member in so far as peaceful and cohesive relations prevail at all levels. This first component in the Mikishi community, the Chain of Being, is not disturbed at all and the Vital Force is circulating freely without any specific care. In the Itako’s world in northern Japan, families are in peace as parents are sure that their children will grow up normally and will finally be able to marry and lead independent lives.

However, the next component shows a strong lack of social harmony at family and community levels. Both the Itako and the Mikishi to be face problems resulting from their failure to pursue a normal personal and community life. In northern Japan, the sudden consequences of measles and blindness outbreaks alter future peaceful plans and motivate the launch of an alternative path. In the Bushila land, the incapacity of parents to bring an effective healing process to their child or family necessarily lead them to look for assistance from rather expert hands. They request the Mikishi to bring their expertise in order to end the social danger by healing the disease and stopping the unknown endemic. In one case, the Itako is solicited; in the other, the Mikishi come in action.

The delegation and transfer of power, authority, and love from parents to the sha-

mans, the third component of the analysis, put close family members under the authority of other people. This separation is at the source of suffering, but stresses the initiate's responsibility to successfully undergo training through a transition period spent far from the family and the community. The training period changes the initiate into a new being able to face different kinds of challenges and to bring back satisfaction and harmony to his/her new personality, to the family, and the community. In Japan, those who have been in touch with the Itako are likely to have much respect for the after death as well as for human relationships in order to avoid anything that would bring a quick death or social misunderstanding.

The fourth component displays the achievements of new shamans. It is in fact with the skills acquired during their training and initiation that the new shamans return to their society ready for social services. It is also a time to show gratitude to the family and the community. The Mikishi are indeed completely taken in by their community, while the Itako organize a compensation system that permits them to receive payment from their clients and thus lead a decent and independent life. Personality growth as attested in the Itako or the Mikishi may also be perceived through a psychoanalytical approach, especially through the process of individuation. The candidate for shamanism begins a circumambulatory process that leads to the self. The shadow representing the least known capacity of their personality is given the chance to be reinforced whereas their inner personality emerges slowly to reach the self, or their personal identity. At the same time, their training extends seriously to humility and self-questioning on a daily basis.

Finally, on the fifth analytical level, this research has demonstrated that even though the Itako and the Mikishi are two different forms of shamanism, they share much in common. They both reflect their respective local historical, religious, and philosophical issues and guide the researcher in two different philosophies. They both raise the very important roles women—not often spoken about in these societies—have been able to play throughout recent centuries and are still playing in social communications. These women assist their communities in the understanding of the sacred and the profane presence in human society even though borders limiting these concepts (the sacred and the profane) may vary in time, space, social conditions, and ideologies. This research has also demonstrated that despite social development, humankind is likely to maintain different kinds of magico-religious movements and shamanisms at least for the satisfaction of different emotional reasons, fantasies, and projections to which postmodern development and science will be unable to provide satisfactory solutions. The new personalities that emerge from these shamanistic training sessions reveal specific profiles leading people in magico-religious fields often disconnected from scientific progress.

Both shamanisms have sufficiently concurred with Eliade⁴³) in demonstrating that religious phenomena have one thing in common: they have shown that the sacred and the religious life are the opposite of the profane and the secular life. Still, they have, all the same, exemplified cases where in spite of boundaries separating the sacred and the profane other virtual boundaries constantly move in their respective territories following social dynamism and life philosophies. Such boundaries often move from one territory to another, gnawing on the neighboring ground, thus finally permitting the

sacred to invade the profane, or at least to virtually occupy the territory believed to be profane.

For future research on the same comparative scale, it will be important to move from the Itako to other shamanisms present in Japan today. This move will provide a more complete view of shamanism in Japan and will pinpoint other features not discussed here. As presented in this analysis, several other categories of generic concepts will be structured in a comprehensive presentation. At the same time, further comparative questions will arise. The benefit of such comparison, as already pointed out, will extensively expand upon cultural comparisons whose importance will certainly be found in a better understanding of people and, eventually, upon cultural projects that may be of great benefit in international cooperation and partnerships.

Lexicon

Aomori: Prefecture, in Northeast Japan, part of the Tohoku region known for the shamanism studied in this paper. It is essentially characterized by farming, forestry, and fishing. As for culture, Tsugaru Jamisen is a specific music played in three times and percussive sounds on a kind of shamisen, a kind of large guitar.

Bashila: name given to the fishermen living around Lake Mweru in the southeast of the Democratic Republic of Congo. They are essentially known as a people coming at the intersection of the Bemba and the Zeela with whom they share borders.

Bemba: population (Ababemba) present in Zambia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Tanzania, and Botswana and speaking a language known as Kibemba, Chibemba, and Ichibemba. This language is much used among the Bashila, but with a lot of interferences from another close language, Kizeela. It is in fact the mixture on those neighboring languages that has produced the Ikishila, the language spoken by Abashila.

Bushila: life and world vision of the Abashila, the fishermen living around Lake Mweru in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Bushila land: area inhabited by Abashila, a small region surrounded by the Abemba and the Zeela. It is a geographical area where the Bashila's philosophy and social considerations prevail.

Chokwe: Bantu speaking people inhabiting the south and center of the Democratic Republic of Congo, Angola, and Mozambique. From past centuries, they conquered lands from other large linguistic groups and influenced their cultures. They influenced the area inhabited by Abemba, Abazeela, and Abashila extending their influence to Zambia. The Chokwe share closely their culture with the Lunda, their neighbors and with whom they have a common and long history.

Gyoba: a hut-like small building erected for Itako candidate's ablutions.

Ibibanda: plural form of Ikibanda, evil spirits that may push somebody to act in an evil way, for instance, to think of committing suicide, to violently kill other people for no reason, to enjoy a crazy life or to put upside down the social order.

Itako: blind woman from Aomori Prefecture, trained in shamanism turning essentially around their work as medium making possible contacts and dialogues between dead people's spirits and their living family members. Their consultations are open to anyone twice a year when they gather at Osorezan temple.

Kamitsuke: a period of 21 days (sometimes more) that precedes the Itako's official recognition. During this time, the trainee Itako is submitted to very intense exercises including three times—or more—cold water ablutions even under very cold weather in the winter.

Kasenga: a semi rural city in the Katanga Province in the Democratic Republic of Congo. It is a port on Lake Mweru reachable by vehicle from Lubumbashi. Ships and ferries go from Kasenga port to different destinations all around Lake Mweru.

Katanga: a province of the Democratic Republic of Congo, located in the southeast, it is known world wide for its minerals and cultural diversity.

Kibanda: singular of the word Ibibanda, bad and impure spirits present in some people, pushing them to evil doing and to social destruction.

Kitobo: a man in charge of interpreting and giving detailed explanations of Mikishi's messages. The Kitobo also spends time visiting the bush in order to collect different plants needed for pharmacopoeias prescribed by the Mikishi. In some cases, the Kitobo gets married with the Mikishi.

Kuchiyoze: This is the name given to the work done by the Itako as medium for the contact between dead people's spirits and their living parents visiting for a consultation. The contact turns mainly around pieces of advice and warnings the visitors get from their deceased family members.

Lubumbashi: capital city of the Katanga Province in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Lwapula: a river whose waters enter Lake Mweru. The Bemba population lives on both shores of this river. On one side is the Democratic Republic of Congo and on the other is Zambia.

Mikishi: shamans presented in this study. The word is generic and gathers different comprehensions: statues, masks, masked men, and the spirits that fill the shamans during rituals and consultations.

Mukishi: singular of the word Mikishi. The word may mean a statue representing a given spirit, the spirit itself, or the man bearing a spirits name and acting and standing for a shaman.

Mukishihood: state of being a member of the Mikishi.

Mushila: singular of Bashila, a fish man native of the area studied here, that is, around Lake Mweru.

Mweru: name of the lake but also referred to as the territory where the Bashila live. In some folk narratives, the word may be referred to as a paradise-like environment where man is pure and lives with respect to nature and spirits.

Mweshi: a large village by Lake Mweru inhabited by Abashila and the focal point of the field research on Mikishi.

Nganga: a diviner consulted by Abashila in order to find out causalities linking events, also in order to punish—even with death—the one believed to bring suffering to the community or to community members.

Ogamisama: Male shamans operating in the same area where Itako work and also elsewhere. They are not blind.

Osorezan: Mountain in northeastern Japan in the center of Shimokita Peninsula. It is covered by sulfur from a volcano. Literally, it is "Fear Mountain" or "The Mountain of the Dead." There is a Buddhist temple and twice a year the Itako give consultations in these vicinities.

Pweto: the main city of Kasenga territory. It has the government representative to whom all the Bashila and the Bemba populations refer for social disputes and political details.

Zeela: Neighboring population of the Bashila. Whereas the Bashila live by Lake Mweru, the Zeela live in the mountains. The first are fishers, the second are hunters.

Notes

- 1) Neil S. Price, ed., *The Archaeology of Shamanism*, (London: Routledge, 2001), 3.
- 2) Mircea Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 3–5.
- 3) Hideshi Ohashi, Shinsuke Sakumichi, and Kazuya Horike elaborate on the shaman Yuta's mind state in "A Social Psychological Study of Okinawan Shamanism (I)—Approach and Some Findings," *Tohoku Psychologica Folia* 43, (1984), 66–79. They undertake psychological research and apply consequent methods that lead to the discovery of unbalanced minds. From a psychological perspective the authors show how their interviewees' minds suffer from severe psychological disequilibrium especially when they enter into a trance. They note that the interviewees' brains lose their daily ability and awareness. As such, the interviewees could be considered as not responsible for their actions. However, human contacts developed around shamanistic rituals and trances are far from being naïve or irresponsible. They rather lead to spiritual considerations that can better be understood from holistic perspectives.
- 4) Apart from Mircea Eliade's *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, which provides a large survey of shamanism around the world, it is worth mentioning a book concentrating specifically on Asia, *Shamanism in Asia* edited by Clark Chilson and Peter Knecht. This book elaborates the participation of such rituals in their daily life. Both books give details on shamanism; concentrate on prevailing conditions that lead people in rituals. The papers also stress social organizations largely dependent on the magico-religious conceptions.
- 5) Ohashi Hideshi, et al., "A Social Psychological Study of Okinawa Shamanism (I): Approach and

Some Finds.”

- 6) Arnold van Gennep often refers to anthropologists and colonial powers that considered many African countries—and many other parts of the world—as uncivilized. The indicators were decided without reference to community values. Local cultures were undervalued as the western world prevailed as the only reference. Religion was often used as pretext since only Christianity was considered as the mainline of enlightened civilizations. However, with time, scholars, especially Claude Lévi-Strauss, researched on civilization and culture only to find so many similarities covering many parts of the world. Thus, the so-called civilized and those referred to as uncivilized countries share in common many features regarding creeds, rituals, and many beliefs in the unknown.
- 7) Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004); Clark Chilson and Peter Knecht, eds., *Shamans in Asia*, (New York: Routledge Curzon, 2003).
- 8) Shamans were believed to ensure communications with gods and to empower their communities with powers and welfare. Thanks to them diseases could be healed and pandemics eradicated whereas enemies could be weakened and eventually completely defeated. In the same vein, shamans were believed to hold pharmacopeia secrets based on mixing herbs, roots, tree barks, and ritualistic formulae in order to produce magic potions, remedies, and elixirs served in different presentations, dosages surrounded by specific rituals, all contributing to heal physiological ailments, mental disorders and above all community differences and issues. The normal outcome of the entire healing process is peace, harmony, and outstanding life that bring joy to all community members. The American aboriginal shamans are known world-wide for their social preponderance. They are the pillars deciding on human relations and especially on links with gods and ancestors.
- 9) In *The Myth of the Eternal Return: Cosmos and History*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005) Eliade shows how in many religions and theological traditions the return to the origins is celebrated for the cleansing of sin and any vital renewal through different appropriate rituals. The latter are but a quest for pure physical and psychological states often identified as a phase of purity, power, easy communications, and closeness to the creator.
- 10) Mircea Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, 5.
- 11) Divided into seven chapters, *Bantu Philosophy* primarily tackles the theory of “Vital Force” before shedding light on divinities, people, and society. In stressing the African ontological principles, Tempels questions different theories developed with regard to African beliefs and world vision considered as primitive. The religion scholar points to social and philosophical keys that converge to God the primary source of every existence. This position thus completely denies the widely spread ideas of animism and superstition as foundations of African society. In using the term Vital Force as a contemporary equivalent, even though all the same different from the concept “being” as presented in western philosophy, Tempels pinpoints the particular dynamic character of the African whose life goes far beyond death following some hierarchical evolution in which God, spirits, divinities, ancestors, elders, and all of nature participate. If God is self-created, all his creatures turn around man and may contribute to increase his Vital Force and presence all around the world.
- 12) Geoffrey Parrinder, ed., *World Religions: From Ancient History to the Present*, (New York: The Hamlyn Publishing Group Limited, 1971), 60–68.
- 13) Arnold van Gennep mentions in *The Rites of Passage* many rites observed in several communities especially in Australia and Africa. It is through cyclic and continual passages from one rite to another that people grow within social groups and reach social leadership. Not only rites get in social configurations, they also contribute in philosophical and religious visions that construct community frames. In order to move from one initiation group to another, several lessons are learned and assumed in public life. Application successes on daily social issues are the key to the passage from one circle to the following one. This process ineluctably leads earlier or later to death, the obliged passage to the ancestors’ world.
- 14) Eliade, in *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, observes how in many mythological social constructs man is at the center of the universe. Everything contributes to man’s growth as well as to his responsibility to build and understand the world. The human stands at the center of the world and gets through different training sessions and apprenticeships that ensure him/her benefits from all possible sources that bring the Vital Force needed to live along the path left by ancestors and to grow in spiritual ca-

- pacities.
- 15) Van Gennep repeatedly mentions, for instance, how a girl's first menstrual blood places her in a cycle of rites that mark the passage from one age group to another. Above all, their training consists in taking care of life in general and in particular in assuming their responsibility as those who give birth. It is such an education that also prepares them to find those that can be selected and trained as Mikishi.
 - 16) Carmen Blacker, in *The Catalpa Bow: A Study of Shamanistic Practices in Japan*, offers a full chapter on ascetics. It also depicts how the ascetic begins training leaving out many daily habits in order to reach the profile that facilitates religious communications and social responses. The ascetics are depicted living in isolated places, on mountains, and close to the sea.
 - 17) Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, 81–89.
 - 18) Thomas F. O'Dea, along with Paul Vincent, defines religion not only as rites, rituals, and ceremonies that gather people in order to stand together for their devotion and submission to the creator's will, but rather as the sum of daily human negotiations, conduct, and social organizations that bridge human communities with divinities and spiritual realms. It is generally believed that it is out of personal and collective efforts to lead pure lives and show absolute respect to the dead, spirits, gods, and God that blessings are believed to be pouring, or on the contrary drying out, for individuals, community members, or the community *per se*.
 - 19) Joseph Campbell, *Transformation of Myth through Time*, (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1990), 1–24.
 - 20) Under colonialism, both the Bashila religion and secular education were violently rejected and replaced by western systems. Similarly, many other African communities had very weak educational systems. È Nziem Isidore Ndaywel, *Histoire générale du Congo: de l'héritage ancien à la République Démocratique, Préface de Théophile Obenga, Postface de Pierre Salmon*, (Paris: Commissariat Général aux Relations Internationales, Editions Duculot Afrique, Agence de la Francophonie, De Boeck & Larcier S. A., 1998), 353. Some affluent families sent their children to schools in big cities or even in Europe thanks to their connections with missionaries. At the same time, several education programs designed for African schools concentrated on local education of church catechists, that is, agents who helped spread the Gospel and needed only reading and reciting prayers. Such agents were exempted from paying taxes and helped propagate the colonial law and its consequences. They were unfortunately not trained enough or at all to become involved in their community development.

In the case of the Belgian Congo, missionaries were prohibited from starting anything new, or any educational trend without clear permission from the colony. In other words, they were viewed as King Leopold's agents and later as Belgian agents. They had to teach colonial languages, and missionaries had to regularly submit reports to the government. In spite of such conditions, missionaries agreed to carry out scientific studies ordered by the government on geography and linguistics. Ndaywel, *ibid.*, 352–353. Those studies did not give much knowledge on community development. Consequently, the Bushila land remained disconnected from modern development for many years both during the colonial period as well as the post-colonial era as it was rather viewed as a very distant land lacking any immediate mining opportunity—at least at that time.

Whereas developing missions within a country was required by the Holy See, military reasons were often stressed by the colonial powers to extend the western presence far inland. Some schools encouraged youth to become soldiers and builders of colonial posts. In one way or another, unfortunately, missionaries always had to preserve the interests of the colony. African students were taught to look at the metropolis as theirs; the king or the president was their king or their president. They internalized the belief that to be called good citizens they had to work for a foreign country, building missions, excelling in the kitchens of their masters, and being their best servants. More and more, black intellectuals accepted the fact that they were much closer to whites than to their own countrymen. This moral catastrophe persisted even after independence because most of the African elite were more attached to capitalist expansion than to the development of their countries. In the same way, presidents would align themselves with western countries where they would invest their countries' revenues, while looting their own treasuries. The case of President Mobutu of the Democratic Republic of the Congo is still very fresh in many people's memories.

Most of the young soldiers trained to work for the metropolis took for granted that they were work-

ing for the benefit of their masters. The colonial education was purposely shallow and avoided any kind of comparison with the western world. Young people were primarily trained to become manual workers. Consequently, at independence only a few Africans were intellectually able to work in offices or to fulfill any other functions required of a civil servant. Such young people were completely bewildered and lost the understanding and the role devoted to Mikishi. They rather confused the Mikishi with other charlatans or simply impostors providing customers with magic powers. Such is the case of the Nganga, fortune tellers that often oppose people over causality and occasion controversies that lead to the disintegration of social communities.

- 21) In *The Catalpa Bow*, Blacker has a chapter with many examples and situations where ascetics play a central role. They are presented living apart from human communities, but quite often organizing religious services and sacrifices for their countrymen, sometimes even for the world.
- 22) By their work, the Itako stand for a visible proof of the living capacity to get in contact with the dead. The Itako also prove that whereas the living may be warmed of many issues by the dead, they are also likely to assist the dead on their progress to the resting place, the paradise, with offerings and prayers.
- 23) Eliade in many of his books, especially in *The Myth of the Perpetual Return*, retraces how people within different communities organize rituals and rites that aim at the return through time to the origins. At such moments, contacts with gods are re-established in such a way that human beings' physical and moral integrity can be re-created. This belief repeats what is known in many religions, the stressing of man's renewal and access to eternal life.
- 24) Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, 69–72.
- 25) Jill Robbins, "Sacrifice," Mark C. Taylor ed., *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 286.
- 26) Closely observed, the training is undertaken in an atmosphere of complete reliability. Parents rely on community advice and assistance first to choose the best mistress for their daughter's training, and then to eventually assist in the collection of items needed for excellent training. The community also indirectly participates in the training of someone that will be needed later. Later on, the same community will join the new Itako to show appreciation for her work and enjoy her consultations. In return, the community will insert the Itako into an economic environment by paying for her services.
- 27) Mircea Eliade, *Images and Symbols: Studies in Religious Symbolism*, (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1961), 151.
- 28) Many publications discuss Japanese folktale narratives and their social impacts in different places. While a critic will easily understand that many narratives are connected, reflecting cultural and development challenges faced in the past, it is obvious that darkness took much space in fancy productions in so far as it makes difficult the explanation of many natural phenomena. In Africa, in the Bushila land, unanswered daily development challenges still raise questions that freely open on to superstition. In spite of development differences, superstition remains very similar to that which developed around the Itako and their socio-religious dimensions.
- 29) Vladimir Propp, in *Morphology of the Folktale*, (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1968) pinpoints essentially the functions filled by specific characters around the world. These characters amount to heroes of all ages and times whose life sacrifice and donation brings about change, new life, and sustainable development as well as security to the community. It often happens that such personalities are viewed as the pioneers and founders of new civilizations. They are elsewhere perceived through their extraordinary actions that place them next or on the same level as shamans that dwell in the realms of the sacred as well as the profane while making possible different junctions from the sacred to the profane and vice versa, definitely putting everything on the way to the sacred.
- 30) Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1960).
- 31) Fiona Bowie, *The Anthropology of Religion: An Introduction*, (Boston: Blackwell Publishing, 2000), 161.
- 32) Van Gennep's work is based on the experience of so many once-called primitive people around the world, with a particular stress on Africa and Australia. In the respective communities, several rituals are often held in order to guarantee social cohesion, understanding, and personal and community growth in their spiritual values. Many such rituals consider mainly the passage from one social standing to another. They thus include the very understanding of human life, its conception, acceptance,

evolution within the social community, and death. However, it is quite obvious that life does not progress on a linear and mono-dimensional path. On the contrary, life more and more is in a circumambulatory process that goes far beyond visible steps. In this perspective, death does not seem to play the ending role after a long life progress. On the contrary, death is perceived as an integral part of everyday life and even more so the most significant element whose power and radiance covers every single moment. Death also concerns all living, animate, and inanimate creatures. They all indeed are in a general consideration of a passage from chaos to life, and a continuation under different comprehensions.

- 33) Eliade rather considers them as the people that make possible the return to the origins where the gods can still act, perform miracles, reproduce, and re-create in the same conditions they once created the world human beings and other creatures. In organizing that return and making changes possible, shamans are believed to come from gods, and are identified with messengers of gods, and quite often with good spirits and gods.
- 34) Bremond's theory attempts to give details on the one hand about choices and possibilities the exceptional character faces, and on the other hand about personal capabilities, strength, moral and psychological endurance, and the will to stand firm in order to assume personal responsibilities within a community perspective. The entire process leads to changes within the character and implications for community life.
- 35) Mircea Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, 34.
- 36) Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 33–34, 75.
- 37) After they have gone from one hospital to another, sometimes even when well-informed about their HIV-AIDS health status, the patients believe in the possibility to be cured by shamans. We met such cases in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Zambia, and Kenya. They start another long journey that leads them from one shaman to another, offering here and there their most precious stones or simply their belongings in exchange for survival promises. Finally, the patient becomes very poor and unable to receive a decent burial.
- 38) Robert Scholes, *Structuralism in Literature: An Introduction*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), 108–112.
- 39) Throughout this text, the Itako and the Mikishi are depicted going through ordeals and daily challenges that portray simple characters whose lives change according to their own efforts and perseverance. They become special personalities and fill social functions on a daily basis. They also offer everyone the possibility to benefit from spiritual and sacred resources and lead an interesting social life.
- 40) A very good example can be found in Christian prayer groups. On our visits to these groups in many Sub-Saharan countries—such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, Congo-Brazzaville, Uganda, Tanzania, Kenya, Zambia, Zimbabwe, and South Africa—we have noticed that prayer groups operate in following almost the same evolution consultation line as that of the Mikishi. They are mainly attended for ensuring protection, health, wealth, and temporal survival. At the same time, God, Jesus Christ, and other saints are frequently referred to with regard to the role played by good spirits and ancestors on the Chain of Being. There is in fact a kind of superstition transfer from old African creeds to a new religious environment: the same need for protection and assistance has continued throughout time.
- 41) Mircea Eliade, *A History of Religious Idea: From the Stone Age to the Eleusinian Mysteries*, vol. 1, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978), 4.
- 42) Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, 139–142.
- 43) Mircea Eliade, *Images and Symbols*, 1.

List of Charts and Diagram

- Chart 1 Robert Scholes, *Structuralism in Literature: An Introduction*, (New Haven: Yale University, 1974), 97. Scholes explains Claude Bremond's theory and goes through the three different sequences.
- Chart 2 Jean-Louis Dumortier and Francine Plazanet, *Pour lire le récit*, (Bruxelles: Deboeck; Paris: Duculot, 1969), 50. These writers offer a very good explanation of A. J. Greimas' theories. They use this chart in order to depict the steps that show a narrative evolution.

- Diagram 1 Paul Larivaille, “L’analyse morphologique du récit,” *Poétique*, (Paris: Poétique, no. 19, 1979), 368–388. Larivaille extends on narrative presentation through structures. He sums up the entire process in five different steps.
- Chart 3 Robert Scholes, *Structuralism in Literature: An Introduction*, 102–107, goes on details of Greimas’ theory and fosters this diagram. It insists on actantial responsibility distributions in the construction of a meaningful narrative.
- Chart 4 Daniel P. Kunene, “Journey as Metaphor in African Literature,” *Present State/l’Etat Présent*, ed. Stephen Arnold, (Washington D.C.: Three Continents, 1985) uses the chart as a scheme that describes the main character’s evolution. This scheme resembles very much the one that Joseph Campbell presents in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. The use of a circle helps to understand the hero’s initiation in its contribution to his totality.

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