

Taboo, shamanism, and Jungian psychoanalysis

Introduction

Rites of passage leading to a new developmental status discussed in [chapter 7](#) take place away in secluded darkness, similar to working with unconscious processes at night-time through dream work. Within this dark and invisible frame, one enters the liminal night-time journey of transformation, analogous to the sun as it sets in the west and disappears into the darkness of the 'other' side to arise anew the next day (Jung, 1911–12/1952a, paras. 251–253). This chapter explores the colour black as a night-time colour, which is not considered negative, but as an undifferentiated potential to be explored in the unconscious, not yet realised in consciousness. Blackness, itself, has many shades: there is black that recedes and absorbs; black that dampens and softens; black that sharpens and etches; and black that shines with an effervescence (Hillman, 1997, p. 11). From the analysis of black, I examine the role of shamans who undertake the difficult journey into the unconscious (as the land of the dead) to restore lost or stolen soul aspects of the self. I give two examples of this imaginal fete and compare their journey to the work of psychoanalysis, in particular, Jungian analysis.

Black as invisibility

When Hillman (1979, 1997, 1999) discusses the colour black, he suggests that this particular colour deepens our perception of unconscious material, hidden and tabooed, attached to sorrow and the loss of missing parts of the self, which when found in this blackness, paradoxically restores soul elements to the psyche as a whole. We discuss in [chapter 4](#) the relationship of the miscegenation taboo attached to racism and the colour black. In this chapter, I want to examine black as the alchemical *nigredo*. Of the four alchemical substances, black, white, red, and gold, black plays an especially important role as the basis of the work because it enters into the genesis of the word alchemy. The word *khem* refers to Egypt as the black land, land of black soil; the art of alchemy was called the black art or science (Hillman, 1997, p. 5).

Any substance to enter the nigredo phase and blacken the operation includes in alchemical language: *mortification*, *putrefaction*, *calcination*, *iteration*, and *separation*. Separation means a decapitation (cf. Jung, 1954a, para. 730) by making distinctions that free the mind from a too literal, naturalistic, and reductive identification with nigredo. Separation and distance allow the mind to cognate the darkness and form imaginal appreciations of the material. The process is slow and pulverising, indicating a depressed melancholia already at work and broken down through the loss of comforting and safe paradigms, just as charcoal is the result of fire acting on wood, black faeces the result of digested food mixed with blood, and blackened fungus the result of putrefaction and decay.

Raff (2000, pp. 100–101) warns the initiate not to underestimate the dangers involved in working with unconscious processes, either by taking a naïve view that the imaginative world is full of good will, or that imaginative images should be unconditionally trusted. The ego that approaches the unconscious needs to be willing to hold its independent position, otherwise it will be overwhelmed by the undifferentiated unconscious emotions. The tension of holding the opposites between the ego and the unconscious is frightening, filled with terror and dread. These feeling of dread correspond to the definition of taboo as stepping over the border from one known state into the chaos of the unstructured unknown. The ego may be taken over by undifferentiated affect, particularly loss, abandonment, and guilt, which takes time to process.

Hillman (1997, p. 7) suggests that the two processes most relevant for producing blackness, that of putrefaction and mortification, break down the inner cohesion of a fixed state: putrefaction by decomposition or falling apart, mortification by grinding down as seeds in mortar refined into ever thinner and smaller particles. Black steers all variety of colour into the shade. The shade that black inflicts pertains to the deeper and invisible realms of darkness, carrying the meaning of random and formless. Like a black hole, it sucks into form and makes it vanish along with the fundamental security of consciousness. By deconstructing presence into absence, black breaks the paradigm of comfort and security, making psychological change possible by entering into taboo, liminal, *borderland* states. For Hillman (1997 p. 14) blackness means the incorporation of invisibility within all perceptions, never losing the dark eye or ignoring the soul's desire for shades and sorrow. By means of black, concrete fixities shift into metaphorical images. We cure depression by becoming blacker than black, that is, *archetypally* black, not concretely black, so that we are no longer influenced by the prejudice of colour, but step in the underworld to explore these dreaded taboo images.

Hillman (1997, pp. 5–10) stresses that one of the main tasks of psychoanalysis is not to eliminate the black mood of depression, but to carefully reconvert it into melancholy, with an increased understanding of all its underworld moods, beauty, longing, nostalgia, losses and sadness. Sadak and

Weiser (2017, pp. 434–444) movingly depict the process of grieving, lamentation, and loss by personifying the emotional content as *Penthos*, the Greek spirit of mourning, who is related to the Algea spirits of sorrow and suffering. Gender fluid, sable skinned *Penthos* (or Roman *Luctus*) keeps close company with dread, terror, and madness. His/her bed sits outside the entrance to the underworld next to disease, old age, and fear. In Statius' *Thebaid 3*, *Penthos* as a composite image, expresses the inconsolable grief and sorrow of mothers who have lost their sons in warfare, as well as imagining the slain sons' injuries through her torn and bloody clothes and pierced breast. In Seneca's *Oedipus*, *Penthos* tears out her hair in misery and desolation. These vivid archetypal images offer containment and legitimacy for such inconsolable emotions, reconnecting individual lonely melancholy to the communality of collective grieving and loss that is embedded within the collective unconscious.

Blackness is associated positively with black clouds, which bring rain and much needed moisture (Fraser, 1922, p. 87). Brewster (2017, pp. 58–59) points out that pollution (or a taboo element) is considered in Zulu's beliefs to have special powers and two situations dominate: red and black. Red is associated with fertility, child birth, and menstruation; black with faeces, nighttime, and death. Black medicine is considered necessary to restore health and provides a time for resting. Brewster alludes to Hillman's insistence on darkness to putrefy matter as a return to the undifferentiated *prima materia*. The journey to the underworld is a rite of passage to overstep the margins that separate the known (consciousness) from the unknown (the unconscious) to widen consciousness. Passage through the underworld is held within a hidden precinct (*temenos* or *Hort*) connected to the womb and rebirth (Jung, 1911–12/1952b, para. 570). A basic tenet of Jungian analysis is to explore the unconscious for missing, undeveloped, or disassociated aspects of the personality that are stuck at the margins between outdated authoritarian blocking mechanisms and legitimatise their presence within the psyche.

Hades

In describing working with unconscious processes such as dreams, Hillman (1979, pp. 27–32) depicts Hades rather than *Penthos* as the spirit of the depths, the god of invisibles. Hades, himself invisible, is said to have no temples or altars and, thus, no representative attributes except an eagle. Hades hides invisibility in things. Hidden itself is an attribute of being buried, shrouded, and concealed from eyesight. Whether as a corpse of a *mysterium* or concealed in the sense of a secret, that which is hidden cannot be seen on inspection; it is blocked, censored or forbidden. In short, Hades is nature's 'tabooed hidden hider.' Hillman's description of Hades is that of nonbeing, that liminal state after separation in the darkness, the putrefying, indeterminate state in which the neophyte navigates the individuation process as a voluntary death process

to reassimilate tabooed soul elements that have been disassociated as either lost or stolen and restore order.

The rites of passage at puberty discussed in the previous chapter use the properties assigned to Hades: first, the neophytes are buried or shrouded as a corpse; second, they are concealed in the sense of having a secret; third, they are nonvisible and hidden from view; fourth, they are without sunlight in dark places, sometimes painted black; fifth, they are hidden in a subterranean storeroom, cellar, or cell. Sixth, they are taboo, untouchable and experienced with dread and terror. Seventh, the rites are imbued with stealthy, hidden motives and linked by unseen connections. Hillman suggests that all psychic events and rites of passage have these aspects of Hades when we ask what these events mean for one's life and death process.

Hillman (1979, pp. 24–32) is correct when he maintains that dream analysis has moved from the Freudian attention of taking things apart and reducing them to wayward bits and pieces that have fallen through the cracks of the ego. Visibilities are never enough for the soul in search of meaning. Invisible connections are stronger: to arrive at the basic structure of things, one must go into their darkness because the real constitution of each thing is accustomed to hiding itself. Nature loves to hide. It is in the operation of penetrating, an in-sighting into depth that is soul making as it proceeds. If soul is the prime mover, then its primary movement is deepening and penetrating; it increases its dimension and all things become soul. The movement from the material to the psychic perspective often presents dream imagery of sickening and dying (mortification) because the conscious perspective of the ego is one-sided.

Jungian analysis has been likened to shamanism (cf. Smith, 1997; Noel, 1999; Duran, 2012). Apart from the long intensive training and exposure to unconscious processes required by both disciplines, their salient similarity lies in the use of nature, particularly animal energy, as a transitional tool to reconnect unconscious tabooed disassociated elements of the psyche to enrich and benefit both the personal and collective consciousness. Theriomorphic symbols allow for a wider range of differentiated emotional expression than human form and restore animal totem ancestral imaginary, bringing that disassociated root instinct in-line with ego consciousness (Jung, 1951, para. 291; Hannah, 2006, pp. 3–19; Bernstein, 2005, pp. 15–32).

Depictions of shamanism

Eliade (1964, p. 4) states that shamanism is pre-eminently a religious phenomenon of Siberia and Central Asia as the practice was described and documented by the earliest travellers to these regions. Later, similar magico-religious shamanic practices were observed in North America, Indonesia, Oceania, Africa, and elsewhere. To differentiate shamanism from magic and magicians found worldwide, shamans exhibit a particular speciality, such as

mastery over fire and magical flight. The shaman, as distinct from a magician, specialises in an imaginal trance whereby his soul is believed to leave his body and ascend to the sky or descend to the underworld in search of lost or stolen souls. The Central and Northeast Asian methods of recruiting shamans are first, through heredity transmission, second, by spontaneous vocation through a call or election, and third, through his/her own free will; the self-made shaman is not considered as powerful as the other two accesses to the shamanic profession.

Future shamans are expected to pass through certain initiatory ordeals and receive a highly complex twofold education: ecstatic through dreams and didactic through instruction. Eliade (1964) stresses that it is not the point of departure for obtaining shamanic powers (heredity, bestowal of spirits, voluntary quest), but the technique and its underlying theory, transmitted through initiation, that is important. All the ecstatic experiences that determine the future shaman's vocation involve the traditional schema of the initiation ceremony: suffering, death, and resurrection. Suffering includes the symbolic dismemberment of the body, followed by a renewal of the internal organs and viscera: ascent to the sky and dialogue with the gods and spirits, descent to the underworld to dialogue with souls of the dead and the ancestors.

These ordeals appear in the dreams of the shaman initiate who experiences his/her initiatory sickness, cured through the initiation process of becoming a shaman. The initiation process includes the fundamental pattern of all initiations: first, torture at the hands of demons or spirits who play the role of masters of initiation; second, ritual death experienced by the candidate as a descent into hell or an ascent into heaven, and third, the resurrection of a new mode of being as someone who can personally communicate with the spirit. The shaman's integration of a new personality is largely dependent on his/her being cured. The initiatory imaginal death forms an integral part of the mystical process by which the neophyte becomes *another* fashioned in accordance to the spiritual ancestors and made by the old masters to reveal the deep meaning of existence to new generations in participating fully in their culture.

The key to the esoteric training of the novice shaman is to develop enhanced skills in mental imagery with an auditory component. The novice is trained to increase the vividness of his internal imagery through various psychological and physiological techniques, some of which are extreme, such as pain stimulation, hypoglycaemia, dehydration, acoustic stimulation, restricted mobility, and hyperventilation, all of which induce an alteration in consciousness. It is as if the vibrant world within blocks out the light from the outside world (Noll, 1987, pp. 47–61).

Once novices have access to such internal imagery, they learn how to master their transpersonal energies that convey crucial information and wisdom beyond the normal constraints of space and time. Guardian spirits in the form

of animal helpers, spirit ancestors, and teachers are invoked by the shaman who believes he/she is tapping into collective repository of the wisdom of the human species, which Jung called the collective unconscious.¹ Thus, instructions from such spirits existing in the imaginal realm of reality that coincides and interacts with ordinary states of consciousness can facilitate spiritual transformation.

Above all, shamans are able to contribute imaginatively to the *knowledge of death*. Through the features of funerary geography, the unknown, terrifying, and taboo assume imaginative form as animals or supernatural humans organised in accordance with particular patterns that become familiar and acceptable. The invisible as tabooed become visible, even knowable, and death itself is elevated primarily as a rite of passage on a spiritual mode of being. Shamans' ecstatic journeys, above all, enrich death with their imaginative forms and figures, making the final liminal crossing into the unknown knowable, bearable, and meaningful.

The usual shamanistic performance is carried out in an inner room with the light extinguished (Bogoras, 1904–1909, pp. 443–441). In some cases, after the shaman has sung, beaten the drum, and conversed with his accompanying animal spirits, s/he sinks into a trance during which his body lies unconscious on the ground while his/her soul visits spirits in their own world and asks for advice, chiefly to find the missing soul of his/her patient. Among the northwestern branch of the Koryak and the Asiatic Yupik, the spirits use a special kind of language or pronunciation. During the shamanic ritual, it is strictly taboo to attempt to touch any of the 'spirits.' If the taboo is broken, the spirits might kill the shaman on the spot, or kill the transgressor with a knife thrust through his/her ribs in the dark. Needham (1967, pp. 606–614) argues that there is a connection in human life between percussion and transition. The percussion instruments used by the shaman, such as drum, gong, bell, tambourine, rattle, rasp, and resounding rocks, and the sounds they produce, communicate with the spirits of the other world. Dworakowski (1938) through a comparative study of the drum, the bell, and the gong, suggests that there is a close relationship between these instruments and cults of the dead. She does not, however, explain sufficiently the symbolic nature of that connection.

Crawley (1912, p. 91) earlier bridged that gap by suggesting that the sound of the drum is complete enough to cover a whole range of human emotion. Following on from this observation, Needham argues that there is an immediate connection between the type of sound and the type of rite being performed, leading to the conclusion of a significant connection between percussion and transition. Percussion is a transition marker and displays fundamental features: first, its affective impact; second, as the go-between two structures of category change. Huxley (1967, p. 286) points out that the drummer provokes disassociation by quickening, altering, or breaking rhythm, which meets and balances the emotional disorientation of the oncoming

separation and status change. Firecrackers used during Chinese wedding ceremonies similarly act as neutral sound markers to punctuate separation.

In Yakut shamanism in Siberia, the future shaman 'dies' and lies in the yurt for three days without eating or drinking. The candidate dreams that his/her limbs are symbolically removed and disjointed with an iron hook. The bones are cleaned, the flesh scraped, body fluids thrown away and the eyes torn from their sockets. After the operation, all the bones are gathered and fastened together with iron. The operation lasts seven days, and during that time, the initiate remains like a dead person, solitary and scarcely breathing. Each candidate has a great Bird-of-Prey Mother with hooked claws and a long tail who shows itself twice: at the shaman's spiritual birth and at his/her death. It carries her/his soul to the underworld and leaves it to ripen to gain maturity. The bird carries it back to earth, cuts the candidate's body into pieces and distributes to the evil spirits that bring disease and death. Each spirit devours his/her share and departs, which gives the future shaman his/her power to cure the corresponding diseases. The Bird-of-Prey Mother restores the bones to their places and the candidate wakes up as if from a long sleep. An alternative account depicts the Bird-of-Prey Mother alighting on a giant fir tree, laying eggs, then brooding and hatching shamans respectively in three-, two-, and one-year intervals depending on their respective status.

The descent to the underworld is initiated by shamans searching for the soul of a sick person that has strayed or been abducted (Eliade, 1964, pp. 308–309). The theory of the loss of soul as a cause of illness is comparatively ancient and found in shamanic practices worldwide. It is principally in searching for a patient's lost soul that the shaman uses his/her knowledge of infernal topography and his/her capabilities of ecstatic clairvoyance. The shaman's journey to the underworld takes on dramatic aspects. For example, among the tribes of British Columbia, the shaman takes the old path to the land of the dead and has to fight ghosts before s/he can wrest the patient's soul from them. Since the Nootka attribute the theft of the soul to marine spirits, the shaman in ecstasy dives to the bottom of the ocean and returns wet, sometimes streaming with blood from his nose and temple, carrying the stolen soul in a bunch of eagle feathers. Shamans are believed capable of not only bringing strayed souls of the sick but also of restoring the dead to life. Those who are thus restored on their return from the underworld tell the living what they have seen in the land of the dead in 'spirit.' Shamanism implies the possibility of returning to the origins of time to recover that prelapsarian innocence that existed before the 'fall,' that is, the breakdown of communication between heaven and earth, humans and animals. This primordial state is reaccessible only through ascent and descent.

To rectify any notion that shamans suffer from defective or a too diffuse, magical, associative thinking, Shweder (1969, pp. 327–331) researched into 33 Zinacanteco South American shamans and contends that, in comparison to nonshamans, shamans, in fact, possess special cognitive skills, such as inner

directedness and clear-headedness. They avoid bafflement and confusion more efficiently than nonshamans. Shamans easily impose form and structure on diffuse sense data, are productive in their responses, and generative to different responses. To sum up, shamans are better capable of imposing a differentiated order on chaos than nonshamans and emerge as effective agents of control on unstructured stimuli, which, in turn, produces highly productive, creative, and generative response patterns.

Robbins (2011, pp. 89–93) underscores the view that shamans are unusually mature persons who have undergone rigorous and stressful training that enables them to negotiate in a controlled way between the mental world of thought and trance or ecstasy and translate the experiences from one context to another. The spirit is believed to be an essence, not isomorphic, within the body and able to travel independently of time and space. Halifax (1979, 1982) concludes that shamans develop an unusual sensitivity and compassion because they continually confront and struggle with their own deepest suffering and despair and, thus, are able to contact and help heal others on that deep level without disassociating from that suffering. Eliade (1958, p. 102) also emphasises that the shaman is powerful because he/she *knows* and *remembers*. The initiatory death evokes courage and strengthens memory and mental faculties. S/he is not only an ecstatic who shares in the spirit life, but is also a contemplative thinker, passionately interested in the intertwining mysteries of outer and inner life.

Two examples of shamanism in practice

A shaman journey to the underwater Sea Spirit

In this moving account, Knud Rasmussen (1929/1979, pp. 308–311) one of the foremost authorities on Inuit people, describes a chief shamanic ritual to propitiate the spirit of the sea called Sedna or the sea goddess. The Inuit believe that the sea goddess controls the sea mammals, which, in turn, provide the Inuit with their food, fuel, and clothing, and sends the worst misfortunes when a misdeed or an offense is committed. These offenses gather dirt and impurities over the body of the goddess. It is necessary for the shaman to travel to the body of the sea to meet the sea goddess, comb her hair from dirt and lice, and report the difficulties of his people. The goddess replies by relating which breaches of taboo have caused the misfortunes. The shaman returns to his people to hear their confessions and, presumably, when all the taboo violations are confessed, the goddess releases the game, returns lost souls, cures illnesses, and restores equilibrium and prosperity to the Inuit.

The sea goddess was once a girl who was thrown into the sea by her own father, who cruelly cut off her fingers as she clung in terror to the side of the boat. Feminist anthropologist, Sonne (1992, pp. 172–174) suggests the father was so angry with his daughter because she tenaciously refused to marry.

Her cut-off fingers become various species of sea mammals while the fingerless girl sinks to the bottom of the sea and is transformed into the giant mistress of the species that sprang from her hands. When a shaman wishes to visit Sedna on behalf of the community or a particular family experiencing sickness, s/he sits on the inner part of the sleeping place behind a curtain and 'drops down,' wearing almost nothing, to the bottom of the sea. No one knows how this imaginal feat is accomplished; some evidence suggests that the earth 'opens up' like a wormhole under the shaman with the help of his/her deceased ancestor spirits. In the darkened room, one can hear sighing and puffing noises as if the spirits were deep in the water and coming up to breath as if they were sea mammals.

The shaman experiences many difficulties on the way to the bottom of the sea to visit the sea goddess, the most dreaded being the three large rolling stones, which can easily crush the shaman, that leave very little space to pass between them. Once past them, the shaman follows a coastal path and enters a great plain where Sedna lives, guarded by a snarling dog seated at the doorway of her house. If a large shelter wall is built outside the house, this means that Sedna is very angry and implacable and the shaman has to kick the wall down. Some say that the house has no roof so that Sedna can better observe the behaviour of humans. To the right of her lamp, all different kinds of game, such as seals, walrus, and whales collect in a great pool. When the shaman enters, s/he sees at once Sedna sitting with her back to the lamp and with her back to all the animals in the pool. Her hair hangs down loosely in a tangled untidy mass hiding her eyes so that she cannot see. It appears as if all the human misdeeds and offenses have gathered as dirt and impurity over her body with her hair filled with dirt and lice.

The shaman's task is to grasp Sedna by the shoulder to turn her face toward the lamp and the animals. S/he then strokes and combs Sedna's hair because she is unable to comb it herself as she has no fingers. Once Sedna is calmer and soothed, the shaman relates to her that 'those above can no longer help the seals up by grasping their fore flippers.' Sedna tells the shaman that certain breaches of taboo have barred the way for the animals. The shaman appeases her anger and when, at last, she is in a friendlier mood, she frees the animals into a whirlpool to return into the sea. The shaman returns to those awaiting him through the tube kept open for him by the spirits. Those above can hear him/her returning from the sea as if to take a deep pressured breath. All in the house must confess to any breaches of taboo. One particular breach of taboo concerns a young woman who has not admitted to a miscarriage, but kept it secret because of all the consequences involved, such as throwing away all the soft skin contents in her house including the sealskin used to line the whole interior of the snow hut. The main cause of Sedna's anger is the hidden 'thick blood' on a menstruation cloth pointing to a miscarriage that has escaped the necessary purification rites. Once the rites have been exercised, they can be assured of an abundance of game the following day.

The sea goddess, herself, is a personification of taboo who absorbs all the dirt accumulated at the margins between consciousness and the collective unconscious. Most of the taboos in Inuit culture affect women during menstruation. They are not allowed to work, to wash, comb their hair, move out of doors, eat meat from freshly killed animals, or even use their own drinking cup. In Greenland, a woman spends this period sitting on a platform facing the wall. In Canada and Alaska, a separate hut is made to isolate her completely. A breach of these rules would contaminate the souls of killed sea mammals and hinder their rebirth from the house of the Sea Woman. As Sonne (ibid, p. 173) correctly surmises, the depiction of the Sea Woman's helpless state is modelled on the actual woman under taboo. Like her, the Sea Woman is unable to look after her own hair because of the taboos. The shaman performs the purification for her so that she emerges calmer, cleaner, and able to free the animals.

The burden of taboo is much harder on women than men because women, by their biological nature, are the vehicles of human life who pass through two main perilous transitional stages: birth and death. Within these transitional stages, there lies the danger that the life cycle of sea mammals would become entangled with that of humans with the result that the reciprocity between animals and human could become damaged. The shaman's task is to ensure that the exchanged relationship continues. In indigenous beliefs, the true nature of every animal was considered to be human-like and sea mammals even more so because they spring from the hands of a human girl. Sonne (p. 174) asks why from the girl's hands and not from another part of the human body? She suggests that 'hands' signify a meat-sharing relationship. Meat shared and exchanged is offered by sea mammals, whose reincarnation depended upon the behaviour of humans. Humans alone are responsible for keeping in motion the rebirth cycle of sea mammals. One can interpret the myth of Sedna as follows: in her refusal to marry, she denies her parents the proper use of her hands, draining the meat supply procured within the family. Sedna removes herself to the margins of society (the liminal state) but still remains tied to it through her severed fingers, as a token of the meat-sharing alliance. Human members now hunt the animals into which the productive capacity of her fingers is transformed. In Canada and Greenland, Inuit adult women are primarily responsible for maintaining and mediating between both life cycles: human and animal. The two are interchangeable. By refusing to conform to societal gender forms of marriage and childbearing, Sedna remains in that intermediate, liminal zone as the caretaker of taboo.

This interpretation stresses that Sedna both absorbs and personifies the taboo and its violation for the collective in the collective unconscious, that is, in the land of the dead. Van Gennep (1960, p. 146) gives graphic descriptions of the journey into this domain, similar in topography undertaken by the shaman when s/he crosses the shoreline into Sedna's house. Sedna is the composite archetypal image of taboo combining a wide spectrum of affect

in her disorderly appearance. The shaman needs enough courage to handle Sedna's strongly ambivalent disassociated emotions (dissent, anger, injustice, jealousy, shame) empathically, by touching and caring for them in the form of her tangled, matted hair, thereby soothing, understanding, and healing her psyche in the process. The role of a psychoanalyst is similar to that of a shaman: s/he must enter the unconscious terrain of the dead or the disassociated others by dialoguing and touching the tabooed emotions that hinder ego enrichment.

Shaman's symbolic journey into the womb

The second example of shamanism shows the therapeutic use of vivid symbols. Illness and disease are not merely physiological phenomena; anthropologists and depth psychologists have long noted the widespread use of curative symbols and their effect on patients. Such symbols organise the ways in which physiological illness is perceived, experienced, and dealt with. Beginning with this premise, Levi-Strauss (1963, pp. 186–205) analyses a song used by Cuna Indian Shamans to facilitate difficult childbirth.² He suggests that the effectiveness of the song lies in its power to psychologically manipulate the patient's generative organs. The shaman's song provides a mythic language by which the patient can express the inexpressible incoherence of pain and disorder. By attaining this psychological release, the shaman also affects the physiological cure. Levi-Strauss draws a parallel between shamanism and psychoanalytic efficacy, asserting that both attempt a cure by creating a myth, which the patient must then relive. In the case of shamanism, it is a collective myth; in the case of psychoanalysis, it is the personal myth. However, Levi-Strauss stresses that both are one and the same because shamanism and psychoanalysis parallel a universal, unconscious, symbolic function regardless of cultural conditioning. Although this view has been criticised (cf. Neu, 1975) few, including Douglas (1966, pp. 88–89), would question Levi-Strauss' insight into the power of therapeutic symbols in ritual that give meaning and engender courage.

The song begins by describing the shaman's arrival and the preparation consisting of fumigations of burnt cocoa-nibs, invocations, and the making of sacred figures called *nuchu*. These images carved out of prescribed wood represent tutelary spirits whom the shaman makes his assistants and whom he leads into the abode of *Muu* (the uterus) responsible for making the foetus. A difficult childbirth has resulted because *Muu* exceeds her functions and captured the *purba*, or soul, of the pregnant woman. Thus, the song embodies a quest for the lost soul of the woman, which will be recovered after many vicissitudes, such as overcoming obstacles, a victory of wild beasts, and, finally, the great contest waged by the shaman and his tutelary spirits against *Muu* and her daughters; once defeated, *Muu* allows the *purba* to be discovered and freed. The delivery of the child takes place. The battle

is not against *Muu* herself, who is indispensable to procreation, but against her abuse of power.

Muu is literally the vagina and uterus itself, within which the shaman penetrates and frees the child. The pregnant woman has not just lost her *purba*, her double, but also her *niga*,³ meaning her strength and vitality, which needs to be restored. It appears that *Muu*, as the instigator of the disorder, has captured the souls of the other organs in the pregnant woman's body, thus destroying the cooperation that would normally exist between them in childbirth. Once these souls are liberated by finding the corresponding teeth and hair captured by *Muu*, the soul of the uterus in the form of *Muu* cooperates. At the same time, *Muu* must not escape before childbirth is accomplished, so the shaman mobilises the lords of the wild animals to guard *Muu's* opening. Golden and silver nets are fastened, and for four days, the shaman's assistants (*nelegan*) stand watch and beat their sticks to keep *Muu's* way open.

In *Muu's* way, darkened and covered in blood is situated *Muu's* abode in a dark, uterine whirlpool where she dwells. To enter the abode, the shaman's *nelegan* wearing white hats take on the appearance and the motions of an erect penis to symbolically enter the vagina. Not only does the patient feel them entering, they also light up the route that they are preparing for the delivery. The image of white hats also attributes a reflective thinking function to the *nelegan* as they penetrate to assess the difficulties of labour and bring these to attention.

The searing labour pains of contractions and dilations become embodied in images of Uncle Alligator moving about with his bulging eyes, sharp teeth, and swishing scaly tail; *Nele Ki (k) kirpanalele*, the octopus with sticky, sucking tentacles alternatively opening and closing; and many others, such as the black tiger, the red animal, and the dust-coloured animal, all tied with an iron chain, their tongues hanging out as claws tear at things 'all like blood, all red.' The *nelegan* also have to overcome other obstacles, this time in the form of material such as fibres, loose threads, and brightly coloured curtains. For this task, the shaman brings in lords of the wood-boring insects that cut and reduce the threads identified as the internal tissues of the uterus. The lords of the burrowing animals, such as the armadillo, prepare the way to the orifice. It is not only against *Muu's* elusive stray impulses that the cure must be affected, but also to offer the patient a resolution so that all the imaginal protagonists have returned to an order that is no longer threatened or frightening but now productive.

Levi-Strauss suggests (*ibid.* p. 197) that the cure consists of making a distressing situation, originally existing on an emotional level, acceptable to the physical pains the body hitherto refuses to tolerate. That the mythology of the shaman does not correspond to the objective reality does not matter. The patient believes in the shaman's helpers, which helps her accept the incoherent and arbitrary pains that feel like alien elements in her body but which the shaman will reintegrate as a whole to make the unbearable contractions

of the uterus meaningful. In this way, her soul's vitality is restored and freed up from the overwhelming influence of uterine childbirth symbolised by the wayward and difficult *Muu*. Entering into the relationship with a living symbol (*Muu*), the shaman provides both a language and an image by which unexpressed psychic states can be immediately experienced and expressed. Progress in a difficult childbirth is further facilitated by imaginal action on the part of the shaman's helpers. During the second part of the delivery process, when the unwilling uterus in the form of *Muu* has been sufficiently contained, attention turns to the *nelegans'* feet, now with shoes on, marching in rows of four rather than two, or in single file, to coincide with and support the widening process of dilatation in childbirth. The effectiveness of such images guarantees the harmonious paralleled development between myth and action, symbolic and concrete, and mutuality of trust and accompaniment between patient and healer.

Levi-Strauss emphasises (ibid. p. 198) the role of language in this process to induce physiological release, whereas I suggest equally the Jungian definition of a symbol⁴ in terms of the efficacy of an *image* as preverbal communication. All the shaman's helpers (*nelegan*) have specific emotional images, such as white hats, white shoes, and specialised animals, such as crocodile, octopus, armadillo, and tigers, which help absorb and restructure physical pain so that the patient can simultaneously cope better psychologically. Levi-Strauss (ibid, pp. 201–203) compares shamanism to psychoanalysis in that both methods involve a genuine abreaction through a double transference mechanism whereby both the shaman and analyst serve as flesh and blood protagonists with whom the patient can restore and clarify an initial situation, which has remained unconscious, unexpressed, and unformulated. The precise differentiated images evoked by the shaman reverberate in the unconscious to affect the cure.

Taboo, shamanism, and Jungian analysis

Both the above examples of shamanist practice illustrate the skill and courage shamans show by entering the realm of taboo and dialoguing with the disassociated emotional contents, such as fear, grief, and loss (as lost souls), which are impoverishing ego agency. Their analytical and detailed exploration of the emotions involved and the precise images they create to express and absorb their patient's unconscious pain is remarkable. In both cases illustrated above, soul energy is either missing or stolen because a taboo has not been respected. The shaman has to find the missing soul aspect in the unconscious and restore it to consciousness so that an actual birth or an imaginal rebirth, depending on the case involved, can effectively occur.

The relationship between taboo, shamanism, and psychoanalysis is well depicted by Merchant (2012, p. 25) who compares the vocation of the shaman (cf. Eliade, 1964) to that of a psychoanalyst as wounded healers who have

both entered the realm of taboo, that is, into the unspeakable, and survived the ordeal. Both the shaman and the analyst during their training have been symbolically killed, dismembered, and put together again, so they are able to retrieve lost souls in the underworld of Penthos, Hades, or Sedna. They traversed that tabooed, invisible, *borderland* realm to recover lost energy caught up in that unconscious realm. Both return safely and restore what was lost, or disassociated, for the benefit of the individual and the collective consciousness. The process leads to a widening of ego consciousness through abreaction, differentiation, and the courage to bear previously tabooed, emotional material.

Guggenbuhl-Craig (1999, pp. 408–411) alludes to the shaman archetype as an important element in a good Jungian analyst and is a talent that one is born with. The shaman archetype ensures that dreams from the unconscious are imaginatively dialogued. Jung (1954b, para. 411, 448) defines the process of individuation in his definition as a series of painful initiatory ordeals. It is only in initiation ceremonies that death is given a positive value. Symbolic death prepares the new spiritual birth access to a mode of being not subject to the destroying action of time. Jung defined shamans as those who leave their bodies and make contact with the transpersonal archetypal realm of the collective unconscious, showing patients these other dimensions, especially through dream work. Consequently, Jung sees a shamanic initiation as central to the vocation of being an analyst. In indigenous tribes, the shamanic initiate is the one who experiences a breakthrough of the collective unconscious and is able to master the overwhelming experience, a feat those psychically wounded cannot achieve on their own.

Groesbeck emphasises (1989, p. 274) that those analysts who directly communicate with the emotions within a patient's illness to produce a transformational experience can be considered as effective analysts. Merchant (2012) suggests that given the more recent contemporary views on neuroscience research, not available to Jung when he wrote about archetypes as an innate, *a priori* disposition, the shaman archetype could be better understood as an emergent and developmentally produced mind/brain structure forged out of intense affective experiences in infancy and, once in existence, has the capacity to directly influence psychological life. Merchant (2012, p. 162) thus argues that shamanism is not an innate talent as Guggenbuhl-Craig suggests, but an emergent one having more to do with the individual's capacity to process and use early preverbal infant trauma associated with the development of the proto-borderline model. Merchant believes that the proto-borderline model, when applied to particular analysts, explains why they are drawn to their own psychotherapy and what kinds of wounds predispose them to the analytical vocation.

An effective analyst must have a similar prototype borderline psychological structure as shamans, that is sufficiently wounded at a core level of

their personality, but without further gross psychopathology deriving from other chaos, which would impede their all-important self-cure. This also explains how analysts use this psychological construction in their countertransference because the analysts' own pocket of early infant damage becomes activated and resonates with that of their patient. The self-cure through their own analytical work enables them to engage with unconscious complexes as a wounded healer without being possessed by them. It is only those analysts who have been wounded in the earliest stages of infancy who have the essential porosity and susceptibility to the psychic infection kind of embodied countertransference experiences. Jung (1946, para. 364) suggests that the analyst 'by voluntarily and consciously taking over the psychic suffering of the patient, exposes himself to the overpowering contents of the unconscious and their reductive action.' Jung stresses that the transference bond (conscious/unconscious) demands the whole person of the analyst in his/her preparedness to enter into the suffering of the other and become affected by it.

Hillman (1977, p. 117) emphasises that the wounded healer is a personification of a consciousness that has broken through dismemberment and allows a dialogue between two people through their wounds: 'My wounds speak to yours; yours to mine.' Hillman equates such moments of localised, dismembered, disassociated consciousness as the 'healers in the wounds.' These statements resonate with the work of shamans who enter into difficult taboo, unconscious terrain between the margins where aspects of the self are lost or stuck in transit. As shown in the two illustrations of shamanic intervention, shamans touch 'tabooed filth,' not as dirty or disgusting, but as emotional aspects that need patience, kindness, and empathy.

Conclusion

Working with dreams where the animal psyche often appears as a helpful guide, as I describe in [chapter 6](#) (two clinical cases), links unconscious processes to shamanism and Jungian analysis. The animal psyche bears witness to the efficacy of indigenous animal totems as vital energy sources that link us to our instincts and our evolutionary past, as I have described in [chapter 4](#).

The analytical work involved is difficult because certain emotions have been tabooed for good reason; to uncover them feels like a betrayal to the collective rules that are meant to keep us safe but at the expense of independent thinking and freedom of expression. Questioning religious or secular authority is a courageous act filled with anxiety and dread. Animal totemic energy provides a method of differentiation, which can lead to change and how we view working with taboo as a creative, rather than a punitive phenomenology.

Working with taboo is important in clinical practice because the analyst and the patient gain insight into the taboo unconscious areas that have not

yet entered the symbolic death process of independent thinking and separation, but become stuck in a never ending liminal ritual of cleansing and purification of dirt and contamination. Such patients have not been able to traverse their margins into a new consciousness because of societal or religious pressure to conform; taking risks into uncharted territory would be seen as 'sinful.'

Each culture performs its rites of passage in different ways using different taboos, depending on climate and topology (cf. Brodersen, 2016, pp. 20–27). An analyst from a different culture, as I show in the two client cases in [chapter 6](#), can help overcome an outdated set of taboos in a more conservative, authoritarian culture that is causing considerable psychological distress. The severity of the taboo in the form of a symptom gives an indication of the ambivalence between not overstepping a particular margin and the overriding wish and need to do so.

Notes

1. The concept of collective unconscious as defined by Jung (1936, paras. 87–110) differentiates the personal unconscious consisting of mainly of complexes, and the collective unconscious made up essentially of archetypes. Archetypes are primordial categories of imaginative thought made visible and dynamic through motifs that become clothed as images that enact their energetic charge.
2. Levi-Strauss places stress on the words in the song of the shaman, whereas I suggest that the specific physicality of the images evoked by the shaman in animal form as helpers meet and assuage the difficult painful labour.
3. The word *Níga* is used nonpejoratively by Levi-Strauss, where its original indigenous meaning of positive vitality and resistance is stressed.
4. Each of the shaman's helpers embodies a specific image that constellates a preverbal somatic communication. These are immediate and empathic, similar in nature to affect attunement in the mother-infant dyad before the child is able to speak (cf. Stern, 1998, pp. 138–61).

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