

N' ANGA

Shona Healers

N'ANGA: SHONA HEALERS

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N'anga

N'anga is a traditional healer of the Shona people of Zimbabwe. They use a combination of herbs, medical/religious advice and spiritual guidance for healing. In Zimbabwe, they're recognized/registered under the ZINATHA (Zimbabwe National Traditional Healer's Association).

Traditional healers were first professionalized in Zimbabwe at the country's independence in 1980 through the establishment of an organization of traditional healers called Zimbabwe National Traditional Healers Association (ZINATHA). The urgency in securing the independence of traditional healing from the oppressive and negative perception it had got from the colonial government shows the importance of traditional medicine and healing in the lives of the people of Zimbabwe. - Tabona Shoko

The impact of traditional medicine in Zimbabwe is intricately linked to the operations of traditional healer as the chief practitioner. The traditional healer performs multiple functions as diviner by diagnosing the causes of sickness, misfortune and death; as herbalist he dispenses medicines and as healer he promotes health and wellbeing of the Shona through rituals and treatments. The Shona use a common term "n'anga" to describe his roles as traditional medical practitioner. Traditional medicine is used for various purposes that include preservation of morality, good luck charms, contraception, psychological and spiritual problems. In fact the traditional medical practitioner has multiple functions, in addition to being a medical practitioner, the traditional healer is a religious consultant, a legal and political adviser, a marriage counselor, a police detective and a social worker. - Tabona Shoko

They are believed to have religious powers to tell fortunes, and to change, heal, bless or even kill people. Traditionally N'angas were people's main source of help in all matters of life. They have existed for decades well before the British colonial era. - Wikipedia

Another important aspect of Shona culture are the n'anga, medicine men (and women) or "witchdoctors." Their healing methods include spiritual guidance as well as traditional herbal medicine (muti), since in the traditional Shona worldview many physical ailments have spiritual causes. A n'anga may consult the ancestral spirits to determine whether a taboo has been violated or a ritual omitted, and then advise his or her patient on how to appease the spirits. - Marin Theatre Company

N'anga are believed to get their training from Njuzu, a water spirit depicted as either a woman or a mermaid.

Njuzu can be extremely kind and generous. She is a wise spirit, a repository of knowledge. If captives pass her tests, they essentially become her apprentices to whom she bestows information and teaches various healing arts. Eventually, if all goes well, a kidnapped person is sent back home with a basket filled with magical medicines (mushonga). Njuzu has supplied this person with the skills, knowledge, and tools needed to become a potent and successful healer. The process can take a year or longer. - Occult World

The njuzu [water spirit] is an important part of Shona mythology. They are supposed to live in deep lakes and rivers, and may lure the unwary person into the water. Those who return from this experience are more likely to become a n'anga [witchdoctor], as they have travelled between the physical and spiritual worlds. - Guruve

While they are away, the person is trained in the spirit world by the njuzu and when they return to the physical world they are very likely to become a n'anga or traditional healer - because they have already been to the spirit world and they know how to travel between the two dimensions.

The njuzu is half human, half fish and is always female, so it is no surprise that it is often represented in Shona sculpture very much like our mermaids. - Guruve

A n'anga divines by mechanical means using items like hakata (dice) or a talking calabash. Nowadays objects like a mirror, water, cloth or paper are used to identify the causes of the problem. Diagnosis can also be effected through omens, dreams and ordeals. The spirit world reveals and communicates to the practitioner through various forms of phenomena. According to one n'anga nature speaks to you through trees, grass and animals as invisible spiritual forces. A n'anga uses a third eye to look inside. He identifies the cause and attacks pain in three ways: physical, psychological and spiritual. Elders in the Karanga society are also equipped with basic knowledge of diagnosis through dreams, omens and observations. The n'anga divines. He is more powerful than the elders. - Tabona Shoko



Hakata (Dice)

Divination Methods

1. Spirit Possession
2. Hakata - dice sets, shells, bones, seeds

Before each casting, the diviner directs specific questions to the hakata. When the dice are cast, the ones that fall face up form a configuration through which affirmative or negative responses are articulated. There are sixteen possible throws, each of which has a name and a range of interpretations. Many highly skilled diviners throw four or eight sets of dice at a time in order to achieve a more complex and nuanced interpretation of a situation. - Goddess Chess

Hakata (dice) seem to link the divine and the human worlds. As the diviner throws them up in mechanical diagnosis, the dice accrue pertinent information and bring it down as they land on the ground. As such, the dice are not merely ordinary objects and as a result no ordinary person can interpret the throws. - Tabona Shoko

The design and use of hakata reflect the convergence of diviners' and artists' sensibilities. Not only are diviners the primary patrons of artists in Shona society, but the two share the same source of divine inspiration in practicing their respective vocations. Some individuals may have dreams in which they are called on to become diviners by relatives who were themselves banganga, after which they are inhabited by a spirit (shave). Similarly, the careers of artists are often launched by a diagnosis of an affliction signifying that an ancestor desires them to develop the skills of a sculptor or blacksmith. The creativity involved in the design of traditional Shona forms of expression does not reflect an emphasis on originality on the part of the individual artist. Instead, it too is conceived of as the product of divine inspiration communicated by the shave. - Goddess Chess

The n'anga's primary function is healing. As a traditional medical practitioner he provides both physical and spiritual healing. Healing involves both the individual and society. He also acts as an intermediary between the human and spiritual world. He is consulted on medical, economic, political and social issues. - Tabona Shoko

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