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Body and affect in the intercultural encounter



Langaa &  
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Body and affect  
in the intercultural encounter

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The book owes a great deal to the generous advice offered by professor emeritus Wim van Binsbergen and dr Hugo Stuer MD, as well as the forbearance of professor Francis Nyamnjoh, editor-in-chief of Langaa in a joint venture with the African Studies Centre. I would like to cordially thank Dr. Sean O' Dubhghaill and Bart Van Hoorick for editing my English prose. Professor Oswald Devisch designed the vibrant book cover, something which I feel sets the tone for the co-resonance between the weaving of the local universe of the living and the exploratory meeting. For more than ten years, two different monthly seminars (EBP-BSP; NLS, G. Laforce convener) for psychoanalytical and anthropological reflection, have enriched my space for thought considerably. My hearty thanks go to my seminar colleagues.

The present volume is released in parallel with a complementary volume in French published by Langaa, African Studies Center and Département d'anthropologie & Bruylant Academia at Louvain-Brussels (Devisch 2017b). In a gripping biographic novel, Koen Peeters (2017) pithily recounts the Flemish early roots of my intercultural sensitivity. He closely traces, in Southwest Congo, the steps of my anthropological search for endogenous ways of unravelling the unspeakable and of healing the intangible shadow of our selfs.

My affectionate gratitude goes to my wife, Maria De Leeuw. She joined me and gathered much data on fauna and flora, along with photographic documentation regarding ritual life during the

last four months of my early fieldwork among the Yakaphones. Currently, her infinite care and that of professionals has enabled this much-delayed publication. Their help contributes to my ability to surpass the progressive multiple sclerosis, which disables me greatly, by providing a fruitful harvest that will hopefully prove to be boundless, as my Yakaphone friends wish me.

Chapters 1 and 6 are original works, written for this book. Sarah Jacobs translated the first part of chapter 1 from French, as Claire Chevalier did for chapter 7. Bregt Brosens volunteered to edit the bibliographic references.

Furthermore, the following chapters are rewrites of previously published essays:

- 2 “De pluricentrische wereld”. In *Grenzeloze wetenschap: dertig gesprekken met Vlamingen over wetenschappelijk onderzoek*, edited by J. Van Pelt, 1997: 35-42. Leuven-Appeldoorn, Garant.
- 4 “Frenzy, violence, and ethical renewal in Kinshasa”. *Public culture* 7, 1995: 593- 629.
- 5 “Een masker en zijn heimwee”. In *Vertoog en literatuur. Cahier 3: Provincialismen / ontworteling*, edited by B. Verschaffel & M. Verminck, 1993: 177-186. Antwerpen, Meulenhoff, Kritak. German translation: “Eine Maske und ihr Heimweh”, 1993: 132-140, in *Provinzialismus, Entwurzelung*. Köln: Dinter.
- 7 “Convertir la différence au Congo: le missionnaire belge masculin”. In *Du missionnaire à l’anthropologue*, edited by F. Laugrand & O. Servais, 147-174. Paris: Karthala.
- 8 R. Devisch & Mbonyinkebe Sebahire, “Medical anthropology and traditional care”, in *Health in Central Africa since 1885: past, present and future*, vol.1, edited by P.G. Janssens, M. Kivits & J. Vuylsteke, 1997: 47-64. Brussels: King Baudouin Foundation; Leuven: Peeters.
- 9 R. Devisch, Lapika Dimonfu, J. Le Roy & P. Crossman, “A community-action intervention to improve medical care services in Kinshasa, Congo: mediating the realms of healers and physicians”, in *Applying health social science best practice in the developing world*, edited by N. Higginbotham, R. Briceno-Leon & N. Johnson, 2001: 107-140. London: Zed, 2001.

# Plates

**Plate 1:** Map of Yaka land in the Kwaango

While this map of the Diocese of Popokabaka is also used by the civil authority, it approximately corresponds to the region inhabited by Yakaphone people and which is labelled as Kwaango or Yaka land. The map of the diocese was designed by Luc van den Steen s.j., who holds the copyright.

**Plate 2:** *Ndzaambi* statuette

The sculpture comes from the extreme southwest of DR Congo, along the Angolan frontier, forming a borderland of Yakaphone and Holophone people. It was obtained at the “Marché d’objets d’art” close to Kinshasa’s Central train station, in September 2001.

**Plate 3:** *Kholuka* mask,

The mask stem from Yaka region, at the early 1900s. Chapter 5 deals with it.

The Ethnographic Museum of Antwerp obtained the mask from Breckpot auction house. It was catalogued as AE 0516 and housed there until 2011 when it was moved to the new MAS museum. It is 71 cm high. I gratefully acknowledge that Mrs Els de Palmenaer, from MAS, granted me access to the photograph of this mask. The *kholuka* mask is second in a series of dancing masks (see Devisch 2017b: photo 4) crafted towards the end of the circumcised boys' initiatory seclusion of each Yakaphone village community. The shape of the sculpted face, its upturned nose and rich ornaments are typical in northern Kwaango region, even today. This dancing mask evokes the ever-renewing mythopoeic cosmogony and displays blissfulness and connectedness, in which the society and the emerging masculine generation creatively participate.

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**Plate 2:** *Ndzaambi* statuette



**Plate 3:** *Kholuka* mask,

# Preface

The book is a long-awaited contribution to anthropology, which will establish René Devisch as one of the discipline's major fore-runners. In a time of intellectual crisis in the humanities and social sciences, leaving a complete generation aghast in postmodern entanglements, this reflection on nonverbal, sensory forms of comprehension and knowledge in the world brings us back to the basics and roots of anthropology. Formed as a fieldworker during the early contractions of decolonization, just after Foreman fought Cassius Clay, the author has the capacity to cast a wide net over the DR Congo's history and in the same throw synthesize virtually all theoretical explorations on the phenomenology of the body since the late 1960s. In his unique take on anthropology's past and future, Devisch will inspire a new generation who did not have the chance to discover his works, many of which hidden like gems. This book offers new material, built upon a coherent body of papers, some of which have become rare finds among google's bin of citations.

Most of all, *Body and affect in the intercultural encounter* weds experiential anthropology to both psychoanalysis and subaltern speech in a manner that will inspire those seeking the missing link between postcolonial Africanists and the new wave of ontologists working in other regions of the world (such as Holbraad and Pedersen, following Strathern and Viveiros de Castro). Some origins of their intellectual journey can be found in this book. Those wanting to tackle recent critiques on the ontological turn will find in these pages, manifestly between the lines, a torchlight showing the way ahead. To paraphrase the ever more serious, no longer disparaged effort of «salvage ethnography», this book does academia the favour of salvage anthropology, in the sense of reminding us of our scholarly purpose before it is too late, that is: before the major intellectual streams — questions, concerns, sensitivities — that fed our discipline become extinct.

Weaving together experientially salient moments of personal life, African and global history, this book on cosmology, sorcery and healing offers a much-awaited overview of the theory of René



Devisch. The central themes are brought together here through older and new work, because by far not sufficiently known among Africanists older and new. I name some of the ingredients of a richly flavoured dish: Devisch's three-fields method, approaching African traditions of healing (including objects and practices of well-being, illness and treatment) in terms of concordance and rupture between the three fields of body, society and cosmology; his concept of the matrixial in culture, revealing how the imaginary subtends the symbolical, indeed masculine order; his attention to the (re)productive dynamic of border-linking; his understanding of the ethnographic (sensory) self at the heart of anthropology, defending the extimate and bifocal to-and-fro of the fieldworker as key to intercultural comprehension imbued with the subaltern experience. Each of these themes has been uniquely developed by Devisch. They have benefited from 40 years of fieldwork-led reflection, and been attuned to processes of recent social change. Together these themes stem from the postcolonial turn he has contributed to, and of which his work has been exemplary.

The style of the author is entirely his own, known among his former students as Devischian: only Devilish to the positivist mind reducing cultural knowledge to the factual, seeking the angelic beauty of data. His words, not fearing to contort English semantics, explore without pretending to know, evoke rather than name, seek to speak in ways that leave space for the unsaid. That is the way he chose to pay tribute to the creativity of the communities he was part of. It is his humble sign of respect to them.

After reading this book, questions will remain. At least one matter struck me and may be raised here beforehand. In exploring the ongoing lived meaning of long-term intergenerational experiences, including trauma in postcolonial and post-war Congo and Flanders (Belgium), the author bridges two kinds of data, or rather 'relata': the not so manifest individual lifeworlds and the even more latent collective pasts of communities. Does he mean to clear the path for a new field of research at the intersection of social sciences and humanities, namely where anthropology and history meet? The encounter never materialized between two other Belgian Africanisms, the all too synchronic take on culture by Luc de Heusch

*Preface*

and the all too diachronic account of history by his compatriot Jan Vansina. When Devisch delves into post-coldwar Kinshasa, where he witnessed the frenzy of which the Pentecostalist revolution partakes, does he observe the atavistic expression of colonial trauma, the remnants of African traditions of regeneration, the reflection of millennial capitalism, the contractions of culture in the (re)making, or all at once? I advise the reader to slowly savour this dish, and to share any thoughts with the cook.

**Koen Stroeken**



## Introduction: the co-implication of anthropologists and their hosts

Let me first narrate a confrontational encounter in Kinshasa that may testify my hosts' alliance. In 1986, I returned to Kinshasa to participate in the Third International Colloquium of the CERA (Centre d'études des religions africaines) on the theme of African mediations of the sacred. Meanwhile, I aimed to take up some threads from my previous stays in the Democratic Republic of Congo during my university studies (1965-1971) and my anthropological research in Kwaango land (1971-1974). This return happened to inaugurate my annual research stays in Kinshasa, which happened until 2003. On the eve of the colloquium, a confrontational encounter had occurred in the shanty town of Bumbu. Following a number of informative queries on affliction and healing cults in Kinshasa, I invited the Yakaphone cult healer, Kha Lusuungu, to submit his questions to me in return. (I will respond to it in the paragraph on the ethical.) His piercing and insightful questioning of my anthropological work has remained on my mind:

“But you white man who knows so much about our divination and healing, who are you? You whites have ripped the heart out of our culture in condemning our beliefs in spirits, our sacrifices, and all our initiatory, divinatory and healing arts as belonging to satan. Who are you? What allows you to speak for us, about how it is in the ancestral world? Tell us who you are, interested as you appear in what is the most intimate part of ourselves”.

### The book and this chapter

This chapter, as a prelude to the book, revisits the intercultural encounters I had from the late 1960s onwards with the cultural other; the most enduring took place in the DR Congo. Following

my MA studies, from 1965 in the capital city of Kinshasa, I had the privilege to immerse myself around the clock in the Yakaphones' activities and thoughts, from November 1971 till October 1974, in the borderland with Angola in the southwest of the country; and intermittently from 1986 to 2003 in Kinshasa's shanty towns during annual three week stays. The encounters were mutually enriching, surprising and in some instances, intersubjectively, conceptually and epistemologically disconcerting. The intercultural encounter aimed at close egalitarian interaction and reciprocal empathy.

Let me outline the structure and content of this first chapter. Its first section analyses the perspectives, specific obstacles and challenges that are part and parcel of the intercultural encounter. There is no doubt that this encounter has led me to revise many of my assumptions and habitual ways of thinking that I acquired during my childhood, youth and university education. A second section sketches some of the encounters I had with otherness in its various forms, including the encounters I made within myself. Section three analyses the predominant emotions and feelings that I experienced during my stays in Congo. A fourth section demonstrates how, during my first stay of almost three years, an ethical alliance developed between my Yakaphone interlocutors and me. This alliance strives towards a balanced reciprocity, hence an interpersonal equality and reciprocal exchange in "the meeting of giving and receiving" (as Léopold Sédar Senghor so famously expressed). Here, I take my time to define under what conditions the encounter, such as set up by Yakaphone elders, resulted on both sides in a transcultural or panhuman awareness in our hearts of an intensely shared but hardly definable humanity. In a fifth section, I characterise the Yaka society in both its rural and urban environment. The sixth section outlines how the particular type of reciprocal anthropology that I practised led to an auto-anthropological reflexivity susceptible to unravel some unthought alienating dynamic in the author's native Flemish-speaking culture. It thus awakened an intercultural reciprocity of perspectives between there and here, as if here were there. Laying bare the specifically Yaka, hence Bantu-African view on the 'body-group-world' weave, this type of reciprocal and perspectivist anthropology discerned the heuristic of the 'three bodies' and the ontological principle of a 'co-resonance and co-naturality of life-

forms' in the local universe of the living. To unravel the large segment of existence that is beyond words and factual reasoning, the analysis turns to the 'later Lacan' (see thesaurus) focusing on the unconscious desire and seldom spoken-of affects (such as, excitement, envy, anxiety, aversion). The last section of the chapter provides a brief overview of the various chapters in this book.

The book provides a detailed analysis of the various dimensions set out in the first chapter. It offers a thematic selection of both thoroughly reworded articles that are out of reach as well as brand new chapters. As a whole, the volume covers four decades of my research and experiences, thoughts and reflexivity as a researcher, academic and supervisor of doctoral dissertations in the field of Africanist anthropology. Adopting a phenomenological perspectivist approach (Merleau-Ponty, Viveiros de Castro, Willerslev), this book unravels the hosts' perspectives on, and commitment to classical Bantu-African healing cults, parallel consultation of physicians and healers, sorcery's threat and its homeopathic ritual reversion. The volume furthermore takes into consideration the widespread proletarian outbursts of violence in 1991 and 1993 expressing people's disenchantment with the catastrophic hyperinflation and president Mobutu's millenarian Popular Movement of the Revolution, and also with the disillusioning modernisation. The aim is to affranchise in particular Yakaphone people's zest for life, tenacity and sociality, along with their investigative and epistemological traditions, particularly centered on their quest for health.

## The intercultural encounter: perspectives and challenges

With this book, I try to break down imaginary barriers that wall off the intercultural encounter, and aim to demonstrate the encounter's specific opportunities and heartbreaking challenges. The encounters I was privileged to have, led me to revise many of the assumptions and habits of mind that I had acquired in my home country. I even dare to suggest that my academic training in Kinshasa (1965-1971) and my initial experience as an anthropologist (1972-1974) occurred during a pivotal phase in Europe's history and the Belgian colonial enterprise. Interwoven with the genealogy of colonial and

reactionary reflexes of the collective imagination in my home country and Western Europe, this period garnered hardly any critical thinking regarding the intercultural development from policy makers or the mass media at all.

It seems to me that the astounding, blind and uncritical political, economic and cultural subjection by the white colonial leaders, steered by prejudice and passions, in nineteenth-century and twentieth-century Africa, foreshadowed an even more disconcerting stigmatisation. Here, I am referring to the stigma that affected immigrants from the Mediterranean, who were brought into Western Europe during its recovery from the second world war in order to work in mining, roadworks and construction. This marks the beginning of a history of immigration, a history that Europe did not manage as a complex and enriching intercultural encounter, but instead belittled the immigrants in humiliation, submitting them to the inexorable logic of capital and of the world market.

Today, member states of the European Union seem to be losing ground against nationalist and conservative groups reacting to the growing numbers of cultural others settling in Europe. Overestimating their values, their autonomy and the living standards that they acquired “at a high price”, these groups identify with an ancient Europe and perceive the cultural other as an intruding alterity from which they apprehensively intend to protect themselves. The media machine underlines the sheer horror of the recent Paris and Brussels “killings” (Badiou 2016) more than the linked and yet deadlier attacks that took place in the beginning of 2016 in Baghdad, Damascus or Lahore. Moreover, these mass media pull public opinion back into a reactionary and anxious space. Political deciders as well as the press that shape public opinion reproduce imperialist and repressive characteristics and old patriot reflexes of a patriarchal Europe, along the line of its long history of conquest and colonialism.

Conversely, identity exhortations by a number of Islamic religious authorities find fertile soil in the second or third generation descendants of Mediterranean labour migrants. The exhortations are only little understood by Belgian policy makers, numerous nation-states in Europe, and the greater part of the mass media and public opinion. The latter tend to amalgamate the jobless youngsters and

middle aged as of North African origins. They are described by the mass media as “deeply frustrated”, finding themselves unreasonably altered in the metropolises of western Europe and thrown into the same basket with recent war fugitives or refugees, indistinctly designated by the catch-all concept of Muslims. A great number of the younger generation of immigrants sources its models from the social media which no longer know boundaries of space and time. This generation does not accept the highly unjust and unequal regulation of access to employment, a regulation steered by reflexes characteristic to the old nation-state. Here, I speak specifically of an ethnocentric form of bureaucratic management that is based on traits and identity provisions allegedly linked to ethnocultural origin, home-based education, religious affiliation, equivalence of diplomas, linguistic skills, professional experience. Without being given equal opportunities (to be hired, to find wage labour or employment, to participate in consumption and to have a future) due to this colonial-type “regulation”, a segment of the most gifted and ambitious youngsters feels deeply frustrated. Some literally ignite to commit indescribable bloodshed, while others take action in view of emigration to North-America which provides greater equal opportunities.

In the remainder of this book, while remaining aware of the global context, my focus is on the lived encounter in Africa, particularly in Kinshasa and southwestern DRC. I also examine its resonance with my Flemish-Belgian roots.

### *The anthropologist and the host groups*

This section outlines some of the intercultural encounters I had with various shapes of alterity, which in turn have defied me to shed light on the shadows within myself.

Ever since childhood, I was fascinated by the relationship to otherness. I was born and grew up in the northwest of Belgium, close to the North Sea along the border with France. I threw myself with great enthusiasm at the intercultural encounter when I arrived in the DRC in 1965, in the wake of the political independences won in Africa<sup>1</sup>. At this time, I was being trained as a Jesuit and was heavily inspired by Charles de Foucauld, a hermit, linguist and



anthropologist who, in the early 1900s, shared the life conditions of the Tuareg and the Berber in the Hagggar mountains (in the Tamanrasset region of the Algerian Saharan South). In the words of my Jesuit advisor in Kimwenza-Kinshasa (at the Institut de philosophie St Pierre-Canisius), in September 1965, “I had come to the DRC to study the existential questions and philosophical knowledge of the ‘African’. I was meant to free myself of Eurocentric preconceptions by exposing myself to the cultural ways of life and life conditions I had never faced before. In dialogue with my African *confrères*, we ought to selfcritically learn how to place ourselves at the service of the local populations in culturally sensitive and thoughtful ways”.

During this time, I unwillingly appeared like a heir to the “civilising mission” which had encouraged the Congolese to convert, educate and to develop themselves in the white mirror. I stayed with Congolese fellow Jesuit students of philosophy who felt like strangers to themselves, upset by the slow pace of decolonisation that, in many ways, seemed more rhetorical than emancipating. All along my university curriculum, I joined my Congolese fellows in their resistance to the existing ethnographic monographs and evolutionist theories which to them had been constructed in their entirety by the colonising West and were testimony of an ethnocentric perspective affected by racism.

I discretely participated in student debates and was influenced by the Negritude movement much like my peers; these experiences gradually exposed me to both the genius and colonial wounds of the African peoples. Levi-Strauss’ structuralism, which I encountered during my master in philosophy in Kimwenza-Kinshasa, felt like a liberation after the prejudicial, evolutionist, Western centric ethnology that I had been confronted with earlier on. Later, Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological approach, with its sensitivity to sensorial, corporeal and intersubjective experiences and its plurality of perspectives would allow me to adapt my anthropological approach to the life-world and epistemology of the host society.

My choice of host society in the beginning of 1971 was influenced by a number of experiences. Firstly, I was heavily influenced by ethnographic works regarding Congolese cultures and societies, even though I read these with great ambivalence and

criticism. My anthropological research project took shape under the influence of professor Jan Vansina, whom I met at the University of Kinshasa in 1970-1971, as well as of Léon De Beir (1975a, b), a Jesuit who recommended the location for my ethnographic insertion. The day I entered the field, I was no longer a Jesuit.

Groups and networks in ten African countries hosted me for periods of time lasting from two to six weeks. In Tunis 1985, I participated in a psychiatric hospital ward in its transition from an asylum to an “open door” hospital service (Devisch & Vervaeck 1986, Jeddi & Harzallah 1985). In 1988, I supported Jos Van de Loo’s ethnographic research amongst the Guji-Oromo in south Ethiopia (Van de Loo 1990). During the 1990s, I had the chance to join my doctoral students *in situ* for one or two weeks; these were located in Cairo, the west of Congo, the north of Ghana and the south of Burkina Faso, the east of Kenya, the southeast of Nigeria, the northwest of Tanzania, the southeast of South Africa, the northwest of Namibia, as well as beyond Africa, at a Druze community in the north of Israel. I was unable to join doctoral students of mine in the west of Congo-Brazzaville, the southwest of the DRC, Burundi and Rwanda.

From 1972 to 1974, I was hosted by a Yakaphone group (a cluster of thirteen villages called Taanda) in the northern Kwaango region. I participated around the clock in as many activities and interactions as possible; this way, I tried to adapt myself as well as I could to my host group, its modes of perception and its universe of the living<sup>2</sup>. I carefully observed my hosts’ everyday lives and the ways in which they sought health and cared for themselves. I made sure to closely follow family councils, divinatory consultations and rites of passage such as funerals or initiations. I particularly tried to adopt my hosts’ points of view and sought to understand the genius of their culture in its own terms and perspectives and in due respect of its genuineness and ontological self-determination. During this time, I developed a refined sensitivity for issues that appeared indefinable or remained beyond words or factual reasoning. It appeared to me that core foundations and premises of their life-world found expression in surprising weaves of signifiers which touched the indescribable and unthinkable.

From 1986 until 2003<sup>3</sup>, I undertook annual research stays of three weeks or more among the Yakaphone and Koongophone people residing in a number of Kinshasa's shanty towns (a term which I use as synonymous with squatter settlements or slums). My interaction with Koongophone people had to do with plural health care (see chapter 9) and the prophetic healing communes of the sacred spirit (see Devisch 2017b: chapter 6). The large Kinois zones under study — namely Ngaliema-Camp Luka, Kimbanseke, Masina, Ndjili XII, Mbanza Lemba, Bumbu, Yolo sud and Selembao — then accounted for one-third of Kinshasa's total population. In the 1980s and 1990s, I experienced these zones to be harsh environments where I witnessed the misery endured on a daily basis by the deprived Kinois. They were actually undergoing a process of profound self-questioning with regard to the contradictions in which they felt themselves caught. Despite political independence, they were facing utter alienation, in part due to the colonial past which was now succeeded by a predatory state, unreliable civil services and the “politics of the belly” (Bayart 1989).

As displayed on the front cover, a major facet of the context in which the intercultural encounters took place can be depicted by imagining longstanding interpersonal interactions taking place in so-called confidential conversation chairs. These consist of a pair of adjoined chairs but oppositely-oriented in the form of two mirroring shells. This double-chair arrangement positions the pairing such that the persons are seated back-to-back and shoulder-to-shoulder. Such positioning, either actual or imagined, was found to induce communication and exchange in an intimate and unencumbered manner, allowing each to display his or her own perspective of self-determination. Engaging in this brand of intercultural encounter encourages the mood or resonance grounded in close egalitarian interaction, empathy and confidence, in view of being authentic and effective. While exploring mutual interests and comprehension, the exchange is nevertheless unavoidably marked by each informant's feeling-mind, character, history, predispositions and contextual culture-specific perceptions of the co-resonance of life-forms and useful things in the local universe of the living. In accordance with the objectives of the anthropological encounter, a sensitive, compassionate and transforming experience is aimed at

developing between those who meet in the co-emerging and congruing setting. As argued further on and depicted on the cover, the intercultural exchange does not deepen primarily on the level of words, but deepens by tacitly testifying and nurturing an affinity and co-resonance. In the process, this amounts to an in-depth comprehension of the presuppositions and constituents of the communication, wording and symbolic processes in the common language-bearing group.

### *Feeling affected and questioned*

In what follows, I will briefly lay out my main heedfulness during my stay in Congo. The ideologically and politically charged air had a clear influence on me, both in terms of affect, emotion and questioning. The first period of particular importance was the period of my master studies in philosophy and later in anthropology in Kinshasa (1965 to 1967 and 1969 to 1971), at the dawn of the country's political independence. (I spent the year 1968-1969 at the Catholic University of Louvain). I felt deeply and increasingly affected by the trauma that the colonial intrusion had left on my Jesuit brothers and university peers. As a Belgian, I found the confrontation with the wounds caused by my own nation-state's imposed colonisation to be harrowing. In this context, the unprecedented enthusiasm of the nationals, by then called Zairean citizens, swept me away. With their millenarian call and Recourse to Authenticity (also called Return to Authenticity), along with the thrilling nation-building initiatives, president Mobutu and his Party-State pushed the citizens to once and for all free themselves of colonisation. As a Belgian, a student Jesuit and an anthropologist in the making eager to become part of the everyday lives of the Yakaphones, the colonial trauma and the unforeseeable fate immersing the postcolonial state distressed me greatly (see Devisch 2017b: chapter 2). In May 1971, I left the Jesuit order so that I would have the liberty to properly connect with the Yakaphones' strong preoccupations and to fully engage with their passions. I applied myself to get to know their zest for life, their life-world, their cultural roots and their authentic creativity. I also worked to discover their alienating fates as colonised and conversely to

understand the influence of Mobutu's return/recourse to authenticity, and the abrupt nationalisation of public health care, education, landed property and extractive enterprise owned by foreigners.

From the beginning of 1972 when I started my research in northern Kwaango, the ideological context led my anthropological sensitivity to avoid any political focus, but increasingly attune itself to the aspirations, life-world and way of life of my host society. It was also this context that gave rise to my 'postcolonial' feeling, the feeling of being ethically indebted to my hosts. The recourse to authenticity and the Popular Movement of the Revolution (*Mouvement populaire de la révolution*, MPR) launched by Mobutu, the "father" of the emerging Zairean nation, resonated with me on an intersubjective and intercultural level.

In my anthropological experience, the intercultural encounter conjoined fascination and the momentum of discovery with the responsibility that such a meeting entails. Over the years some sort of alliance has continued to develop between the two dimensions of my double-sided endeavour. There is, on the one hand, the relentless effort to consider, as much as is possible, my empathic experiences and research data from the point of view of my hosts and in terms of the people's characteristics, past and aspirations. On the other hand, I was determined to provide a theoretical reflection on the intercultural enterprise as well as on the epistemological and ethical questions they raise.

The interbodily, intersubjective and cosmocentric modalities of the Yakaphone people's articulation of sensory experience, comprehension and communication made me increasingly sensitive to culture-specific, bodily-felt experiences, epistemologies and modes of knowledge production. The anthropological field method adopted by way of a long- and full-time participant research involvement in the host group leaves neither the anthropologist nor the group unaffected. In the unprecedented welcoming and quite intimate meeting between anthropologist and hosts, intuitive insight and empathic comprehension make those involved feel themselves to be affected in their body and the largely unnameable agencies that thrive on the mood of the direct interaction and the unfolding perspective. Unsettling experiences in the exploration through

intercultural contact can sharpen the body's responsiveness to affects, as well as the senses (Classen 1993, Geurts 2003), emotions and perceptual regimes in a community. These unpredictable and multifarious encounters urge — in the terms of Elisabeth Hsu characterising my approach — the “doing away with the artificiality of studying either semantics (meaning/knowledge) or pragmatics (doing/action)” (Hsu 2012: 57).

From 1986 onwards, my annual research stays in Kinshasa confronted me with the intense bitterness of the Yakaphones' exclusion from modernity and stirred serious questions within myself. This bitterness intensified during the 1980s and 1990s, decades that were marked by catastrophic monetary hyperinflation and the abuses of the state's underpaid civil servants. In September 1991 and January-February 1993, Kinshasa was struck by the same wave of violent and destructive uprisings that was also washing over other big cities in the country. (I was a witness and indirect victim of the uprisings.) Members of all segments of Kinshasa's population got involved in the protests, which I qualified as *luddite* or proletarian revolts (see chapter 4). Shortly following these events, the slum dwellers noted a “villagisation” of their environment; by and large, they were referring to a feeling of intensified community solidarity. Concretely, the neighbourhoods started to organise a network of guards that systemically surveilled the comings and goings of residents, visitors and government officials. Small clusters of neighbouring dwelling units wanting to ensure security and hoping to maximise their odds in the struggle for survival started to establish various systems of solidarity, in particular sharing their bits of staple foods most essential for their children's growth. Groups of men started draining the marshlands in order to improve the life of squatters. A number of women lined avenues with crops, or developed a small agricultural production outside of the city and collected fuel at ever further distances from their dwellings.

During this period, employment was rare and living conditions were precarious in the suburbs and slums; many earned less than one dollar US per day, the cost of two loaves of bread. Men and women bought second hand clothes that were shipped in bulk from Europe. Mobile phones flooded Kinshasa around 2001. Disenchanted by their socio-economic exclusion, many highly

qualified individuals remaining jobless were flocking to neopentecostal churches and healing communes of the sacred spirit in order to exorcise their alienation and miserable living conditions by way of parody (Devisch 2017: chapter 6). Here, celebrations in the name of the sacred spirit were echoing the ingenious and sophisticated musical styles of Kinshasa's artists, as well as the way in which they subtly twist the French language, labelled "*cadavérisation*" in the Kinshasa French. This way, members of the churches and communes, artists as well as their fans appropriated the global code, that was impressed upon them by the coloniser through education and mass media. They tailored it to their own local needs, transforming it into a global element that unified both the global and local. Sexual exploits in bars and nightclubs, as well as fashion "made in Kinshasa" — meaning tailored in Paris, London or Brussels — worn by an exclusive circle of Kinshasa's dandies, was spoofing the spectacle of deception of the rich and privileged (see chapter 4). I dare hypothesise that in the beginning of the 1990s, this parody turned into blind destructiveness during the popular uprisings.

### *Ethical commitment and shared humanity*

As a young anthropologist, I set out to have an encompassing and symmetrical relation of equality with the most significant members of my host society, the Yakaphone people. On an interpersonal level, I intended to be, if possible, on equal footing with my counterpart. Bound by such an alliance, the anthropologist and her counterpart end up in a situation of complicity; they are accomplices unified to such an extent that divergence is eclipsed. In retrospect, the most relevant question is the following: how did the anthropologist and the host society reach some degree of mutual understanding about the complex Yaka universe? How did we deal with the unprecedented fact that a white person from the former colonising nation-state initiated this quest? Could such an alliance result in the transcultural?

Taking part in daily practical activities during my first months in Yitaanda village, I quickly felt a kind of resonance with my host group, just as with the surrounding environment that had welcomed



me and that I was experiencing intimately in dreams, attractions, or overwhelming anxiety. Above all, I felt encouraged to commit all the sensitivity of my flesh (*chair, Leib*) in my understanding of the emotions, the motivations and existential quests of the people who welcomed me. The alliance I had looked for was built through warm and diligent interviews rather than through formal declarations. When I arrived, the dramatic death of the head of the Taanda group determined my place in the collective imaginary (see Devisch 2017b: chapters 4 & 5; thesaurus). The first months, I was associated with events that signalled the paroxysmal ruptures caused by chief Taanda's loss of authority and death, as well as with negotiations and procedures related to the rebirth of the bereaved society and local universe of the living. Along the way, my investigation was moving toward the affliction and healing cults, along with ritual practices that were used to contain the forces of sorcery and bad fate that may further disconcert such crisis. I attended the palavers that applied the oracle's analysis of the chief's death (and the deaths of others) in view of revitalising the sociocultural fabric of the bereaved. Such experiences forced me to clear the epistemological methodology involved. All of this thoroughly transformed my existential vision and my valuation of metaphysical Western-centric theories that I ran across during my MA in philosophy and MA in sociology-anthropology.

I had the privilege to regularly meet with family heads, judges, priests of affliction and healing cults as well as male and female diviners from the shamanic tradition who generally spoke to me in truth and confidence. They helped me to contextually comprehend the hosts' intuitive and imaginative feel-thinking, categorical determinations and conceptual assumptions. In contexts of conflict or social untying, they delighted me with ritual processes and their remobilisation of significant structures of affects, senses, feelings, gestures and other bodily experiences, which they put into play efficiently. This giving and taking solidified our alliance and was accompanied by a feeling of heavy debt towards the host society and a longing for authenticity in my research reports and accounts of experiences.

As the reader may surmise, this type of alliance that I envisaged with my host group was an offshoot of a number of questions that



played on my mind throughout my research and up to today. Is it possible for an anthropologist to be adopted by a culturally other group and be regarded as a guest or member of the group; or does she in essence remain a stranger? Should the anthropologist become a spokesperson on behalf of the host group, or is she primarily an intercultural interpreter, hence a go-between? In her writings, who is actually speaking, from where and for whom? What does it mean to grant authority to her words or writing? And to what extent can it be said that the anthropologist bridges the unthought and unspoken that marks the emotions and pressing concerns, next to some basic presuppositions and unquestionable truths in both the host group and the anthropologist's society and culture of origin and education?

I now come back to the incisive questioning of my anthropological quest, which I reported at the beginning of this chapter. Here is how I formulated an initial response at the 1986 colloquium by the CERA in Kinshasa (*Cahiers des religions africaines* 1993-94), attended by some 150 persons, including many senior members of the catholic clergy and, most likely, by some agents of the regime's secret service agents. I had arrived in Kinshasa less than a week previously. At that time, president Mobutu's autocratic party-state was on the wane, partly due to economic inflation. It was as though the attendants were particularly anxious and cautious to avoid any selfquestioning or groundbreaking debate. The following witnessing of my alliance with local healers appeared untimely if not uncanny:

“After twelve years of absence from the Congo, I would like to further clarify my positioning as a researcher among Yakaphone people, as I did yesterday in Bumbu when provoked by the cult healer Kha Lusuungu. I will try to do so by associating myself with the Yaka widower: he ends his mourning by paying a visit to his maternal uncle or mother's brother. Indeed, it is prescribed that at this visit he offers ‘palm wine’ — that is, a share of the gifts he received by way of condolences, majored by a portion of the proceeds from his basket weaving or other handicraft in the funeral house.”

He does so in the following coded terms:

Nge ngwaasi, tala malafu wusa kumina kumbika meni. / Uncle, here is your share of the palm wine that was offered me [as a mortuary compensation]. With this gift I terminate my period of mourning. / Taa yisalu kyaama, yibitsatsala. / Here is what I have produced and I hasten to share it with you. / Wapheka bimenga. / Please offer me the meal of familial communion” (cf Devisch & de Mahieu 1979: 137-138).

As a matter of fact, my anthropological experience in northern Kwaango in the 1970s was marked by my own bereavement with regard to a good number of presuppositions and self-evident truths which I had inherited through my natal Flemish culture. My stay in Kwaango sharpened my sensitivity to people’s pre-reflective bodily sensitivity and methods of attuning to one another and to the world of spirits. My address at the colloquium was an initial attempt to handle my ethical debt:

“As a sign of recognition to you, my Kwaangoese hosts, I would like to bequeath you with my anthropological writings in the hope that they may contribute in some way to strengthening your pride and that of your descendants. May the intercultural exchange, to which my writings testify, help to compensate for the moral debt that I have incurred as a guest while drawing from the intimate springs of your culture”.

It is important to note that in Yaka society and culture, based on orality and direct contact which is not facilitated by technology, the encounter occurs first on the interbodily level. Initially, my experience of this contact was often an unreflected one, sometimes tinted with a glare, sometimes with confusion or a misconception impossible to trace or prevent, given the innermost (or intrasubjective) and sociocultural otherness differentiating my guests from myself, the young anthropologist. Here, I refer to the meetings I organised in Taanda in particular, meetings that I could only begin to understand in a circumstantial way after months of learning the language, the cultural values and the verbal and nonverbal forms

of communication. These were meetings that had the potential to attain the transcultural and the panhuman. These experiences, orchestrated by healer-priests of affliction cults and dealing with information of the initiatory type, took place in a spirit of consensual exchange, but could in some respects have been considered to be too forced or inappropriate because of my foreign background and thus my inability to be verbally initiated in such a cult. In any case, these were benevolent meetings lacking an agreed leader, meetings which manifested as very committed, although likely to run out of words or result in the consciousness on both sides of a point of the unspeakable in the very heart of an intensely shared humanity.

Moreover, during these intercultural encounters, my Yakaphone interlocutors and me, we experienced the unspeakable that was particularising the strangeness or extimacy within each of us (see thesaurus). The unspeakable or untellable covered latent axioms or what was a priori implied yet unmentionable in their life-style and worldview. It seemed to me that, when having arrived at the core of a paradox or something unnameable within the family or authority institution, or relating to an affliction or trauma associated with ancestors or witchcraft, all interpretative verbal cognition ended up failing. The unknown or the unspeakable was then punctuated by a respectful silence. Interspersed with smiles, this zero point dissolved with the formal sharing of palm wine, signifying the end of the meeting, via the simple expressions of thanks and farewell uttered by the person serving the wine.

Let us now expand the approach. Our unconscious desire, inclination, interests, dreams and longings, just like our suffering, disgust and resentment have an interbodily and intrasubjective as well as intersubjective dimension. They are traversed by a hallucinatory and unconscious debate with underlying phantasms. During actual encounters, we can unconsciously transfer our anguish, vulnerability, aversion, sympathy or passion to our guests in a contactual transference or co-resonance. Before we were born, we were dreamed and imagined by our parents or affected by certain aspects of their desire, obsessions and unfulfilled ambitions and traumas that they in turn had unknowingly inherited too from their parents and close family.

Thoughts from Didier Anzieu (1984, 1987), the later Lacan, René Kaës and co-authors (Kaës *et al.* 1998), as well as from Wim van Binsbergen (1991, 2003, 2016), can help us to unravel the unconscious but culturally shaped, imaginary dimension of our cultural self as it unfolds in the intercultural encounter. The cultural self — both of the anthropologist and the host group's members — is transmitted and shaped, among other things, by the parental culture and that of the local society, including the mother tongue (possibly alternated by that of other close persons). It is equally passed on through the maternal, parental, family and residential group, as well as by affects and drives, desire and dreams, phantasms and unconscious motions. Moreover, the determining culture comprises the habitual dispositions, perceptions and images, thoughts and shared tasks.

Intense intercultural encounter ensues from the attentiveness to cultural differences as well as from the unthought and unspoken in the family and residential group. The thoughtful experience of the transcultural ensues from the intercultural. The anthropologist will, for sure, experience how the hope she places in intercultural encounter unfolds with the help of the host group's members, but not by pushy, impatient or transverse behaviour. Its at times perplexing effect, possibly triggering a regressive dimension, may stem less from the cultural other than from the emotion, anxiety or agitation gripping the body of the one involved, be it the anthropologist or anyone else. For example, detailed information on witchcraft can be disconcerting and deeply affect client and priest-healer, anthropologist and host alike. The long silence on the part of the ritual specialist and anthropologist on such occasions is the enactment of a reservation, a fear or anxiety.

In retrospect, my reflexivity suggests that my privileged relationship with some diviners and a cult's priests-healers made them sense something in me that affected them as much as it did me. I wonder if the unwavering remembrance of suffering, which can be traced back to my childhood came into resonance with the diviner's traumatic experiences and compassion as it is at play when she professionally proceeds to disclose (*-dibudika*) the client's predominant affects, emotions and bad fate or affliction. This question opens up other ones. Indeed, whose field of ambivalent

desire — both vital and toxic — is the diviner about to bring out: is it that of the afflicted, the consultant, the maternal uncle or the agnatic elders? Is the mutual admiration and openness to strangeness, in my interlocutors and myself, nurtured by the shared consciousness of this fluid and unspeakable dimension of otherness and extimacy? Does the awareness of being allies also rest upon what is destined to remain largely unconscious and indescribable?

### *The Yakaphone people*

Yakaphone society is part of the northwestern border of the vast politico-cultural Luunda kingdom, to which among others belong the Ndembu (Turner 1968) and Nkoya of Zambia (van Binsbergen 1992), as well the Luunda of southern Kwaango (De Boeck 1991, 1994). Shared location, language, history and customary rule are used as criteria to define the Yaka or Yakaphones. They live in the vast expanses of the southern savannah in the borderland with Angola. The Yakaphones consider themselves as a united society under the authority of the paramount Kyaambvu and a dozen sovereign chiefs allied to him as younger brothers, each governing a region (Devisch & Brodeur 1999). Present day Yaka society and culture are thus the product of prolonged political and cultural influence of the Luunda to the south, and the Koongo to the north. The Yakaphones of Kwaango — also called Kwaango land or Kwaango region — may be estimated at about 800,000 (de Saint Moulin 2006 & Personal communication September 2016).

The Taanda settlement of villages (comprising some 1,300 persons) is located in north Kwaango land, an hour's walk from the Waamba River, west of Mosaamba as centre of the thus called “administrative sector”. In DR Congo's administrative idiom, the “administrative district of Kwango” exceeds Yaka land (and the diocese of Popokabaka) by three territories; namely, those of Kimvula in the north and of Feshi and Kahemba in the south (Plate 1). Yaka land covers an area that is 1.5 times the size of Belgium; the administrative district of Kwango is twice that of Yaka land. In the border zone of Kwaango land, several hundred thousand of people speak Yaka or some akin language (such as Koongo or Suku), but withstand the authority of Luunda political traditions and the paramount ruler.

The stability of marital relations in the Kwaango region among others results from the gender hierarchy that lies at the core of the local world order. This order is basically fuelled by a collective imaginary with regard to the gender division of the reproductive tasks in the family group. All women are expected to become mother and take on the responsibility not only for childbirth and upbringing (with, on average, three or four children per family), but also for the arduous tasks of subsistence farming and of daily nourishment of the close family. Fishing and the seasonal collection of insects and fungi, next to the manual hunting for reptiles, mice, mole rats and cane rats are a female activity, complementing the small-scale agriculture (cassava, beans, peanuts, corn, spices) generally providing only low yields. The much-touted preserves of male production entail engendering offspring, house-building, clearing fields for agriculture, occasional hunting and furnishing the requisite firewood. It is up to the bridegroom, and later the husband, to come up with the capital (in the 1990s equivalent to one year of minimum wage), to be invested into the matrimonial reserve of the bride's patrilan. A similar amount is needed for clothes and household utensils for the newly married. It is up to senior men in the residential group to ensure the new family unit's social reproduction by means of palaver and ritual procedures such as gift giving and protection, initiation or cure. Despite the fact that a quarter or more of the younger generation of males migrates to Kinshasa in search of cash, the daily sustenance of the Yakaphone population is increasingly precarious.

Yakaphone society is based on a bilinear kinship system. The individual — representing a node in family relations — is at the intersection of both the patrilineal line and the uterine progeny. The patrilineal line of rights and privileges determines the individual's status or social *persona*. It is through the uterine progeny that the mother bears life. From the agnatic point of view, it is the *genitor* who is valued for his “erectile and fertilising power” (*keboondzu ye ngolu<sup>A</sup>*). The patrilineal society organises itself into minimally hierarchical and centralised patrilineages. The lineage (*yikbanda*, *yitaata*) includes all individuals who, by means of agnatic filiation, link their distant ancestry (*kaanda*) to the same founding ancestor of the patrilineage as well as to the primordial founders (*bakhaaka*)

of the local society. Just like the foliage of a tree that overshadows a meeting, the common ancestry covers the members of the same name lineage (*phu*, literally, head covering). Generally, members of the same lineage inhabit a common territory, following the principles of virilocal household residence and of lineage segmentation to the rhythm of successive generations.

The uterine bond that ties each person to her or his mother, mother's mother, maternal grand- and great-grandmother, as well as other close maternal relatives, represents a life-regenerative tie with the chthonic womb of all life. The matrilineal or uterine line does not commemorate any ancestor. It taps from this cyclically self-regenerating cosmic source of all life situated in "the primordial life-spring or womb of the earth" (*ngoongu*). It is cosmologically, but not strictly geographically, associated with the wellspring of the Waamba river which drains the eastern side of the Kwaango region of its rain. The mythical stock of the highly vitalising kaolin-like clay (*pheemba*) is closely associated with this wellspring. Drawing from this source through the veins of maternal life, the mother transmits the soft body parts: the organs, the blood, the innate physical traits and the individual gifts or flaws, as well as the singular physiognomy (*yibutukulu*). The tree — with its roots in the earth, its foot, its trunk and its branches — inspires the underlying metaphor of uterine reproduction: each branch stems from an alliance for which a patrilineal group has given a woman in marriage to another patrilineal group in order to transmit life there. In counterpart to the reproductive capacity that the mother brings to the husband's household and in order to sustain the life of the bride and her descendants, gifts are given by the husband's patrilineage at each stage — puberty, marriage, pregnancy, status promotion, initiation ritual and death. This way, compensations (mainly white fabrics) are gifted to the uterine lifegivers.

Even though half of the Kwaangoese people have taken advantage of elementary school education over the recent decades, it is important to acknowledge that, since the late 1980s at least, rural areas have increasingly been bereft of good educational opportunities. For example, aside from the bible, one can hardly find any newspapers or books in rural areas. It is fair to say that literacy in the Kwaango region has not been a mutational force and has failed to



take hold of the society at the level of its sociocultural foundations and its basic beliefs. Although there are no recent statistical data regarding religious affiliations in the Kwaango region, it can be estimated that nowadays, half of its population self-defines as christian, having either been baptised at school age or having joined a neopentecostal church movement thereafter. The bureaucratic state slowly permeates the Kwaango region, primarily through civil services and schools, as well as through men's stays in Kinshasa. Mercantile imports such as corrugated metal sheets, cement, beer, and imported mass consumer goods are also slowly becoming common, but at high prices due to the transport from Kinshasa.

In the flow of daily life, village people put a great deal of care in attuning their conduct and activities to the habitual reproductive, health seeking and transformational objectives, be they sexual, alimentary, agricultural or technical. They consider the lunar or seasonal recycling of life-forms to reverberate in the local group's vitality. In other words, a person's feelings and sensations, perceptions and representations, thinking and speech tend to deeply resonate with the daily social and ecological processes. More concretely, an individual's and kin-group's rhythm and reproductive activities, as well as funerals and ancestral cult, develop in tandem with people's local life-world or universe of the living. Here, there is no hierarchical modern nature/culture divide at stake. Instead, these realms are organised along a continuum; culture, after all, is a part of nature. The individual's life-force, bodily-felt experience and commitments are intrinsically geared toward enhancing the interrelations and interspecies resonance with the many modalities of life at play at multiple levels. Space and time are not uniform categories but are moulded by, and adapt to, the changing interactions, relational moods and properties of the actors and context.

Following political independence in 1960 and over the course of just a few years, a significant number of men from the Kwaango region moved to Kinshasa, settling in shanty towns. They were in search of a modest income as *pousse-pousseurs* (pushing hand-driven carts), motorcar guards, night guards or as helpers in construction yards. Some managed to build a rudimentary house amidst kin. Others returned to their home village after a couple of years, having



earned just enough money to purchase clothing and a few tools for their own use or to meet the terms of matrimonial or funeral transactions. From the late 1970s onwards, those Kwaangolese who managed to achieve secondary education migrated to Kinshasa in search of modern, urban opportunities. In doing so, most educated youngsters severed their ties with the rural world of their youth.

Around the turn of the millennium, Yakaphone people, of whom there are now at least half a million in Kinshasa, live primarily in ethnocultural clusters in unplanned zones or townships beyond the indigenous *cité* of colonial times. These poor zones with large clusters of Yakaphones include Bumbu to the north, or Mbanza Lemba, Ngaba and Selembao to the south, as well as Ngaliema-Camp Luka to the east, and Masina and Kimbanseke to the west. The houses in these zones are usually rudimentary, constructed with breezeblock walls and tin roofs, containing two or three small rooms. These squatting areas are still without some of the most basic urban services. Kerosene lamps are the only source of light, cooking is done on charcoal fires and water is drawn either from a nearby watercourse or from shallow wells near one's dwelling. Around 1986, the major streets of the unplanned zones became connected to the electric lines and water mains, but even today, paved roads, sewage and sanitary systems, piped water supply are hardly provided. Only a few homes along these streets have electricity. Today, Ngaliema-Camp Luka, for example, still resembles an immense village with its unfenced lots, numerous unfinished homes and many roads inaccessible to motor vehicles. Shelters built on hillsides subject to serious erosion are in danger of being washed away by the heavy rains from February to April. Masina and Ngaliema-Camp Luka have the lowest proportion of residents with educational and employment qualifications in Kinshasa. In 1976, 46.6 per cent of the populace of Masina was described as being illiterate; today, the estimate is even higher. Masina is nicknamed the People's Republic of China because of its dense settlement.

Since the 1990s, the harsh experience of most emigrants from Kwaango, stranded in these poverty-stricken shanty towns, is one of joblessness and miserable living conditions. Youths engage in small practices of acquisition and survival such as participating in the predatory economy of the street, a common euphemism for

petty theft (Devisch 1995a). Early immigrants, now in their fifties or sixties, report that they increasingly find themselves to be confronted with these youths' so-called possessive individualism, waning family solidarity and insubordination, all labelled as diseases of the city. Female vendors sell small quantities of daily essentials from their makeshift stands on each street corner: bread, cassava flour, vegetables, peanuts, fish, sugar, milk, fruits and cola nuts. Modest quantities of firewood or charcoal, nails, pieces of board, grass for mattresses or mats, and similar goods are also for sale. In most of Kinshasa's townships, each family has its own shady fruit tree. Word-of-mouth communication, popularly called *radio-trottoir* (literally, sidewalk-radio), broadcasts both information and rumour to the entire neighbourhood. In this way, a newcomer will quickly trace a relative or an acquaintance prepared to offer hospitality or help, namely a chair or a mat for sleeping.

Rural and urban residents seem to mutually develop both continuity and polarity in their lifestyles, social imaginary and symbolic categories. Since the 1970s, there have been increasing exchanges from the rural area and its small towns to the city and vice versa. These concern material as well as symbolic means of livelihoods, especially when it comes to the pursuit of health or the appeasement of the deceased. Respected senior women or matrons in the Kwaango region have set up local associations to mobilise young people to work as commuter-traffickers of locally produced cassava, groundnuts, maize and charcoal; these are primarily provided at below-market prices to emigrated family members.

From the 1990s onwards, the unsettling life conditions notwithstanding, people in the suburbs and shanty towns dream of connecting their living modes to global conjunctions. The modern-minded aim at enrolling in Western-derived education, speaking the lingua franca of Lingala or even the national language of French. But the majority of deprived Kinois, among whom a great many Yakaphone slum dwellers, are certainly undergoing a process of profound self-questioning with regard to the contradictions in which they feel themselves caught. They are still facing an alienating colonial past following the political independence succeeded by the rise of a predatory state (Bayart 1989), unreliable civil services and the "politics of the belly".

Fascinated by global developments and yet disappointed by the capitalist forces, an increasing number of destitute people join independent neopentecostal churches or communes of the sacred spirit (Devisch 2016b: chapter 6) to air their bitterness regarding the ruinous monetary hyperinflation and abusive state officials. Initially, the rapidly growing mass of members feel particularly adopted by the elaborate communal rejoicing in the name of the sacred spirit. Having come into ecstatic contact with the sacred spirit, the prophet and pastors ostracise the “children of darkness” in the local community because of their hedonistic life-styles and sexually loose habits. Their sermons associate the increasing class division, as well as the so-called obsolete customs in the villages with satan. In this manichean-like vision, the communes moreover reject the missionary’s redeeming outlook on the converts’ adversities or even openly attack this view as inspired by satan.

## Reciprocal anthropology and innovative research

### *Reversal of perspectives: seeing here from there*

In this section, I outline in three steps the desire, affects, feelings and emotions, as well as the values, attitudes and assumptions that link my experience in the Yakaphone environment (and other African contexts) to my being-in-the-world in my natal, parental and professional Flemish speaking environment.

Firstly, from the 1980s, my experience and research in Africa strongly affected my anthropology courses taught at MA level at the University of Leuven. This resonance led me to revisit, from a Yaka point of view, both my natal Flemish society and my local universe. This triggered in me an anthropological reflexivity and the reconsideration of memories from my childhood and my youth (I was born in 1944). The African experience and the reversal of perspectives of ‘there’ as if ‘here’ was seen from ‘out there’, allowed me to discover the repressive and alienating dynamics at play in the rural Flemish-speaking society of my youth.

It also represented an unexpected revelation of blind violence between civilisations and prejudicial thinking in the Western colonial enterprise. The further I walked down this intriguing path of violence, the more I felt questioned by the untellable distress that

the first and second world war buried deeply in my own family's memory. I understood the importance of looking at the present from the past, the 'here' from 'there' and back. Specifically, from the 1980s onwards, my perspectivist and reflective positioning allowed me to approach my youth's Flemish socioculture from the Yakaphones' perspectives, elucidating the linked attitudes, values and presuppositions from a new point of view. Anthropology only rarely discusses and clarifies these interlinkages. Gradually, I realised that my interest in health research was rooted in an unconscious desire to clarify intolerable trauma in my family past. At the same time, I fostered the wish to counteract the ideological stereotypes and inequities of subordination that were prevalent in my natal environment. In the time leading up to my youth, members of my family and people from its wider circle found themselves blatantly subordinated and alienated by the local Francophone bourgeoisie.

Secondly, thanks to my annual stays with the Yakaphones in Kinshasa, I continuously and self-critically reviewed and expanded my theoretical and methodological toolkit in order to account to the best of my abilities for my experience in Africa, and thus conversely my experience in Flanders. This effort was inspired by the experiential and intersubjective phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty, which is sensitive to the given experience (of a sensory, bodily and intersubjective nature) and adopts a plurality of perspectives. This approach makes it easier to adjust to the local universe of the living and epistemology of the host society. Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology does not oppose interiority with exteriority, the subject with the world, the visible with the invisible, matter with thought. It grasps the being in its local universe, and particularly the reversibility (chiasmus, to paraphrase Merleau-Ponty) of the seeing and the visible, the touching and the tangible. Rather than being an approach of participatory observation, phenomenological anthropology focuses on the situated experience of the human being (*in casu* of the anthropologist and of the host) eventually indistinguishably merging with the motion of the experience. It concerns the "flesh" (*chair*) at the point of quasi-overlap and of intersection, the very moment where the touching is about to become tangible, the sensitive about to become sensing, a surface about to be covered by an expansive touch or look.

Thus, the encounter develops conscience and history in a kind of internal refolding, infoliation, invagination, *connaissance* (in the sense of *co-naissance*, literally co-birth). Wanting to observe and see — in the phenomenological sense of Merleau-Ponty — is to renounce becoming the impartial spectator that hovers above the universe of local life. This approach allows our counterpart to remain what she is and allows us to actively work with her in our encounter. It involves understanding culture as a web of filaments, mycelia, a texture that is still in the making, while drawing from the fibres of tradition. Its making requires our creative engagement. From the Yakaphones' perspective, the tradition that is rooted in the ancient world is not a past long gone, but a past that envelops and orients us. Such a phenomenological approach also helps to trace the interpersonal transference, even if pre-reflective, of inhibiting or enchanting affects, as well as the ethical implication that develops between the anthropologist and host group.

The adopted perspectivist approach, inspired from Merleau-Ponty, is developed primarily by researchers in Native American and Siberian region respectively, such as Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (2004) and Rane Willerslev (2007). It is sensitive to the pre-reflective experience of being-in-the-world that affects the body-subject and the meaningful interaction at play between human beings and other living beings. Perspectivism gives a better overview of the human being's universe on the level of the flesh, that is to say as a sensitive, desiring and involved being-in-the-world. In this context, perception is a fact of the body-subject that is part of the local universe of the living, experienced from multiple positions.

In addition, a senior colleague from philosophy convinced me in the early 1980s to deepen my insight in my anthropological endeavour by engaging in a didactic psychoanalysis — in affiliation with the Belgian School of (Lacanian) Psychoanalysis. Some subsequent psychoanalytical clinician work in Flanders indirectly helped me to look back at my anthropological work and the rich transferential effect that it yields between hosts and researcher, and most forcefully in the unsettling, but hardly reflective encounter with a great deal of unthought in people's thoughts. I hasten to say that throughout that self-critical examination and reflexivity on my situated scholarship as anthropologist, I lastingly try to forestall and outgrow

any Freudian-like reductionist stake hastily stereotyped as basically focusing on the supposed childhood traumas sharpened by the oedipal triangulation. As ethnographer, I never positioned myself as a clinician, nor aimed at inducing transformation in people's thoughts or consciousness. No any research focus and process was based on a psychoanalytic theory. For sure, in my recent writing, I turn to the 'later Lacan' and the post-Lacanian Jacques-Alain Miller (1996, 2007, 2009, 2010) and Bracha Ettinger (2006a) who help me to trace the reciprocal affects of the anthropologist and the host group. Their focus is on the body, the affect, the untellable and the analysand's unveiling of the insisting signifier (in its relation to other signifiers) rather than meaning. They seek to uncover *jouissance* or enjoyment (see thesaurus) as well as of the unconscious ambivalent desire. The latter rouses the transfer. The concerned psychoanalytic look focuses on the emergence of the speaking subject through her search for words which may surprise and let her desire emerge.

Prompted by this interdisciplinary perspective, I developed an auto-anthropological reflexivity on my work and the transference effect that the meeting with the cultural other induced between the researcher and key persons of the host society. My anthropological experience taught me to what extent such transfer is in play on the incorporeal and intersubjective level, with more force in the thoughtless feeling of the affects, senses and emotions.

Thirdly, between 1979 and 1986, my applied medical anthropological — or anthropology of health — undertakings in Flanders involved training of some psychiatrists and family physicians (responsible for the academic training of their younger colleagues at the Department of Psychiatry or the Centre for Family Medicine, University of Antwerp). It involved the training in healing skills suitable for working in a culturally sensitive way with chronic — particularly epigastric and epileptic-like — health seekers with Mediterranean or Belgian roots (Devisch 1988 1990b, 1993a, 2011). Türkan Turuthan, Antoine Gailly and myself created self-help groups in Brussels for Belgian-Turkish mothers suffering from epileptic-like fits (Devisch 2011, Devisch & Gailly 1985). The same doctors who had health seekers of other cultural origin in Antwerp and Brussels, invited me to make them aware of this approach. It is

important to note that at that time, up to 10 per cent of family physicians' consultations took place in the family's homes, thus granting the doctor a privileged insight into the family's history and life universe.

The support I gave to the academic centres for Family Medicine and Psychiatry was drawing on the ways in which affliction and healing cults of Kwaango privileged gender specific functions of contact and exchange between the body and the living world. How do these functions of contact and exchange privilege the skin and body care, breathing, food intake, along with the rules of 'purity' in the kitchen and bathroom, as well as the storage of food and household garbage? How do these bodily functions, as well as sexuality and the five senses (touch, smell, hearing, sight and taste) develop into opportunities for contact? In other words, how does culture in a Yakaphone environment value gendered transactions on the level of the three bodies (physical, social and cosmocentric), particularly at the access points of the household and local universe of the living? How and under what conditions do these transactions contribute to a balanced resonance between the body, the group and the life-world, for the good of the people? Conversely, which kinds of transactions cause harmful dysfunction?

In this context, I directed the attention of the academic team of doctors to cultural models and perspectives for deciphering and interpreting, in their culturally specific way, the shape, manifestation, formulation and incidence of certain symptoms. To give an example, male Belgian-Sicilian patients between 30 and 45 years of age approach the general practitioner with five times as many epigastric complaints than comparable native patients. What experiences and what representations of the body is this fact based on? When a Belgian-Moroccan patient of first or second generation immigration background complains of great chronic pain in his right knee, is he not actually expressing a social failure in his fatherhood; that is, an inability to stand tall "with honour" in front of his eldest son, because of loss of erection that is culturally inappropriate to put into words?

With this distinctive look on my natal society and culture as well as on the intercultural encounter, I hope to have contributed to some decolonisation of Orientalism (denounced by Edward Said, 1978); that is to the gradual breakdown of the exoticisation and



othering of the African or other civilisations in the mirror of the injurious Eurocentric colonial gaze. In fact, I aimed at developing a balanced reciprocal anthropology by looking from there to here and back. This led me to think about the anthropologist's ethical commitment to, and alliance with the host society. Departing from the gaze that I acquired in Kwaango, such a reversal of perspective examines what is repressed in the experience of the body, in its borders and in its sensoriality in the Flemish society and culture. Flemish society, all too late, sees itself becoming multicultural since the 1960s with the immigration from African countries turned independent, and of workers from the Maghreb and Turkey displaying Islamic traditions alongside the political debate on voting rights for the second generation (see Devisch 2011c, 2017b: chapter 2).

Fourthly, I have put the reciprocal anthropological gaze at the very core of other heuristic initiatives. There is the Anthropology of the Body course, which I taught at the KU Leuven Department of Anthropology from the 1980s, and finally the study of local knowledge practices. Departing from the insights that I acquired in Kwaango, the reciprocity of perspective between there and here enabled me to enquire after what is being repressed in the bodily experience, senses, borderlinking and bordercrossing in the Flemish social and cultural universes. The course explored the heuristic value of applying major cultural perspectives from southwest Congo to interpreting two mutational periods in Flemish society and culture.

Firstly, the course analysed the profound transformation that took place from the late Middle Ages to the Renaissance and Modern Era. For this enquiry, I also drew on the work of Philippe Ariès, Jean Delumeau, Norbert Elias and Jacques Le Goff among others. By tackling a highly diverse set of spheres of innovation and transformation, such as literacy and painting, surgery and dissection, or upcoming urbanity, dominant patriarchy and its witch-hunts, I suggested that this historical transition led to two major cultural changes. The first concerns the transition from a fundamentally tactile and oral perspective to one that becomes primarily visual. For example, one can find a clear expression of this change in the work of Jheronimus Bosch. The second change regards the predominant modelling of space and time that moved from a cyclical and concentric, matricentric and oral model in the Middle Ages to a



more linear, vertical and differentiating, along with viricentric, hierarchical and oppositional representation of space and time. The manifestation of the human body and body politics, religious scenes and moralising themes as well as cultural landscape elements, architecture and urban design were increasingly centred on the self-aware male, manifesting himself for the gaze of the beholder. Medieval courtesy transformed into modern civility.

Secondly, the course dealt with the body and the hypermodern imaginary that emerged from the 1970s onwards in Western-derived subcultures of artistic expression. It explored the way in which hypermodern media use the transgender body, cyborgs/sheborgs and cyberfeminist praxis, mutant life and queer longing, technobodies and loss of central control, all the while taking into account the posthuman era's growing awareness of human frailty and multiform mutability. The focus here was, among others, on the monster and grotesque along with the flâneur and queer, at the bursting borders of Western multigendered and transgendered body cultures.

The gaze, from there to here and back, brings us face to face with what Western civilisation both represses and masks, but which is felt by a minority and gropingly rendered into images, words, bodily manipulation. Let me say that most doctoral theses written under my direction have subscribed to the perspective developed in this course of Anthropology of the Body.

Finally, the same approach has led me to undertake a comparative study of practices and content of Western scientific knowledge and local knowledge practices in various African societies. In this context, an explorative and comparative study was conducted in 1999 by the late Peter Crossman in six African Universities (Tamale University of Development Studies in northern Ghana, Cheikh Anta Diop University in Dakar, Addis Ababa University, Kampala University, University of Zimbabwe in Harare, University of the Western Cape). The study led to a number of innovative programs tailored to the sensitivity, values and epistemology of the cultures in place, in order to develop an "endogenisation" of the contents and modalities of the education at the local version of a "multiversity" project. This project refers to the historical resources of Ancient (Eastern, Hellenic, Hebraic, Arabic) traditions into the local invention of

what is conventionally labelled as “university”. Its worldwide spread in the twentieth-century went together with Western imperialism and extractive colonisation drawing on applied sciences and technology (Crossman 1999 Crossman & Devisch 2002, Devisch 1999, 2001, Devisch & Nyamnjoh 2011: 273-336).

### *The body-group-world weave*

By way of a first step, let me clarify the perspective of the three bodies by focusing on how the Yakaphone people — like many other related common-language-bearing groups — consider the human body as an interconnecting pattern. They see the body as a confined space, but also as a scene and agent of exchange and reciprocity (Devisch 1984, 1985a, 1985b, 1993a). Over time, the individual’s bodily actions unfold and develop between birth and death. In space, the individual withdraws within the confined expanse of her body and marks it off by her body care and style of dress, particular sense of shame and composure. Yet, the body is also the space through which the individual opens up to others and to the world. The orifices (mouth, nose, ears, eyes, genitals, rectum, breasts, navel, fontanel (“through which the *genitor* is meant to feed the foetus”) and the sensory and communicative functions (smell, touch, hearing and speaking, looking and being seen) serve as media for both the borderlinking and bounding off of mother and child, gendered bodily expression and identity, spatial organisation, such as inside and outside, high and low, front and back and so on.

Each particular society and culture tends to mould the bodily scene of its subjects, and in particular their official transactions, according to its own ‘norm-alising’ patterns. In Yakaphone society and its subsistence mode of living, eating the cooked meal in the evening is by definition a form of communal and symmetrical sharing. By its very nature, eating must be shared equally. Eating circumscribes a space of physical co-presence. It includes that parents and children, squatting in a circle, equally share the meal from the common plate or pot. They are “exhorting each other to partake in the meal” (*-diisasana*, a term composed of the verb *-dya*, to eat, to which is added the causative suffix *-isa* and the suffix *-ana*, indicating reciprocity). This symmetrical reciprocity between parents and

children, who as commensals serve as a common mirror in the conjugal and parental home, also marks the relation between cult initiates. The intimacy of the family meal entails sitting close to one another, coined as *-dyaatasana*, which I would render as “making one another walk in each other’s imprints and sit or squat closely in one another’s shadow”.

However, conjugal intercourse is by its a-symmetrical reciprocity clearly contrasted with the symmetrical commensal intimacy. Conjugal partners are “exciting each other, and consenting to the entwining of one another’s legs” (*-biindasana maalu*); the husband is “the one entitled to open or shut the door” to both the conjugal dwelling and to his reproductive spouse. He is, by custom, taught to lie in bed with his back turned to the door as if to cover, protect and enclose his wife, who lies on the side of the rear wall. The sexual functions are neither interchangeable nor reversible; the husband relates to his wife as penetrating and fecundating the womb correspond to being penetrated and conceive; the conjugal partner lying above relates to the one being underneath, like the one lying on her right side relates to the other lying on his left side, or vice versa.

The human body and its habitual system of dispositions and affects does not only inform the realm of the family meal and the conjugal or parental home, but also acts as a well-articulated and confined space and as a borderlinking one. This bodily pattern confers to the home — particularly through the sharing of meals and the conjugal bed — an integrity that is as vital and inviolate as that of the human body of each of the commensal and marital partners. In return, the intimate commensal and marital reciprocity between the close family members produces, and calls for, the safeguarding of the home. Concretely, this reciprocity turns the domestic realm into a protective and receptive shell which is viewed as a social skin conditioning the health of close family members. Conversely, adulterous relationships violate the intimacy and integrity of the home, at the risk of striking the smallest child with *phalu*, that is, most severe vomiting or dysentery.

In public and society at large, feminine or maternal virtues and manifestations of reciprocity are expected to express “self-restraint, avoidance or shame” (*tsoni*) so as to promote the interactions into a well-confined sharing of vitality, affect and emotion. At

borderspaces at the level of the body and home, women are particularly wary of their own vulnerability and that of their children through “intrusion or encroachment” (*yidyaata*) of something unknown, invisible, unpredictable, heterogeneous or traumatic. It is at the bodily borders, particularly in and around the home, that a person’s shadow — *yiniinga*, literally that which “constantly balances from one side to another” — may play out a very suggestible or impressionable mixing of visible and invisible influences on the self. This is likewise why, for women, the “sense of bodily balance” (*-niinga*, *-niingisa*) is highly valued along with the senses of smell, touch, taste, hearing and tempered sight or gaze. Therefore, great emphasis is placed upon training girls to develop a sense of unpretentious bodily balance, for example, for carrying objects on their heads, such as tubers, firewood, their hoe, a machete or bottle with water. Girls praise one another for their modest play of amiability (*kitoko*) that stirs one another’s zest and delight (*kyeesi*) in life and co-affects one another’s want (*ndzala*) to link up with age-mates.

On the contrary, any mixing of the oral, anal or genital spheres entails some ominous confusion of the body-related polarities of high/low, in/out, front/back, right/left. The mixing is all the more polluting and pathogenic when it occurs in a gendered transition area of the conjugal home; for instance, adultery occurring in the couple’s sleeping space or “at the entrance to the woman’s cassava field”. Any obscene act perpetrated by a man who, for example, exhibits his buttocks in the doorway to a home or defecates there, equals “a chaos-causing disruption” (*mbeembi*) of the basal social and moral order of the local community. This is an obscene act of a man who lost his senses or is beside himself, or who has been bewitched and turns mad. The inhabitants of the homestead feel in danger of a disruption of the official body; for example, the wife who was in the house and witnessed the obscene act runs the risk of becoming “too tied in or too open”, which means she may become unable to conceive or to deliver. Moreover, she or one of her children may find herself mortally afflicted by some exhausting bodily discharge, also labelled as *phalu*.

By way of a second step, let me now consider the perspective of the three bodies. This proves very heuristic for exploring and comprehending people’s manners of thinking and doing, next to

their perspectives on life in all its manifestations and forms of resonance. This heuristic perspective aims at clarifying, from the inside, local people's flexible practical and perceptual regimes, along with their habitual interpretational horizons. It is a multiple perspective or play with perspectives, amongst others, modelled along the root metaphor of interweaving life-forms and which is jointly developing at various levels. The three-fields perspective unravels a major valuing of, or resonance between, the symbolic and imaginary spatial patterning and its transposition from the bodily and social onto the cosmic and vice versa. The masculine and feminine body each provides some major imaginary activity and symbolic thought with each a different repertoire of order and interconnectedness.

The repertoire of order expresses itself by way of a constellation of tangible symbols which both shape and signify the mutual belonging of body, meaning and being in an interweave between the three bodies: (i) the physical body, interbodiliness and senses; (ii) the intersubjective body-self or sociopolitical body; and (iii) the cosmocentric body and life-world. Conceptions of and connective processes involving the body, its limits and orifices (including the senses, breathing, ingestion, excretion, sexual reproduction) offer 'natural' symbols for meaningfully figuring and moulding the relationships between emotions, individual, society and the culturally informed imaginary and symbolic frames. These relationships orient the social and political conditioning, unfolding and controlling, amongst others, of people's sense of relational — socio- and cosmocentric — hierarchy and normalcy. They also orient people's expressions of love and virtue, moral sensibility, good fellowship and exchange, or of distinction, etiquette and hygiene. Conversely, people's rivalry, envy and disability may block this unfolding, and inspire the witchcraft imaginary and its paranoid-like construction of the adversary other and of deviance. Bodily orifices, for example, are the loci of giving and receiving or linking and separating between parent and child, husband and spouse, inside and outside, high and low, front and back. This is very much thought to be analogous with the functions of doors of the house and other thresholds.

Bodily habits, sensations, affects and imaginings are a major source of interaction between body, in-group and world. The

modalities of sociocultural organisation (such as values, religion and cultural identity modelled after one's genealogy and gender identity) maintain their grip on interpersonal behaviour, particularly by means of bodily functions and habits. Think of the habitual conduct between siblings or between children and parents, or vis-à-vis the maternal uncle or grandparent. In Yaka society, the body-self is marked by agnatic descent, uterine filiation and lineage-belonging. This is in particular articulated by procedures such as giving the newborn the dreamed-of name of a forebear whilst remitting it a first gift such as a small blanket for swaddling and thus bordering the baby in the infant-mother contact zone. The culturally modelled nurturing favours certain postures or techniques of caressing and clothing the suckling child. It also moulds the body-subject along the food taboos or the particular speech — its rhythm, melody, tone, emotional expression — shared within the family and residential group. Furthermore, the family culture attaches particular value to the body boundaries through style and rules of conduct. This attention appears, for example, in bodily contact and care, circumcision and tattooing, dress and decoration, or shame and control of impulses, table and bedroom manners, as well as in facilitating the sensorial and sensual, along with the imaginative. This fashioning is most overtly effected by etiquette or prevailing taste and inspiring ritual practices. Common discourse and daily routines in the homestead also mould the sensations and emotive reactions, perceptions and expectations. The familial style and ambience may further determine symptoms that are, to some extent, inherited and pre-modelled through unconscious memory traces, or pre-figured by the familial style of pre-reflective bodily postures, gestural patterns and prevailing moods.

My initial formulation of this three fields' heuristic derived from my astonishment at the mourning rites' effect on the recovery of the bereaved spouse and re-articulation of her life-world (Devisch & de Mahieu 1979, Devisch & Brodeur 1999: chapter 5). Mourning rites start by undoing the corpse of all sociopolitical tokens and any hereditary marks that might be transmitted, such as the lineage name, regalia, or professional and artistic skills. Moreover, they also cleanse the corpse of any negative effect on the descendants, such as any curses the recently deceased could have pronounced or any

of her inimical traits. Stated more broadly, funeral rites and affliction and healing cults, alongside daily reproductive practices, mobilise those concerned to interconnect their sensory and broader bodily aptitudes and habitual dispositions into an interbodily complicity with fellow humans as well as an interspecies and interworld reverberation. They clearly distinguish an ill-bearing dissonance from a health promoting consonance, which both rest on a reverberation between fields of shared experience and co-affecting.

*Towards an ontology of resonance and co-naturality*

The third methodological stance regards the culture-specific ontological perspectivism proper to the Yaka and Bantu-African genius. It rests on the axiom regarding a reciprocity of perspective between familiar life-forms, thereby implying a co-naturality and co-resonance of life-forms in the local universe of the living. Yakaphones consider that intertwining force fields of activation and vitality are animating their living and breathing world with its well-known animals, plants, spirits and useful objects. The ontological perspectivism helps to comprehend people's, in particular women's, astounding energy, resistance and resilience, and conversely the marked discouragement or even resentment of the afflicted. The ontology inspires their propensity toward effecting some subjectification or personification of familiar agencies in the world they inhabit. The metaphor of interweaving (thoroughly analysed in Devisch 1993a) goes with the collective imaginary regarding the forces which some cult healers are said to mobilise for animating particular life-forms and even effecting some exchange of form. The latter depends on the reciprocal commutation and mirroring, for example, between the hunter and the spotted animal; it may evolve in the hunter's receptive cast on the verge of exchanging position, perspective and form with the animal.

The affliction and healing cult, called *ndzaambi* celebrates the primary order that unfolds as society's originary space-time (*mu yitsi kbulu*). This cult magnifies the primary womb-like source of uterine life at the earth's core (*ngoongu*). The *ndzaambi* statuette is formed into an intricate composite of bird-animal-human attributes, with a body hatching out of a primeval rock-like base that is carved along



a pattern which unites rhythmic and geometrical figurations (Plate 2). It thereby quite adequately depicts the interworld stirring up of the afflicted in her state of possession, with its blockages and potentialities, while mobilising the forces that can exorcise or avert this disruptive state to her benefit and that of her group, along with the local world of the living which she belongs to.

However, such possible combination or exchange of forms is thwarted by basic ambivalence. Life's interconnectivity is both one of enhancing the uterine life-flow and agnatic life-forces, as well as one of potentially hampering or even undermining life's force fields. For example, according to Yakaphone people's collective imaginary, betwixt-and-between zones, objects and phenomena, particularly shadowy, messy or frightening ones entailing an attack on sight, may almost contagiously transfer a lethally bewitching blockage or confusion of body functions and the body-self onto the vulnerable person.

Positively, a propitious resonance between life-spheres, together with a stirring reciprocity of perspectives between life-forms, are beneficially called upon by at least three categories of actors and agencies in Yakaphone society. Firstly and most naturally, people in the flow of daily life seek to attune themselves to the surrounding reproductive and health promoting processes or agencies, be they sexual, alimentary, agricultural or technical. They consider that the lunar or seasonal recycling and enhancing of the co-naturality of life-forms reverberate in the vitality of the kin and local group, and also in the reproduction of animals in the savannah and forest, alike in the produce of women's fields. On their side, contentions of the local ontology lead the family to submit any major affliction to divinatory scrutiny and healing. Secondly, it is supposed that whatever a priest, elder, hunter, craftsman, cook or other gifted person or agency undertakes, this should be in tune with the ontology of co-naturality, reverberation and reciprocity of perspective. People believe that this reciprocity may extend an anthropomorphic or animal quality onto some physical, emotional, social or moral dimension. Similarly, the point of view, the intention or empowering words or forces that the agency possesses are able to effect some invisible subjectification of objects. That is to say that the agency may act as a site of interspecies metamorphosis or exchangeability



of perspectives. Thus the empowering words may subjectify and animate some medium of sorcerous forces (a so-called fetish) into a desiring, envious and wilful or person-like agency. I borrow the notion of subjectification from Eduardo Viveiros de Castro's characterisation of the Amazonian anthropomorphic animism, perspectivist multinaturalism and concern with interspecies exchangeability or transformability (Viveiros de Castro 2004, 2012; Wagner 2015: 319). Priests and sorcerers may fabricate these agencies of sorcerous forces, as if the latter were becoming a bullet, by loading or charging them with a spirit, even most exceptionally with the murderous power of lightening. The user may transfer her own well-wishing or malevolent intention into the agency of sorcerous forces (see Devisch 2017b: chapter 7). Thirdly and inversely, cult members may come to incorporate some life-enhancing or life-deflating properties from their totemic animals, plants or objects.

### *A matrixial understanding of subjectification*

A fourth methodological stance takes up some of Bracha Ettinger's *matrixial* psychoanalytic theory (Ettinger 2006a, b, c, 2007; thesaurus) as it offers an intercultural lens for taking account of the plural work of local culture. More specifically, Ettinger's subtle matrixial theory may inspire an innovative heuristic perspective, first on forms and modes of life-bearing relatedness or co-implication such as in the intercultural encounter, and second on interspecies transformation. The latter is able to operate and intensify the aforementioned subjectification of life-forms, agencies and objects. Ettinger's theorising regarding the matrixial, that is the subconscious pre-and post-natal infant-mother resonance (see thesaurus) has proven very useful in my effort to properly understand Yakaphone people's deep sense of attunement to, and empathic osmosis with the vital processes of borderlinking with the other.

The mode of anthropological participant observation that I have learned in the process is especially receptive to an intercultural, interbodily and intersubjective encounter, emerging in-between researcher and hosts, while affecting both. Ettinger's theory, moreover, offers insight into both the transfusion of states of being

and energies among members of the local group and into the intercultural encounter that one may become aware of through retroflection. The matrixial approach offers insight into the play of sensual interbodily and intersubjective openness to one another's fantasies and desire, affects and memory traces, longings and emotions, and sense of good and beauty or of evil and the abhorrent. These energies and their transfusion, as well as interbodily and interspecies states of being and becoming, are largely beyond the grasp of optical representation, causal explanation and conceptualisation.

A most noteworthy matrixial ability of the healing cults is their capacity to lead the initiates through the various experiences of entering passageways, meeting and sharing. Moreover, the affliction and healing cults can both restore or bewitch and deflate a subject's vital bodily and interbodily capacities. These include breathing and the heartbeat and their audibly accelerated or decelerated rhythm, the menstrual cycle and reproductive sexual union, pregnancy and parturition, and most manifestly the sharing of the meal and digestion. Women's dancing in the evenings of full moon or from sunset to sunrise at funerals and other rites of passage develops a similar borderlinking capacity. In the dances and transition rituals, the local group associates the advent of life or death with the movements and changes that go with the lunar cycle, or weaving and sexual communion. In the perspective of affliction and healing cults, the innermost source for the re-empowering of the initiate, her family and their life-world lies in the primordial chthonic womb (*ngoongu*). In its numinous and augury dimension, this re-empowering is made present and given some subject position in the form of a clump of kaolin-like clay; this is hidden in the seclusion house for a cult initiate and, later, either in her home or that of the lineage patriarch who acts as guardian of the cult. It makes present the local world's cradle of all life. The matrixial borderlinking stirs in each body-self a proper bodily economy, such as in the heaving of the chest in breathing, or in the heartbeat, the digestive process, the menstruation cycle and auspicious pregnancy.

Likewise, the sharing of matrixial vitality keeps these bodily processes and their cycles in resonance with the social and cosmocentric bodies. Affliction and healing cults mobilise what is

invisible and intangible in the bodily, social and cosmocentric economies. The divination cult in particular seeks to disclose the unspeakable in both the visible or tangible and invisible or intangible realms, namely of forces, affects, feel-thinking and tacit communication, or expression of emotions, shared compelling concerns, alike also feelings of life-promotion or evil-causing.

## Overview

Chapter 2 sketches a mosaic of the contemporary multicentric world and its staggering local particularities, alongside many common patterns in the context of economic and informational globalisation. It is a transcript of an interview I gave to science journalist Jan Van Pelt, in 1997, for his book entitled: *Boundless science: thirty conversations with Flemish researchers* (my translation). The open interview allowed me to even wax poetical on a number of topics including the enduring importance of Claude Levi-Strauss' work which breaks radically with Western-centric evolutionary thinking. It led me to evoke the manner in which, from the 1960s, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology stimulated social scientists to study the human person in the daily context of involvements with fellow humans, the local life-forms and practical concerns, while understanding all this from, and in the terms of people's perceptions, perspectives and mother tongue. It is further argued that, today, masses of impoverished people in the world's so-called periphery find themselves to be more and more excluded from the global flows of information and the new grassroots productive technologies. Today's liberal economy is ceaselessly aggravating inequality and exclusion. Contemporary anthropological research moves away from its earlier interest in the far-away 'other', to now taking to heart the concerns, sensitivity, aspirations and creativity of subordinated and culturally composite local people. Present research focuses in on their ways of facing hunger, scarcity, deficiency, pollution, epidemics, social exploitation and ecological disturbances. Some anthropologists are concerned with the vanishing of local languages and cultural riches, or with the ongoing plundering of resources, and the related wars and massive migrations to towns and cities. The question concerning what an anthropologist ought to be today allowed me to unfold some insights and self-questioning learned

from my contacts in the global south; these include the jettisoning of Atlantic biases in anthropology, the need to engage with colleagues in an interdisciplinary polylogue on rethinking scientific activity and development (Hountondji 1994, 1995, Nader 1996). This is to be done in terms of the local cultural genius of feel-thinking, reflexivity and inventive undertakings (see thesaurus). A related but much broader question that came up is this: is it not the role of the university in today's multicentric world to also promote itself, at certain levels and in a well-balanced mode into some 'multiversity'?

Chapter 3 is a *laudatio* delivered as promoter for professor Jean-Marc Ela, a pioneering West-African theologian who was very committed to the sociopolitical emancipation of "people of below". The academic praise was held in 1999 at the request of the Rector of our University of Leuven to confer on him the honorary degree of doctor, as a corroborating recognition of his many years of pastoral service and eminent advocacy for the people of lesser means, in particular in West-Africa. The praise was an attempt to highlight this outstanding liberation-theologian's and sociologist's sociopolitical accomplishments in the field of African theology, African studies, pastoral work, inculturation, conscientisation and social mobilisation of peasant communities in northern Cameroon and beyond. It was also an attempt to show how Ela's charismatic sermons at the Sunday celebration in his suburban Yaounde parish, questioning the concentration of state power in a few abusive hands, made him both very popular and suspect. Professor Ela felt threatened and stealthily left the country seeking asylum. The University of Laval at Quebec and later the University of Quebec at Montreal offered him refuge — until his death in 2008 —, allowing him to pursue his critical and inspiring sociopolitical reflection and mobilisation of West-African christians, scholars and writers.

Chapter 4, entitled 'Frenzy, violence and ethical renewal in Kinshasa' examines the crisis in the Zairean/Congolese capital city context between 1971 and 1997. The 1990s, for many Kinshasians, was a time in which many monumental shifts occurred towards the radical transition from an alien colonial past to a modernity increasingly of their own making. It was an attempt to break away from the predatory mobutist state and ruinous inflation ever deepening the divide between the rich and the poor. There had been

a nation-wide push, in the 1970s-1980s, to return to authenticity — its aim being to politicise and mobilise every person living in the Congo in a commitment freed from the yoke of colonialism. However, and to the dismay of many, the authenticity programme was high-handed, inconsistent, exacting, while actually disguising how indebted it was to hegemonic practices which had no grounding in the local sociocultural contexts. It negated the many people's ancestral foundational horizon of thinking. It was blind to how much people were relying on the ancestrally-informed core values and imaginary-symbolic horizon and references for sustaining health, reproduction and solidarity, as well as for tacitly orienting and appraising their practices, perceptions and current circumstances of living. The cleavage between the small class of haves and the masses of have-nots was compounded by the collapse of civil services (transportation, education and public health care facilities at the local level.) The uncertainty of when the economy would recover or whether state-offered services would return to trustworthy and efficient ones, eventually gave way to unrest, discontentment and outright frenzy in the massive looting of September 1991 and January-February 1993. This frenetic period of the early 1990s is characterised by a reliance upon gambling, pillaging and looting alongside a general attitude of gloom and dysphoria. The vacillation between these two states was popularised in the process referred to as the Somalisation of Zaire, in that it was thought that Zaire with every passing day was coming to increasingly resemble Somalia. That being said, though, the hope and aspirations of the Kinois never waned fully. Movements which sought to publically demonstrate resistance and opposition, rather than apathy, were founded and oftentimes repressed. The hedonistic or overly consumption-happy sections of the population were also reframed in popular discourses. A number of neopentecostal churches and independent prophetic communes openly questioned Kinois people's state of frenzy while being both enchanted by, and captives of the ruinous appeal of capitalist consumerism. This piece closes with a meditation on a larger process, called from 1993 the villagisation of Kinshasa or setting out of neighbourhood networks and a communitarian economy of mutual assistance among mothers, next to their bartering particularly of charcoal and daily food for the small children. Neighbourhood networks and food market zones acted

to diffuse uncertainty and restore some small amount of stability. In closing I mention a most significant rejection by these women of a 5,000,000 Zairean banknote valued in February 1992 at 3 USD (namely, which was the value of 1 zaire at its introduction in 1967). With this rejection we see the possibility of a people acknowledging their own suffering, their longing for real change, and the impending need for some stability and a return to some equitable order.

Chapter 5 concerns the acquisition and display, by the Ethnographic Museum of Antwerp and since 2011 by the new MAS museum, of a *kholuka* dancing mask from Kwaango land. What I contend is that the culture- and site-specific meanings enacted in the context of the circumcision and related initiation cult with which the mask is imbued, become stripped away in its museum exhibition to the public at large; there, it is turned into a dated, artful but exotic curio. My central interest is, on the one hand, in examining the relationships that it possesses, mask with museum and visitors with the mask; on the other hand, my question is whether the dancing mask's authenticity is not primarily in its performance as an epiphanic agency making present the local universe of the living, the founding lineage ancestors of the cult and the sociocultural principles from which it emerged. The mask's role in Yakaphone society is a multi-tiered one: it is an agency, not an art object, acting as an intermediary for the ideals of masculinity that the circumcised in the *n-kbanda* initiation cult of those coming-to-age are thought to emulate. Considering the *kholuka* mask in the museum, namely the very initiation mask which villagers do admire greatly, I return to the question of the possible meanings that the mask can bear witness to or transmit to its audience in Belgium. Does it, in being locked up in a museum's showcase, become a lifeless and drab thing, only attesting to a by-gone and henceforth imaginary connection to a vital weave? Considering its morose reduction to a thing, my final contention concerns the possibility of it being whisked back to a new kind of museum to be set up in its original context, so as to reimburse it. Is it the role of the anthropologist to advocate for such a community museum or centre that would contribute to unlocking local people's cultural ingenuity and voice, while revaluing and inciting their genuine creativity in today's world?

Chapter 6 places the affects and senses in initiatory as well as affliction and healing cults front and centre. The focus is on the interbodily mobilisation into a most vital humoral balance between sensory fields of rhythms, sounds, smells, touch, colours, such as between initiate, healer, coiniciates, kin group and life-world. How do cults fold the senses onto one another by way of a complex interbodily and interworld resonance? The essay draws insights from work previously undertaken on the *khita* 'gyn-eco-logical' affliction and healing cult, from which it teases out paradoxical, doubly-articulated or adversary forms at play in the local culture. As a specific case in point, I examine the patterns that these intersubjective and intersensory ritual processes take in the instance of barren female initiates into healing. Infertility is commonly associated with the wasting of one's naturally imbued (re)generative capacities and is an affliction whose redress might lie in being homeopathically reversed. Three main lines of argument are employed to examine this notion of homeopathic reversion in all of its contextual specificity. Firstly, it concerns the provision of a backdrop against which the affliction and healing cults operate. Secondly, I try to shine a light upon the seemingly duplicitous, janus-like qualities that the senses have within the *khita* cult of affliction and healing. Finally, the very homeopathic effectiveness of the treatment is assessed. The merit of such an approach lies in the fact that it outstrips the modern Western-derived divide between body and mind, action and thought, emotion and idea, subjective and objective, orderly and discordant, irrational and rational, lower part and upper part of the body, individual and social. The essay shows that the human body, and in particular affects and senses, constitute the basic scene wherein the human agent remoulds her bodily experience and capacities, such as in reproduction, gender and kin relations, as well as in healing.

Chapter 7 goes into a few intercultural dimensions of Belgian missionary work in the Congo. My analysis of its declared intent and sociocultural roots in an increasingly rationalistic and secularised western Europe should help to comprehend the convert's mimetism.

Part one sketches the late nineteenth-century extractive programme designed by King Leopold II, notorious for its violence, in the Congo Free State (1885-1908). Part two overviews the



gradual evolution and diversification of the male missionaries' endeavour. From the early 1920s, the *adaptationist* search towards an *indigenisation* of the christian message of salvation was the option of missionaries with a deep mistrust in the increasingly rationalist and secularising stance and materialist values animating the emergent Euro-American urban high modernity. Many missionaries tended to address principally rural children and unmarried youth, and barely avoided to belittle or infantilise the adult converts. For their part, Jesuit missions in western Congo, including Yakaphone society, were initially inspired by the *reducciones* in Spanish America. They opted for a neatly planned village life for the converts that combines local material culture with the christian ethos concerning prayer and the sacraments, and concerning sexual reproduction, or collaboration in group and productive work.

In the early 1930s, the *assimilation* strategy was set up by the more elitist missionary orders. These were persuaded to contribute to the spiritual salvation of the converts by freeing them from the supposed collectivist solidarity, the alleged terror of anxiety and backward, if not deviant customs. Conversion meant assigning a mimetic disposition to the neophyte and an extraneous identity in christianity's universal civilisation in line with the one God's salvation or redemption of mankind. Rational and self-responsible decision making, as well as monogamy were the most strategic targets in the christian modernisation of *mores* and society. Fetishism, beliefs in sorcery, and polygyny were the epitome of backwardness. From the 1940s, in their assimilation strategy in educational, sanitary and agricultural development work, the catholic missionaries were very much associating the new christian era with the coming of Atlantic civilisation in tropical land. Social programmes at the mission, just like those at the christian school, aimed to form a new civility and the selfconscious, autonomous and responsible individual.

From the late 1940s, the church authorities were advocating a *harmonious association* of African évolués and colonialists in the towns and industrialising and modernising centres. The association was designed to form the new individual in lines with modern intercultural interaction, albeit moulded by Atlantic christian-inspired discipline, order, truth and solidarity.



Part 3 focuses on the missionary educational endeavour and examines its different approaches, which reflect those of the overall evangelisation effort. There is first, in the interbellum, the indigenising approach to education, favouring a practical formation. It is followed by the strategy towards mimetically assimilating christianity's universal mission. In the towns at the late 1950s, the so-called harmonious association model implied to open the secondary schools not only to the European, American and Asian youth but also to selected Congolese elite youth. Higher learning was slow to develop, such as in paramedical and agricultural schools, as well as for forming teachers and clerks. University education came only in the late 1950s.

The decolonisation achieved by Congo's political independence, next to president Mobutu's recourse to authenticity movement in the 1970s-1980s, as well as the Second Vatican Council in 1962-1965, set an important scene for hesitantly questioning the Atlantic civilising missionary movement and its paternalist stance. It has not stopped offering a favourite condition for christians and non-christians, in massive numbers, to join prophetic healing or neopentecostal communes.

Chapter 8 examines some contributions by two local versions of Classical African medicine to the health care in their respective communities. The essay also aims at the revaluation of local people's practical knowledge in matters of keeping or restoring good health, primarily in the family. The full contribution of African classical medical knowledge and practice is an issue being raised with increasing urgency by the world's younger nations with a slowly developing economy. Our study's particular focus is on two local versions, namely of the Ngbandiphone people in northwestern Congo and of the Yakaphone society in southwestern Congo and Kinshasa's shanty towns. This chapter aims to show the status of classical African healing, and the extent and manner in which it is wed to local, culture-specific understandings of ill and good health. Rather than a care seeker being viewed as a discrete, isolated sufferer, African healing seeks to examine the role played by the family, both in assessing the etiology of the ill (whether vengeful ancestors and cult spirits, or bewitchment involved) and in contributing to the recovery. Finally, the treatment pathways in line with the local form

of African cults of affliction and healing can involve initiatory seclusion and ritual action to stem the tide of malevolent forces and turn the illness against itself. Particularly, transforming devices and cultural inducers of healing are studied in detail. Treatment is a process of re-launching or re-energising bodily processes and a reconstruction that relates the individual again to the group's symbolic system and world order. Healing entails a systematic handling of paradoxes whose dual meanings — such as of separating and linking — is alternatively or simultaneously, if not self-destructively, mobilised at the level of the body, family and the life-world. The analysis closes by reviewing the creative potential shown in the culture-genuine healing. It provides guidelines to conducting some comparative analysis of classical African medicine in view of intercultural collaboration, such as case-sharing among healers and medical doctors.

The book's last chapter, 9, closes by offering a summary overview of the strains of pluralistic health care systems which can be found in two of Kinshasa's shanty towns; the latter are socioeconomically and infrastructurally diverse, the one with mainly Koongophone people and better infrastructure, the other with a Yakaphone majority. Stated broadly, the types of health care which are subject to an examination concern: (1) biomedical care workers, (2) cult healers who adhere to the Classical African medicine, and (3) faith healers who channel their neopentecostal tinged remedies as a vehicle for proselytism. Cooperation between these various types was excluded in the colony and is still so in the biomedical training and decision-making favouring Western-born rationalism, which hinders integration of Classical African medical know-how. This chapter discusses the findings generated by a multidisciplinary action-research project which sought to understand the motivations behind the existing pluralistic therapy choice. The research proceeded by determining three interrogative tracks which it sought to address: (1) the role urbanisation and local commerce play in the increasing secularity, including people's imaginary with regard to common notions of misfortune, ill health and the reliance on Classical African medicine; (2) factors which determine the choices made regarding treatments, such as access, financial concerns, as well as the appeal biomedical infrastructure plays in decision-making

over time; (3) the final track examines the perceived biomedical and African treatments and seeks to explore whether one strand of treatment might come to eclipse others and, conversely, how treatments come to be viewed as dangerous or otherwise untrustworthy. This chapter closes with an examination of how borderlinking between plural health care services might be thoughtfully advocated by anthropologists in future work. This applies also to bypass the extent to which Western-derived higher education has caused some researchers' tendency to impose that more secular discourse and their disconcert to communicate in their mother tongue with language mates. They may do so to confirm their modern status, power and education, at least in contexts of unequal authority. Among other things, this means that researchers must constantly be critical of the politico-ideological, sociological, sensory and emotional, next to cultural factors impacting upon their epistemological concern and enquiry. Such awareness should sharpen the sensitivity for local-cultural insights, alongside the contribution of social sciences, psychiatry and group psychotherapy in plural health care.

## **Part 1**

The shock of the multicultural



## The multicentric world: interview by Jan Van Pelt

Modern anthropology is said to have emerged at the end of the nineteenth-century. It has, from its inception, not hesitated to venture into a field fraught with historical, economic and cultural complexities; those of Western Europe's vast colonial endeavour in Africa and the Orient. Anthropology was an enterprise undertaken against the backdrop of the evolutionary thinking that dominated the Western intellectual world in the course of that century. Public discourse spontaneously identified the Western person as the male. At the summit of this patriarchal and phallogocentric worldmaking stood the social and technocratic engineer. The first is thought to be able to lead the world on the path to political and social development by imposing order and law, and acted in keeping with this perspective. The technocratic engineer opened up great expectations: one need only think of the development, at that time, of the industrial revolution, the great cities, the railways and other new means of communication. Anthropologists from this period defined peoples in the preindustrial sociocultures of the so-called south or "periphery" as beings of "nature", supposedly dominated by the forces of the natural world and vacillating back and forth between fear and passion, hunger and lack. Western man formed the reverse mirror image to this; led by the model of *ratio*, he was the technocrat, master of nature. The worlds of the upper body and of enlightenment were, thus, set over and above that of the lower body and of darkness.

In order to increase his control over nature, Western man designed the bureaucratic nation-state, education for all and scientific research, side by side with industrial resource extraction. In the vision of the Belgian King Leopold II, the physical ubiquity of the state apparatus, mining and plantation enterprises, commercial endeavours, infrastructural and architectural works, would make

the American Dream come true for Africa and Asia. Since the second world war, Western man has lived with the certainty that he is effectively master over nature. He defines the colonial enterprise as one which aims to free the colonised from the overall reign of “darkness”, by seeing through the linear trajectory of progress and overall rationalisation labelled, from the 1950s on, modernisation.

Slowly but surely, cracks began to appear in the framework of this enterprise. By the end of the 1950s things were falling apart as decolonisation set in. The end of the European version of the American dream in the colonies was at once the end of the type of anthropology that constituted a large part of colonial science.

It is a unique and absorbing story, one of colonial power and subordination, misrepresentation and lies, injustice and exploitation. It is a story of misunderstanding which turns the colonised peoples and their everyday worlds into the cultural other of the West. The conversation that I had with René Devisch on anthropology deals with an approach that directly counters that of the old vision and positioning. His observations, with regard to anthropology, are founded in a deep respect for human relations amidst the everyday reality of his hosts; relations between culture and bodily symbolism, experience and the imaginary, between cosmology and rituals for healing or countering misfortune.

“The year 1968 was a turning point in anthropological thinking”, states Devisch. “The ode to productivity was dislodged by the ode to creativity. One of the pioneers in this turnover was the Parisian, though Brussels-born, anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss. He decolonised anthropology, breaking radically with evolutionary thinking by seeking out what was at play in the depths of the mind and creativity of each person. He postulated that human thought, whether that of literate or illiterate people, functioned in the same way for every person along the lines of binary coding — comparable to that of a computer processor”.

### *How did Levi-Strauss reach that conclusion?*

“During the second world war, Levi-Strauss came into contact with semiotics while at Columbia University in New York. In this perspective, speech denoted the articulation of sounds. It is precisely

through the arrangement of contrasting sounds that meaning and meaningful nuances originate. In a brilliant doctoral thesis, Levi-Strauss demonstrated that this fundamental structuring based on the oppositions of binary coding, such as in language, can be found in similar forms in kinship terminology, in sociopolitical and spatial arrangements, or in the myths and arts of all sociocultures throughout the world. He suggested that humans, in their greatly non-conscious ordering of their life-world, act along formally similar modes everywhere. This perspective was revolutionary and it brought anthropology to a previously unknown level as a generalising, explanatory science. For this reason I find Levi-Strauss to be one of the greatest anthropologists of his generation”.

*Are there other thinkers or schools, since Levi-Strauss, that have influenced anthropology?*

“Yes, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, for example. For these scholars phenomenology cleared the way to study the person, concretely, in her or his everyday life. The focus is placed here on the subject in meaningful relationship with fellow human beings and things in context. Let us also not forget that Austrian-English personality, Wittgenstein. He questioned, in a fairly radical manner, the pattern of thought adopted by the enlightenment. Wittgenstein proposed that the meaning of a term, such as that of a civilisational ideal, can only be detected in the linguistically-determined and pragmatic use of the term and not in its idea.

The Vietnam war, the Islamic revolution of Iran, the struggle against apartheid, the marxist liberation of peasant communities in Latin-America, as well as the postcolonial turn in many African societies were breaking away from the modern vision that had equated industrialisation, urbanisation or capitalistic westernisation with progress and integral development. The impoverished masses in the periphery found themselves excluded from the self-focused accumulation of wealth on the part of the upper classes so-called centre of the leading world. Neither the ever-increasing rationalisation of man and society nor the global expansion of the capitalistic economy and mass media could guarantee an equitable reciprocity between peoples and classes.



With the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989 and the end of the east-west division of the world, marxism lost in the eye of the masses its powers of social emancipation. Beyond this, the dictatorships and in particular the increasing ethnic or interregional violence in many nation-states — as in the Balkans, Somalia, Sudan, Ruanda, eastern DR Congo, Angola and Afghanistan — demonstrated that the westernising modernisation of the state and the provision of education or other civil services did not of themselves adduce progress to the people. The so-called post-structuralists and deconstructionists — with their French pioneers including Barthes, Baudrillard, Deleuze, Derrida and Foucault — broke with the master narrative of the enlightenment. They argued: Look around you and see how much unreason rules the everyday world. Each common-language-bound culture, fortunately, is a daily source of much imagining, symbolism and gratuitous usefulness that does not directly address material or physical needs, yet contributes in a sustainable way to healthy self-development and a good life within the group”.

*But these ways of thinking are still typically Western products.  
Is there then no place for a view of man and world that  
belongs to the local classical knowledge practices proper to  
the countries where anthropology busied itself?*

“From the 1980s on, the people of below from the so-called south or periphery, and especially Africa, turned their backs on the project of westernisation. That is the great moment of disenchantment in the north-south or centre-periphery relationship. The global system of capitalist economic rationality and that of the mass-media or information-society, conquering consumers throughout the globe, clashed with a world of hundreds of millions of people falling out of the boat of technocratic and economic development, so to speak. They rejected the idea of the straightforward perfectibility of the world. There then arose, around 1985, a new theoretical perspective on globalisation. In anthropology at least, attention was now focused on the paradoxes of the modernising state and exclusion, and the local compression of global forms and meanings into a reaffirmation of regional and common-language-based civilisational uniqueness”.

*What are the most important ingredients here?*

“Many forms of mimicry of westernisation have made their appearance. Societies have seized upon these forms in order to reappropriate their uniqueness and highlight their own contributions in the mosaic of peoples and creativity. There are many remarkable expressions of this, among them the reinvention of English in Nigeria for example, or French in the Antilles or Congo. The languages of the coloniser — English, French, Portuguese or Spanish — are each day being refashioned, reshaped and adapted. Why? Because these languages have been the medium of the universalising and domineering enterprise of Western modernity. Inasmuch as they symbolise and transmit the Western interpretation of economy, administration and information flows, this interpretation becomes the imposed condition for participation on the world scene of globalisation. And this is what many subaltern people withdraw from. Colonising modernity attempts to force everyone into its own mould. Money followed in the 1990s; national monetary policies — in concert with transnational financial strongholds — and their unbridled satisfaction of the wishes of the politicians and their complacent and greedy public, were nicknamed “politics of the belly”. Moreover, there is also the ongoing degeneration of the spirit of capitalism in the retail sector. The local reinvention, appropriation and endogenisation of the market economy is called, again in the domineering perspective of the capitalist economy, the informal economy”.

*What does this development mean for anthropology?*

“With time, and by seeking to break away from the ethnocentric and othering approach of realities of the so-called world’s periphery, we have seen a splintering of theoretical approaches. We now observe that the world is no longer one single entity and that non-Western peoples are redrawing the map of world civilisations along the lines of their own cultural assertiveness and no longer within the framework of Western ideals; think of many Islamic societies, Bantuphone Africa, the interaction zone of south-east Asia and China, the Portuguese- and Spanish-speaking nations of Latin America, as well as the Amerindian societies. These all manifest new formations of

cultural-political blocks which have loosened their ties with the dominant Western heritage. We can see how the subaltern groups of the world's periphery increasingly wield their genuine cultures as a means of resistance while reaffirming their proper identity.

In former times, the imperial civilisational pretense of the coloniser was to mobilise people's cheap labour and production for the capitalist-driven markets. Culture was perceived, then, only to be a local and subordinate phenomenon, doomed to disappear if it would not conform to universal standards outlined by the west, such as enlightenment rationale and productivity disciplined by the watch, calendar and market.

But the world scene is increasingly figured in anthropology as a mosaic rather than as an architectonic structure, and the modern vision and its latent evolutionist bias is revised by rhizome-thinking — in line with Deleuze and Guattari (1987). Now, rather than being a sign of exclusion from the world system, local culture proper to a common-language-bearing people is increasingly the focus of assertive group identity in the worldwide multiform social and cultural scene. Local language-sustained cultures draw on particular identifications with and differentiation from another subject, society or instance. By the culturally different other — in the phenomenological perspective adopted — is meant an other subject, gender, age category, group displaying some proper breed of affects, emotions, activities or capacities which embody the unthought, repressed or alienating otherness inside the subjects concerned”.

*Who, then, are the main movers behind this movement of resistance and endogenisation? They have not simply fallen out of the blue?*

“One of the strongest forces behind the movement, from the 1970s on, derives from the struggle against the exclusion of women, particularly intense among African-Americans which found a worldwide response as it was addressing their harsh socio-economic exclusion. I find that to be a most inspiring and hopeful development. But it is above all the combination of gender assertiveness and cultural self-discovery that lead to the break-up of the self-confident, universalist epistemology vehiculated by imperial languages in the field of anthropology”.

### *Thinking in fragments?*

“Indeed. African-American feminists reacted against the overwhelmingly masculine — phallogocentric — thinking that dominated the Western world. The critique addressed high modernity’s patriarchal concepts such as the self — self-centred or self-made man — and reason, autonomy and empowerment, system and order, measurability and proof, management and agency, feasibility, approached in terms of the cohesion and stability versus malleability of a system, or efficiency and profitability. Feminists contested this. They said, ‘There is no empirical or logical reason to impose on reality the sole principles of unity and irreversible causality rather than multivocal heterogeny, anticipative openness or multivalent inventiveness. Our world is also an incessantly fragmenting reality, moved by the plight of undirected fields of forces, thanks to the potentialities that only take shape in their emergence or in the communal development of an agreement’. This was a new platform of thought. You could approach it — as north-American anthropologists often do — from the perspective of political anthropology as a struggle over identity and power relations, ethnicity and rights. That is also the rationale of the consumer who claims her rights in order to strengthen her negotiating position. Seemingly, until the 1970s at least, a very north-American disposition and approach. However, in their daily existence many people appear guided by other, non market driven processes which give due attention to the human body, senses, emotion, passion, the living and breathing world. From this realisation came a new sort of anthropology, that of a meaningful everyday practice within fields of intersubjectivity”.

“A major voice and advocate of this change of direction was the French anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu, in his later publications. He based his academic work not only on the masculine contest over distinction — embedded in the class-bound habitus of predispositions — but also on the sensual and consensual quest for dignified living and living together. In 1993 he published his moving book *La Misère du monde* (*Weight of the world: social suffering in the contemporary society*, 1999). Here he presented a peripheral world of exclusion in France, that of small cities, where familial care for the

child or the elderly, artisanal professions, outdated economic structures, the uneducated ( ... ) were excluded from the neoliberal economic circuit”.

*May I allude to an interview, in the same volume, with the Antwerp sociologist Jan Vranken concerning the research on poverty and social exclusion in our Western world?*

“Yes, this is the other side of the coin. Not only are the excluded countries disillusioned or discontented; here, in the west, disillusionment is also on the rise. Where people in the 1960s still believed that each citizen soon could be guaranteed equity and equality — for example, such that women or mothers were given charge of their own bodies, childbearing or gender roles — it would now appear that the modern subject is more than ever isolated in a body defined as the object of needs, dependent on or weakened by rampant medicalisation and outside conditions and forces. On the socio-economic level, division and inequality reign. This is the great paradox, namely the real misery or weight of the contemporary modern world. The so-called north-south or centre-periphery relation is now also reversed towards the northern hemisphere. The dominant credo of social sciences, which held up concepts such as the progress of peoples through the development of the autonomous subject, rationalisation and bureaucratic control, order and production and the like is now questioned. This criticism regards the universalist assumption that defined socio-economic development in lines with masculine and modern virtues such as rationality, planning, tangible evidence and empirical or evidence-based, explanatory knowledge and applied sciences.

Anthropology's new sensitivity concentrates on particular tracks of worldmaking, whether in aesthetics or science productions, disability and its social fabric, or resistance, emancipation and healing. It starts with the inadequacies of Western society's civilisational pretence and its entrapment in the dual epistemology of same and other, modern and traditional, rational and irrational. The criticism further looks at processes of worldmaking by local networks from the perspective of power or forces, or vulnerability and pain, healing and the sublime. Feminist voices have forcefully argued that self-

identity and the preconceptions of property and mastery, regulation and choice, rationality and science function as both horizons and shadows of gender- or race-biased master narratives. These preconceptions also imply a *rapport de force* of violence vis-à-vis the proclaimed alien, the non-cognitive along with the unspeakable and inconceivable, the affects and the bodily. This interrogation endeavours to unpack and decentre both the modernism of self-creation or self-help and its shadowy complement, today's market-driven hedonistic consumerism”.

*Is the reflection on the dialectic between the conforming consumer and the embodied subject not just another Western phenomenon adulating the individual body-self? Or do you see here the advent of an alternative vision?*

“At top universities and research centres (think of Berlin, Cambridge, Chicago, Delhi, Duke, Harvard, Johns Hopkins, Montreal, New York, Oslo, Oxford, Princeton, Taipei, Yale) a number of scholars are heuristically exploring the contours of multifocal epistemology or of plural local, language- and culture-specific knowledge systems and practices. They moreover cooperate on this question of common-language-bearing plural knowledge systems with colleagues from outstanding university centres in India, China, East-Asia, next to African-American scholars or Asian and African ones of the diaspora. There is very much an expectation that new, valid and specifically non-exclusive, forms of scientific enquiry will develop in such an academic milieu. One notes a sensitivity piercing through for the plural culture-genuine epistemologies and ethical perspectives on the human being, society and the world that belong to the great classical civilisations — Arab, Chinese, Buddhist, Hindu, classical Islamic, Persian, Slavic, Amerindian, south-American or Bantu African, for example. This sensitivity concerns the rich variety of the work of culture that the enlightenment has not taken into account, nor entirely dispossessed.

The multicultural anthropological sensitivity also concentrates on the borderzones where the local and the global intersect — those fluid arenas of economic and cultural subjugation on the one hand, and of counter-hegemonic practices, on the other. It seeks critical

insight into the dynamics of multiple and shifting identities, and in the genuine and paradoxical ways in which particular life-worlds disenfranchise the subaltern, or veil and unveil the unspeakable and unreasonable. The ambition is, moreover, to track the journeys of etiological queries and symbols, pictogrammes and motifs across cultures and history, and to show how cultural sites oscillate between rigidity and remoulding. The multicultural anthropological sensitivity, thereby, focuses on the knowledge, values or imaginaries that are proper to particular cultural sites, as well as on their explanatory tropes, their interpretation and generalisations. This focus may allow us to trace the possible homology between contemporary aesthetics or techno-scientific developments, age-old crafts or rituals, and futurist techno-human virtual reality. It interrogates the paradoxes at the foundation of some local expressions of worldmaking, such as those aligning cultural creativity with doctrines of corporate efficiency, or the interconnections of violence and redemption, or the goodness of suffering and motherhood”.

*In which direction do you think this will evolve?*

“I think that we will gradually evolve toward an opening up to, and mutual recognition of, the rich variety of each culture, such as diverse, valid and culture-specific epistemologies and knowledge systems, each anchored in its own local common-language-based, cultural and ethical heritage. Feminist anthropology, above all that of subaltern groups, such as of African-Americans, has led to most thoughtful and promising controversies opening up to the various sub-cognitive and cognitive competences elaborated by local cultures that are not reducible to the work of Western-born *ratio* and objectifying scientific activity. Feminist anthropological thinking with regard to the genuineness of original modalities of world-making and culture-bound resistance to westernisation out of desire, imaginative insights and sagacity, as well as to openness towards the otherworldly, is in no way independent of thought regarding biodiversity and the culture-specific plurality of epistemology. So too is the anthropologist’s attention drawn to social emancipation, self-assertion, community building and social responsibility. A similar sensitivity focuses on the discriminatory naturalising of the female



body or on the coloured, as well as on local peoples' sense of reality, evidence or vision supporting the finality of humankind and civilisation. This is the way of an anthropology of the everyday that asks the question: what is our nest and civilisational cradle where our roots are and on which our life-enhancing intergenerational memory rests? In this vein, the anthropologist thinks in terms of practice, that is, she seeks to find herself rooted in the host group for her participatory research. It is anthropology that is embedded in durable fields of recognition and reflexivity, namely a host community and professional network, next to the life-world and civilisational cradle where the anthropologist is at home and most herself. I would coin this local re-rooting as a form of *oikology* — from the Greek word for *oikos*, household, house or home”.

*How might I imagine this oikological manner of thinking?*

“Very concretely. Don’t ask a farmer or artisan in India or DR Congo to come explain her practice or openness to the augury and shades or spirits or the transcendent to a crowded university lecture hall in the secularised west. Follow her in her everyday comings and goings, at home where she is ‘her-self’. Thoughtful scholars are more and more rallying in support of a life-sensitive epistemology that does justice to the origination of life-generative processes, to the subject’s practical inhabiting of the world or being-in-the-world in its plural dimensions. This is an epistemology that, above all, takes into account the multilayering and differentiation present in the interbodiliness and intersubjectivity at stake. In former times, anthropologists were sent into the field with classical theoretical frameworks or lists of questions dealing with kinship, political organisation, economy, male-female relations, religion and rituals. Today, this generalising approach is being deconstructed. Attention now is drawn — in the interbodily and intersubjective make up and as encounter — to the rhizome-like tracks, strategies, relations and moves, crisscrossing guesses and rumours, contentions and power strategies of participants as they develop in context. This also endorses the ever virtual and unthought-in-thought, as well as the ceaselessly unfolding and indeterminable swarm of becomings that



give this life-world some actor- or agency-related composition, enfolding and unfolding. This attention — along the lines of, for example, Deleuze — unfolds a far more heuristic approach to anthropological reality embedded in the practice of the everyday, which itself is by definition inadequate. It is flawed because there is considerable irony involved, but also extensive exclusion at play, or opposition and division, degradation and violence. And this is what is new to anthropology. An oikological-sensitive anthropology is also a polyphonic anthropology, with a great variety of individual and collective actors who appear in different guises, scenes and discursive practices. This type of anthropology is also eager to seek out the mechanisms that may break people down into multiple, split or alienated selves”.

*Do I hear a critical, militant even, note sounded there?*

“Yes, militant, in resonance with Latin-America’s tradition of the liberation movements at grass roots level. But this anthropology is, above all, critical; critical in the sense that the anthropologist together with her hosts tends to look for the reasons and causes why they have become voiceless, why they count for so little in society at large and on the world scene. Critical, therefore, in that the anthropologist builds some amount of social criticism into her anthropological approach. The oikologically sensitive approach, thus, may also stimulate some emancipation locally in lines with local common-language-bound culture-genuine genius, and more self-critical reflexivity in academia, in lines with the feminist slant. The slogan of the liberation movements and feminists was: Whatever marginalises and excludes us is our weapon of choice”.

*Isn’t it worrying, from within the context of the inductive certainties of classical anthropological enquiry, to be confronted with the uncertainties and mere tentative or even fragmented scientific views of today?*

“I would not, for myself, call it frightening, but would rather say it is inspirational. Many concepts, perspectives and logical frameworks are opened up and taken apart. This is, however, most uncomfortable

and particularly worrying for the doctoral researchers with whom I rub shoulders every day. If I sketch the current epistemological development as I have done in this conversation, their reaction is often one of discontentment. Young anthropological researchers clearly sense an end to Western certitude. When they, as heirs of a colonising nation-state, are settling in a subaltern community or network, they encounter the paradox of marginality and of degradation, and ask me: How are we supposed to deal with this?

My own answer to this is that I rather see this disconcerting reflexivity as a growth phase in which the tone is no longer set by expansive theories such as marxism and structuralism, nor by systemic and cognitive approaches. A new intercultural openness — inspired by the experiential and intersubjective phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty among others — marks the recent polylogue and cooperation between scholars and artists who share some interrogation from around the world”.

*You frequently travel to countries and communities that fall outside the dominant Western-born or global capitalist system. What in your experience has most affected you as an anthropologist?*

“My most unsettling experiences concern the extreme poverty and/or the violence in the arid region of northwestern Namibia and the townships of Johannesburg and Cape Town, as well as the squatters of the megapoles of Brasil (Belo Horizonte, Rio de Janeiro, Sao Paulo), Cairo, Kinshasa, Lagos and Nairobi. It is daunting to face uprooted youngsters who, to mock things modern all the while taking their share of these, find pride in material destruction or join a criminal economy.

Yet at the same time we have seen neighbourhoods in those cities forming around mothers or matrones in charge of children which take their distance from violence and move towards a so-called villagisation in town or revaluation of the solidarity and security in the vicinity. Here, women in parental or caring roles with their dependents are attempting to restore major values reminiscent of the village community — often drawing on christian or shia-islamic inspiration. There is a search here for basic values,

such as respect for the child or the mother, the sharing of food, safeguarding the local dwelling and older generation, or promoting justice and dense interdependence within a context of unceasing poverty and social vulnerability.

When I, as an anthropologist, speak to the people of below in Kinshasa's shanty towns, including those who might be Western-educated — who know very well what the west is, but don't have a penny to their name — I am each time amazed that these people, out of despair and anger, are not scratching out each other's eyes. 'We are all dirt poor in Kinshasa, but we help each other'. Here, we see people consciously escaping the imposed modern vision on so-called needs or lack — indeed key concepts of colonisation and missionary christianity, but whose equivalents simply do not exist in many languages of Black Africa. Some unthought-in-thought regarding the *oikos* appears to be re-emerging from the collective unconscious and the major cultural values and impetuses from the era prior to colonisation, according to which desire is a core mobilising affect. And from this they draw their ability to survive as fellow people and once again to secure for themselves a place in the fragmented and uprooted mosaic the world has become. They quite probably do so with some sadness because exposed as they are to the global media, they too have dreamed of owning a pair of jeans or a car, or of assuring an education for their children. The melancholy and discontentment is certainly there. But I still have the feeling that in choosing from among other strategies for the way of villagisation, they have opted for dignity and solidarity rather than for a futureless struggle over a piece of cake".

*What do you think the task of the anthropologist should be today?*

"Over the years I have observed that my academic activity increasingly has been shaped by my contacts in the global south. I see that happening among my associates as well. From this I can conclude that the anthropologist has an important role to play in intercultural borderlinking. On the one hand, she is in a position to co-implicate herself, at grass-roots level, with social networks and perhaps also social services. She may, thereby, inspire her hosts on

the road towards endogenisation of the society and culture in their local perspective and terms, as well as empowerment from within themselves; in other words, towards their home-coming. More concretely, she can accompany them in the quest for answers to such questions as: How does our community or network function? What strategies must we adopt in order to survive and, hence, to strengthen ourselves as a group and life-world well connected with the ancestral shades? In what context do we really feel at home? How can we interrelate with fellow people beyond our domestic circle for the better?

On the other hand, the anthropologist back home can also play this intercultural self-questioning by engaging with colleagues in an interdisciplinary polylogue on rethinking scientific activity and development in terms of the local cultural genius, sense of resonance, feel-thinking, shared reflexivity and decision-making. How do people in northern Ghana, for instance, practically conceive of and organise space? And this question can, in turn, lead to a very interesting discussion about dwelling, architecture and ecology. The same goes for issues of food, agriculture, economics, medicine or religious practice and the like. Here the anthropologist may emerge as a borderlinker, between diverse common-language-bearing scientific approaches, between communities, between centre and periphery, between voiceless and dominant groups.

A related question, which is much broader, I wish to raise is this: is it not the role of the university to also promote itself, at certain levels and in a well-balanced mode into some 'multiversity'? In so doing, it could carry out its mission by producing interassociations and debating both on creative platforms between colleagues and researchers, as well as experts and artists from communities joining the polylogue and through a plural partnership involving north-south and south-south networking. Let us imagine interassociations trying to integrate into curricula the local systems of know-how. Indeed, as Frantz Fanon remarked in his own time, we do not expect a Freudian-trained psychotherapist to successfully and straightforwardly apply some conventional professional methods to a Bamileke or Sukuma hysteric. Nor can we see a British solicitor settling a divorce case in the city of Mbandaka. Indeed, the context-bound complexity of human sciences demands that we listen to, and

learn from, the plurality of the contemporary multicentric world — a world where the human being, under her various versions and layers, offers to us an unsuspected wealth that awaits deciphering through the prism of multiple epistemological and metaphysical horizons.

It is anthropology that, from the 1990s, has been fighting to decolonise binary Western-derived human sciences in as much as the latter depicted city life as opposed to the village realm, modernity to tradition, science to folk traditions, and literacy to orality. Anthropology is a science standing close to the living experience of interrelated subjects in a great plurality of sociocultural contexts. It is incumbent upon an anthropologist to report on what has affected her, emotionally and intellectually, intersubjectively and intercorporeally, in a respectful and engaging encounter. It is her task to undertake an inventory of local, ancient and current, forms of knowledge and comprehension, arts and crafts, such as for appeasing and healing, production and sharing, building and irrigating. She may, moreover, enquire about the practices which seek to improve the material, social, legal and hygienic conditions of existence for some networks or the local society. Do these arts and local forms of sensibility and knowledge practices make theoretical and practical suggestions that would allow us to provide some answers to the basic concerns of the majority of the population on the planet? Among such concerns, which are also the anthropologists' concerns, we can mention hunger, pollution and epidemics, spiritual needs and religious fanaticism, exploitation and social exclusions, wars and the massive migrations, the plundering of resources and deforestation, as well as the danger that many local languages, particularly in urban areas, simply vanish.

Moreover, anthropologists, in the near future could offer themselves as an intermemory space between past and present societies of north and south or south and south. Accordingly, these anthropologists may become not only interculturalists but also intergenerational communicators or diplomats. As such, they ought to challenge the excessive Atlantic biases of the social sciences and their adopted perspective. Regardless of whether they are acting professionally either in their group of origin or their adoptive environment — and whether collaborating with social networks or public institutions —, anthropologists should particularly prove

amenable to tapping into the social and cultural genius. Can they also direct their comprehension beyond what the predominant scientific credo tends to obliterate? I have in mind here what — particularly in those areas relating to bare life, the otherworldly and people's core aspirations and commitments or regrets — stands apart from either a secularised modern and postmodern worldview. Think of the typically Atlantic, logocentric and patriarchal or imperial modes of transmission and production canonised by empirical fact- or evidence-based academic knowledge. I also refer to what stands out from European bourgeois visions of subjecthood, identity, freedom, biomedical health development, education, public administration, comfort and so on. The neocapitalist race beyond measure to world widely conquer markets of mass consumption turns our so-called postmodern era into hyper-modernity”.

*Are you alone in this view or is this one you share with others?*

“No, I think I am advocating a sensitivity here of the subaltern, namely rooted in my native Flemish disposition. It appears to me that Flemish anthropologists are actually well prepared to play this role of transcultural encounter, precisely because we in Flanders have developed our plural style of thinking due to our own historical situation. This is one of language, class and regional subordination in Belgium with its Francophone bourgeoisie in the major cities and the Walloon region that in the nineteenth-century became highly industrialised, alongside the fact that the economically poor region of Flanders was excluded from technocratic development until the interwar era. For too long, Flemish-speaking people had to think from a minority position — though one rooted in a rich cultural base — and only a minority of its teachers and *literati* were not alienated by the perspective and modern French language of the established bureaucratic nation-state and imperial high modernity confident in science and technology as the key to reorder nature and society. It is perhaps why we are considered better able to think from the position and cultural embedding of the cultural other and in particular of people of below. And it is because of this approach that our work is appreciated by the latter, in my experience especially by African colleagues”.



# In praise of Jean-Marc Ela<sup>1</sup>, advocate of the people of below

Delivered at KU Leuven on 2 February 1999

*By René Devisch, promoter of the honorary doctorate*

Honourable Rector,  
Your Excellences,  
Dear Colleagues,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,  
Dear Students,  
Dear Professor Ela

More than a generation since political Europe put a stop to its civilisation agenda in Africa, and despite four decades of development aid and the rapid growth of modern sciences alongside the globalisation of the economy and information, it would appear that the acute gap between rich and poor, centre and periphery, has grown still wider. With its 550 million women and men, Black Africa accounts for only 1,5 per cent of the official exports on the world market.

Challenged by the fact that Africa south of the Sahara has found itself excluded from the benefits, potentially belonging to all people worldwide, of economic and informational globalisation, professor Ela<sup>5</sup> has resolutely taken up the cause of local communities and in particular of “people of below” (Ela 1982), beginning with fourteen years pastoral work combined with research in the region of Tokombébé in the north of Cameroon. During this time, he observed the extent to which extended families of the Kirdi peasant



community, united and entrepreneurial, categorically refused to bow to the modern norms of the nuclear family, the consumption of imported products and public services.

Echoing this peasant experience, professor Ela's books — such as *L'Afrique des villages* (1982) and *Quand l'état pénètre en brousse: les ripostes paysannes à la crise* (1990) — pose this fundamental question: what might be the networks of popular education and democratic consultation and governance on which the communities of West Africa could found their own brand of emancipatory development? His essay, entitled *La ville en Afrique noire* (1983) prefigured his engagement, from 1985 on, as priest and anthropologist-sociologist in Melen, a slum of the capital city Yaounde. The people's aspirations and the great challenges of postcolonial Africa inspired and shaped the writing of his thesis in social and cultural anthropology, for the *doctorat de troisième cycle* at the Sorbonne in 1978, to which he added a *doctorat d'état* in sociology from the University of Strasbourg in 1990.

Some time before this, in 1969, Jean-Marc had earned a *doctorat d'état* in theology at the University of Strasbourg. Professor Ela can be numbered among the most critical and respected African liberation theologians of his pioneering generation, as the reception accorded his publications following his doctoral thesis can attest, including *Le cri de l'homme africain* (1980) and *Ma foi d'africain* (1985), which has already been translated into five languages.

In weekly sermons delivered in the period from 1985 to 1999 to the University parish in Yaounde, which often counted several thousands in attendance, reverend Ela would regularly examine — as he does in his ten books — the bitter disappointments experienced by the peoples of the African continent.

Firstly, he observes and describes the extroverted status of the African peoples. For centuries the continent has resigned itself, at the expense of its own development, to furnishing slave labour to the Americas and raw materials to colonial Europe and to opening its vast market for consumer goods imported from the north. Today, a rapidly increasing number of young Africans besiege a Fortress Europe ever on the lookout for resources contributing to its own progress.

A second observation he makes is that Africa is sick, of itself. Having shown themselves incapable of achieving the socialist objectives of emancipating the peoples and constructing a nation-state, the African elites of the postcolonial era have been succeeded by others some among whom are too eager to join some transnational criminal network.

Thirdly, he tells us, the north continues to reproduce, through Afro-pessimism, the ethnocentric stereotypes that disfigure Black Africa, which is often seen as over-populated, genocidal and led by corrupt leaders. Professor Ela replies in pointing out the sinister measures, seriously endangering the social policies of the heavily-indebted nations, imposed by the structural adjustment programs of the International Monetary Fund. Forcefully propagating a unidimensional model of development, the north allies itself with the world being turned into a global market that operates through the ever increasing global flood of dollarised mass consumer goods, by definition ephemeral.

Professor Ela was forced to seek political asylum for having denounced the concentration of power and the primacy of state politics over all other activities which made any open criticism of government impossible and silenced the public in his native Cameroon. Canada, notably the University of Laval and later the University of Quebec at Montreal, offered him a refuge in order to be able to pursue his critical and inspiring reflection.

Through his multidisciplinary studies on peasant groups, urban phenomena, demographic challenges, environmental problems and social innovations, professor Ela has provided us one of the most perspicacious and audacious perspectives on the blind side of development theory. I cite four of his significant findings which speak for themselves.

Firstly, according to Jean-Marc Ela, globalisation is neither as fatalist nor omnipresent as many would believe, given the fact that the reigning development paradigm is reductionist. This model is blind to the most profound anthropological dimensions of group life, that is, to desire, anxiety and the question of meaning deeply rooted in the intersubjective sphere and strongly heterogenous cultural traditions.

Secondly, he questions whether the north does not hope to overcome its fear of death or finitude in its consumerist satisfaction with its complete technocracy and flood of enticing commodities. Parallel to this, and paradoxically, in its discourse and programmes of birth control and development in the global south, the north more than ever persists in purveying its own phantasms of death and decline. It goes on evoking the alterity of the so-called Dark Continent, the wars, epidemics, asylum seekers and refugees. The mass media all too readily go on reinforcing the colonial ethnocentric stereotypes of a Black Africa depicted as the exact inverse of Euro-American ideals.

Thirdly, professor Ela remarks, it is important to establish that Africa is currently experiencing a renaissance from below, instigated by the peasants and the suburban poor. Local communities devote themselves to the development of their local worlds, yet fully intend to carry out this development in their own way and on the basis of their own communal dynamics and their own conceptions of the world, life, space and time. The communal dynamics include their creativity, spirit of humour and pidginisation, as well as through the multiplication of associative movements (such as the self-help banks, which constitute both lending and mutual aid networks, and group action and solidarity between closely related in the north and the home country, as well as on the occasion of funerals). African kinship networks, local communities and local networks subordinate economic and technological modernity to their own millenarian social values.

In the same vein, professor Ela willingly echoes the challenge of this end-of-millennium laid down by the myriad of basic communities in Black Africa, demanding that the right to determine their own history be restored to each region and group. True and sustainable development, whether in the north or the In south, comprises above all else a shared search for a better life together, in the light of its pluriform modalities of exchange not only on an exclusively technical level but also on the cultural and spiritual levels.

Fourthly, professor Ela invites us to adopt a more multifaceted understanding of the local knowledge practices that have been the object of a new interest and revaluation at centres of scientific, multicultural and multidisciplinary research such as the Universities of Chicago, Delhi, Harvard and Montreal-McGill. A growing consciousness of the wealth embedded in the plurality of the epistemologies and knowledge traditions of the peoples cannot be separated from their real sensitivities for the ecology and biodiversity.

It is at this level that professor Ela, in his study of the scientific extroversion of Africa, whose universities remain all too dependent on the north, submits a double question to the various actors in the field of interuniversity cooperation between the north and the south.

For the meeting of donor and beneficiary of plural knowledge practices to be productive, is it not necessary that both northern and African partners take upon themselves the task of reexploring and more lucidly reassuming their own presuppositions, perceptual frameworks and forms of communication of not only the academic knowledge traditions they already represent but also the local knowledge related to each discipline? Allow me to cite only a few examples: faunal and floral taxonomies; pharmacopoeia, medical etiologies and diverse types of health care; the arts of healing and juridical palaver; the notions of time and calendars; and artisan and agricultural techniques.

Moreover, is it not the role of the university to offer to the ambient society, and to the north-south partnership, forums of serenity and wisdom? These could be dealing with the issues of the vital future of plural, multisited knowledge practices, both those proper to local cultures — based on particular and culturally limited viewpoints, as well as those which strive to achieve universal perspectives. Through what research topics or other initiatives might the university better promote its capacity of mediation between diverse cultures and knowledge systems in both north and south with the aim of contributing to the equitable and autonomous development of university centres and communities in Black Africa?

For all these reasons, and on the invitation of the Inter-Faculty Council for Development Cooperation and the recommendation of the Academic Council, I ask you, Honourable Rector to confer the degree of doctor honoris causa of KU Leuven upon professor Jean-Marc Ela.

By professor André Oosterlinck, Rector of KU Leuven (while formally granting the honorary doctorate) to professor Jean-Marc Ela:

The University of Leuven wishes to honour you

- for your exceptional contribution as a committed scholar and liberation theologian to the development of the African continent;
- for your innovative study of the contemporary manifestations of social alienation that you so profoundly analyses and in which you centrally posit the rerooting of African communities in their own cultural values and insights;
- for your unique and interdisciplinary research methods out of which emerges an enriching dialogue between theological, anthropological and sociological strains of the Western intellectual heritage, on the one hand, and the human perspectives and communitarian values of Black Africa on the other.
- for the international impact of your interdisciplinary research work which reveals the blind side of the dominant discourse on development and which stimulates researchers and theoreticians to renovate their concepts of community development.

On these grounds and on the proposal of the Academic Council, I, in my capacity as Rector of the University of Leuven, confer on you the degree of doctor honoris causa of this University.

## Frenzy, violence and ethical renewal in Kinshasa

In the 1990s, the people in Kinshasa or Kinois were going through a process of profound self-questioning with regard to the contradictions in which they were caught — between an alienating colonial past, modernity in the making and “the predatory state” with its “politics of the belly” (*sensu* Bayart 1989). The rundown living conditions in the suburbs and shanty towns — comprising half of Kinshasa’s surface area — forced people to break with their Western-born individualist expectations that they ambivalently had adopted. In their struggle for survival, the poor suburbanites and slum dwellers have had no choice but to seek out modalities of family and neighbourhood mutual aid for food production and firewood collection. From 1993, this increasing local solidarity began to be seen as initiating the process of villagisation of town, particularly in the ways through which the families, local networks and neighbourhoods communally addressed affliction, mourning and possible encroachment on their small domestic space. My study, thus, refers to life in shanty towns in the postcolonial period, prior to the spread of social media.

Throughout the colonial and postcolonial eras, the west has presented itself in the garb of emancipatory ideals of self-achieved personhood and capitalist life-styles of comfort. Christian conversion, the missionary school and the mass media opened up the expectation of a higher future, but it was a future made ‘white.’ The postcolonial ideology went on to offer a hierarchical and dual representation of the world, separating colonist and colonised, christian and pagan, modernity and tradition, capitalist market goods and poverty, science from credulity, culture from nature and truth from illusion (Comaroff & Comaroff 1991, Mudimbe 1988, Vaughan 1991). Colonisation had, at the same time, also deprived influential

mothers and entitled family elders, including customary title-holders, of any control over the sources of modern civilisation and power. These sources, however, lacked any foundation in the local system of filiation. On the contrary, state government, the army and the cash economy were established in the name of a self-legitimizing but exogenous civilisational project of liberation from tradition and of emancipation in the new era.

Throughout the 1960s, following the country's rather abrupt access to political independence, urban people's major civilisational mirror remained vested in pervasive colonial images of the Western order of things. In the 1970s, the party-state generated unanimous enthusiasm among the Zairean population (let me remember that the DR Congo was renamed Zaire between 1971 and 1997), in the cities in particular, by directing the young nation to a new era heralded as *Objectif 80*. The party-state appointed itself to the African vanguard in the enterprise of modernisation, nationalism and the so-called *Recours à l'authenticité* (Recourse to authenticity) under the impetus of the *Mouvement populaire de la révolution* (People's Movement of the Revolution, MPR). Its intention was to shatter the colonial mirror of identification and, thereby, to overcome the contradictions of the alienating colonial heritage. However, this recourse to authenticity campaign was a political project set in motion from above and it concealed how much of the state's hegemony and institutions remained postcolonial, that is without having any roots in the centuries-old but now publicly repressed local political, social and cultural heritage.

In the 1980s and 1990s, the breakdown of the state and civil services, alongside the economic disaster, exacerbated rather than ameliorated conflict and dissent between generations and life-worlds; between the political elite and the populace; between the urban and the suburban and the haves and have-nots. Because of the great regional differences between the educational opportunities and riches of the subsoil, the various Zairean common-language-bearing or ethnocultural groups had unequal access to state power. During the 1970s and 1980s particularly, many city dwellers who had emigrated from the rural hinterland and constituted the larger part of Kinois people, appeared to have been utterly seduced by modernity, the brand of which the colonists and their heirs displayed

in their outward behaviour. Yet the immigrants to town continued to clutch parental and ancestral law deep in their hearts. For the first generation immigrants, ritual practices, ancestral law and its concomitant belief system (concerned with at times angry ancestors and envious kin members) remained a constitutive part of life in the family and neighbourhood. The ancestral foundational horizon continued to mould their affects, habitual predispositions, unspoken injunctions to sociability and solidarity, bodily expression and behaviour (*habitus*, Bourdieu 1980), as well as their mental structures, modes of perception and mode of value judgement. Many immigrants sensed an inner division or lived a kind of split between, on the one hand, their propensities and feelings which they spontaneously expressed in the domestic domain and their mimicking of Western-style conduct in the public domain, on the other. They adopted this style in keeping track with their conversion to christianity and their education in christian mission schools. The physical rupture with the rural parental world and the unescapable reliance on the urban economy of commodities and cash separated them, both mentally and ethically, from the village and parental realm.

From the 1990s on, the misery and incoherence of life in the urban centres, the collapse of state institutions, civil services, affordable public transport, educational and public health services were shattering the colonial and postcolonial mirrors of identity and their concomitant models of progress and emancipation. Meanwhile the communitarian economy of mutual aid and barter became the survival strategy for an increasing number of shanty town dwellers. This strategy as a response to a collapsing capitalist economy of individual commercial transactions undermined by hyperinflation and the loss of one-third of the regular paid jobs in Kinshasa and other major Zairean cities after the massive looting of 1991 and 1993. Since 1990, widespread gambling and pillaging certainly linked the guardians of public order to the populace, in a curious bond of gaiety and vehemence, generating both violent interactions and anguish. The frenzied waves of looting in towns alternated with collective states of dysphoria and set the scene for what, since January 1993, has been called the somalisation of Zaire, that is, the becoming like Somalia of DR Congo.



Paradoxically, in this overall context of anomie and uprisings of excitement and violence people faced their struggle for survival collectively (de Herdt & Marysse 1997). At the same time, they started to acknowledge a new trust in others, a certain sovereignty and daring towards collectively expressing their will to live in dignity and their hope for a better future. This hope, advocated by the 1991 Sovereign National Conference, brought influential representatives of all social levels, major networks and interest groups from all over the country together which contributed to this collective move. Let me also mention the *Marches d'espoir* (Marches of Hope), even though they were repressed by the army (February and March 1992) and also people's passive resistance all over the city in the form of general strikes, called *Journées ville-morte* (Dead Town Days) which have occurred since then. A number of christian churches and collective actions reframed the depressing hardships of present urban life in terms of a sociocultural and moral perspective of solidarity by the "people of below" (*sensu* Jean-Marc Ela).

Henceforth, the collective imaginary correlates the courage to cope with suffering and deprivation as bearing witness to a person's dignity and social stature, which is no longer associated either with political power and material success primarily. Some neopentecostal churches and prophetic healing communes of the sacred spirit offered a plural etiology of the vices and dangers of present urban life. Christian discourse suspects the urban capitalist hedonistic imaginary and life-style, pervasive in the 1970s and early 1980s, of being a gateway into the arms of satan. It thereby calls into question the strong appeal of capitalist consumer values circulated by the globalising capitalist market economy and mass media. In these churches and healing communes, the variety of charismatic leadership and healing roles, as well as the prophet's ancestor-like episodes of suffering, recovery and illumination offer a plural scene upon which the church members deposit, portray and reintegrate various but conflicting aspects of their identity. The massive looting of 1991 and 1993, against the discriminatory backdrop of postcolonial living conditions and capitalist consumer ideals and life-styles, inspires a search for nesting and rousing solidarity in the neighbourhoods. As mentioned above, this is known as the

villagisation of the town. People increasingly rely on their neighbourhood, that is, on the village-like vicinity comprising some twenty houses along the nearby road and circumscribed by interconnected passageways in order to protect against robbery<sup>6</sup>.

## Method of inquiry

People's alienation stemming from colonial times has had an estranging effect upon the anthropologist. My experiences, during fieldwork in the 1970s, among the Yakaphone people in Kwaango land and some three to six weeks annually since 1986 in Kinshasa, has led me beyond mere participant observation. It has directed my analysis and writing of the experience beyond the neutral stance of the scientist, but also beyond an embellishing rendering of the situation. Until 1991, and while working in Kinshasa's squatting zones, I was caught up at times in the perverse effects of entrenched colonial Eurocentred stereotypes of Black Africa (Devisch 1993a: 5-6). Indeed, as an anthropologist from the former metropolis, I sometimes felt trapped in the collective imaginary position of adversary other.

However, I attempted to untangle the estranging otherness in my hosts who had assimilated the alienating marks projected on them by the former coloniser. I have in mind those hosts in the squatting zones who specifically claimed to espouse modernity, imagined to be the path to a world of greater power and a superior way of life. I felt estranged by these fantasies, even going as far as to question the extent to which my hosts had themselves bought into the imaginary "invention of Africa" (Mudimbe 1988). The imaginary construct seemed to pair the ideals regarding life in Kinshasa and higher education, with a feeling of estrangement vis-à-vis their originary space. This space was the "village realm" now figured as the reverse side of the "white or Eurocentred world", and was rendered ambivalent by the missionary and colonial fantasies regarding paganism or sorcery. The coloniser perceived the ancestor not as a source of filiation and identity, but as a persecutor, preventing the descendants from entering the space-time of Eurocentric emancipation.

In turn, the situation of the Yakaphone people in the squatting zones among whom I was working has given me cause to feel dislocated by, and entangled within, the very contradictions of their alienating (post-) colonial past and by the contemporary Kinois scene of disillusion, inflation, struggle for survival and the widespread outbursts of violence. Partly inspired by Pierre Bourdieu *et al.* (1993), I have been seeking to develop a position of self-critical reflexivity in the encounter and have tried to achieve this by taking up a kind of double, insider-outsider, position. My hope, therefore, is that my self-critical mirroring and dialogical interrogation and reflection might help at my modest level the host group, particularly Yakaphone intellectuals, to become aware of conflicting logics and developments in their society and within themselves. Anthropological research and writing is in dialogue and transference (*Uebertragung*). It involves exploration and learning (*diapherein*) through analysis of the multiple and paradoxical tenets of personal and group identity. This may offer some means for portraying and reintegrating these diffuse parts of one's identity and helping people to carry across their own timely boundaries and paradoxes and alienation. The co-implicated anthropologist can help to apprehend forces at work within the local group's collective unconscious. She may contribute to illuminate the people's imaginary register as it appears in the throes of opening itself up to a collective symbolic order of a more lucid and emancipating public culture in-the-making.

## Kinshasa

Due to its rapid expansion in the 1970s and 1980s, Kinshasa is one of the largest urban centres of tropical Africa. Numbering less than half-a-million in 1960, the city's population expanded at a rate of approximately 10 per cent annually in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. By 1995, its population was about five million people, and as more than half of these are younger than 18, Kinshasa increased to about eleven million in 2015 (L. de Saint Moulin s.j., Personal communication September 2016). The divide, originally drawn up by the Belgian urban planners in the colony, soon turned into a fundamental, phantasmagorical hiatus between the European quarters, called *la ville*, on the one side, and the ever-expanding

African settlements in town, on the other; the settlements called *la cité/les cités* comprise the walled suburban plots and unfenced squatter extensions. *La ville*, the city, includes the downtown area with its fenced off places of living and employment, next to the neatly-planned affluent residential areas in which the privileged minority reside and work. The *cité* covers three quarters of the total area of the capital: the suburban area where most Kinois live, either in older suburbs which were more or less mapped out by the urban planners in the 1950s, or in newer, poorer squatting zones of spontaneous or unplanned peripheral expansion after independence to the south, east and west. Moreover, the *cité* and shanty towns corresponds to the spatial context of direct interpersonal contact and exchange where familial and neighbourhood relations dominate.

Many of the suburbs and shanty towns or squatting zones are inhabited by a majority of members of the same ethnocultural group sharing a common language; this makes Kinshasa a microcosm of Zaire/Congo. A history of successive waves of immigration has, thus, inscribed itself into the urban terrain with the continuous expansion on the periphery. Kinshasa experienced its most frenetic growth in the 1970s when new townships and squatter settlements popped up along all its fringes (Fontaine 1970, de Saint Moulin 1969, 1977, 1996). From the 1980s, there has been so much stress on every aspect of the city's infrastructure that schools, medical and civil services, transport, sewage drainage and connections of electricity and piped water have deteriorated and broken down. While the cost of living continues to rise, the labour market shrinks and, since 1990, the average daily salary covers less than one-fifth of most families' basic daily necessities. The only trustworthy studies devoted to the assessment of population and sanitary life conditions of all social classes, date back to the 1970s. For the year 1973 (at the end of his demographic research for the Mission française d'urbanisme de Kinshasa), René de Maximy (1984: 208 sq.) estimates the total employment in the city to be some 218,000 regular jobs, which means only 18.23 per cent of the population were employed. Two years later Marc Pain (1984: 105 sq.), in a research project carried out for the same institution, gave a figure of 345,000 regular jobs, extrapolating on indirect data and polls carried out by others dating back to 1967. One-third of these jobs

were lost as a result of the looting in September 1991 — and I know of no detailed estimates of loss due to the looting in January-February 1993.

The focus of the present study is on the more recent and underprivileged shanty towns bordering the cité and deals primarily with the Yakaphone people who immigrated massively in the late 1960s and the 1970s. In the early 1990s, they numbered, perhaps, half a million in Kinshasa. Here, they lived for the most part on the fringes of the city which developed in the complete absence of formal urban planning. These shanty towns enjoy very few of the public services and infrastructural amenities available elsewhere. In his demographic analysis of these squatting zones, Marc Pain (1984: 16) estimated 60 per cent of the, predominantly male, populace to be under twenty years old in 1976. At that time, two-thirds of the annual growth rate of 20 per cent was due to immigration. However, this influx had diminished considerably by the late 1980s. The Yakaphone people lived primarily in ethnocultural concentrations in the unplanned zones or townships of Bumbu to the north, Ngaba and Sembao to the south, Ngaliema-Camp Luka to the east and Masina to the west of the older town. That is to say, the majority of them inhabited the poorest slum areas of Kinshasa with the most fragile economies, described by Pain (1984: 214) as “squatter zones whose allotments were defined by local land chiefs, undifferentiated and poorly structured neighbourhoods easily recognisable by the mediocrity of the dwellings.” In Ngaliema-Camp Luka, most houses are rudimentary shelters of two or three rooms made of breeze-block walls and tin roofs.

These zones have shown the poorest indices of educational and employment qualifications in the whole of Kinshasa. In 1976, 46.6 per cent of the populace of Masina were described as illiterate and the situation is worsening. Because of its dense settlement, Masina has been nicknamed the People’s Republic of China. Situated in the peripheral area near the international airport and alongside the only avenue linking it to the downtown area, Masina in the 1990s became an important locus of political protest. The barricading of the major avenue provoked harsh military repression.

The informal economic sector suburbs and entryways to the shanty towns, has acquired an increasingly important role in terms

of local earnings and supply, alongside the regular influx of foodstuffs from villages three to eight hundred kilometres away, particularly in the light of recent and rapid decline in public transport facilities in the 1980s-1990s (de Villers 1992b). Female vendors display small quantities of daily essentials from their makeshift stands on each street corner: bread, cassava flour, vegetables, peanuts, fish, sugar, milk, fruits, cola nuts, firewood or charcoal, nails, pieces of board, grass for mattresses, mats and so on. In most of Kinshasa's cités, each family has its own fruit tree. In the cités, word-of-mouth communication, popularly called *radio-trottoir*, broadcasts both information and rumour to the entire neighbourhood. A newcomer quickly seeks out a relative or acquaintance who is prepared to offer hospitality or other help.

A whole range of spatial imagery undergirds the pattern of relationships between *cité* and *ville*. From colonial times, it is expressed on contrasting and moralised terms of a sort in line with high/low or centre/periphery. The imagery draws on the colonial portrayal of *la ville* against the *village*, the latter being very often confused in colonial discourse with "the bush" (*en brousse*) and undomesticated pure "nature". In the face of this alterity, specifically in confrontation with the civilising mission of modernity and the book (both bible and school), life in the village and its culture of orality have been defined by the colonist in terms of absence, negativity, inferiority, exteriority or exclusion, in opposition to self-achieved emancipation, productive labour and progress. In this modern and privative vision of the order of things, the world of the village is considered to have practically no resourceful social or cultural existence, insofar as it represents exclusion of the purest form: from the civilising function of the school, hospital, administrative post, capitalist enterprise and the church, reckoned to be the sites in which rationality, personal initiative and the input of the state, church, market and the written word contribute to law and order.

Colonial and postcolonial Léopoldville, renamed Kinshasa in 1970, has been inundated with tokens of the life-style that have been imported by the colonists and missionaries. Those who, through the school or their conversion, adopted the language, conduct and opinion of the colonists, were named *évolués*, namely modern citizens

thought to be keeping pace with the modernisation of the city. By force of mimetic effort, many of them adopted a collage of styles and identities without much continuity existing among them; they adopted a particular identity in the diurnal and public space, another in the ludic social context of the bar and another still when returning to children and their mother in the domestic and conjugal domain. Let us take the example of the first generation of university graduates who were summoned to create some sort of synthesis. This was to comprise their familial or ethnocultural heritage and the display of an African identity, alongside the domain of a Western-tinged alterity which was derived from science, technology, medicine, law, economic rationality, as well as a christian or, for some, a marxist spirit. Many parents resigned themselves to “whitening themselves” and, instead, projected onto their children the possibility of gaining access to the space of the cultural other and to modernity’s dreamed-of goods. A few students travelled to distant zaïrean cities or abroad to pursue some professional education with the aim of becoming school teachers, clerks, nurses, medical assistants, agronomic assistants or monitors; access to university became possible from 1952. These students ultimately faced a very contradictory filiation, given that they were even more burdened with an impossible and especially alienating mission. They happened to be born in the village or town of their parents, who were ignorant of either the university world or the realm of the book, but who sacrificed themselves for the academic success of the child. Highly educated descendants of these immigrants to town also felt themselves to be in a position of alterity, with regard to their parents and forebears, instead of receiving their filiation through them. In these cases, the return from abroad to Congo/Zaire or to the familial environment often coincided with psychological breakdown.

In the Kinshasa of the early 1990s, the expatriates and the wealthy class of Zaïreans shared the same social and physical space of the downtown city, despite their wealth and social privileges. The indigent classes dwelling on the fringe of the downtown city, or witnessing the ostentatious luxury of the wealthy minority, found this confrontation to be most unbearable, particularly because it reinforced their awareness of their destitution. It confronted them with their exclusion from any socially valued status and the



possibility of advancement. The proletariat of the suburbs and shanty towns had the least capacity to find an identity or assert itself on the urban scene and even less on the national and international levels. The lower class, while directly associated with two negative spatial identities of poorly educated immigrants and jobless slum dwellers were excluded from the spaces of both the village and the city. These two areas alienated them through their longing to erase every trace of having roots in the originary space of the native village. The proletariat's mimetic adoption of a modern life-style turned out to be a ruse. The mirage of some unattainable social advancement and a furtive or dubious participation in the urban socioculture necessitated a series of breaks with the past alongside an unending negation of their aspirations and projective identity.

Among the immigrants from Kwaango land, the ideal of modernisation was very appealing in the 1960s and 1970s and had retroflexively fuelled the longing of many young people to deny their origins or to "whiten" their appearance, collective memory and imaginary. During this period, and up until the 1980s, most adopted the new lingua franca of Kinshasa, Lingala, and rarely spoke the mother tongue even among kin and friends. Many youth left the villages to settle in the city, in order "to break with the backward mentality of our parents who incessantly demand our help and cash, with sorcerous threats if necessary." A fairly high number of immigrants applied themselves to assimilate the French language and the behaviours associated with formal education, as well as the idealist and personalist ethic of Western-tinged missionary christianity. They felt pressured to avoid any outward display of their ethnocultural and familial origins. But this display was supposed, in some imaginary way, to facilitate their integration into the space of the sociocultural other, the west, appearing to them as the domain of ultimate power and enjoyment. The call of the city, the imagery of modernisation and the religious discourse of conversion constantly opposed school to tradition, knowing to believing, intellectual to manual labour, good to evil, christ to satan, formal education to magic or illiterate credulity, modern life and economic development to morbid backwardness. In the spatial hierarchy of the city, the peripheral and least urbanised shanty towns were assumed to reflect and maintain



the old ways of village life. In the modern discourse of the city, any form of attachment to the ancestors, kinship obligations and traditional marriage came to be seen as hopelessly backward and, hence, irrational and accountable for the “outmoded and insalubrious way of life of the inhabitants of the slums”.

With the recourse to authenticity movement, a product of a Western-inspired urban vision, the underprivileged emigrant from the hinterland was defined as a *citoyen* (a citizen), namely a typical Zairean. This identity of Zairean citizen was happily and positively contrasted with the colonial and ambivalent label of the acculturated *évolué*, which would rather suggest a hybrid identity (that of a “white black”). Yet the new characterisation continued to be seen in contrast to that of the *villageois* (villager), evocative of the notion of *indigène* (the indigenous person) who was tied to subsistence farming and the so-called ancestral worldview. The process of acculturation to the urban context was seen as a passage towards modern culture and as an upward movement in social space. The acculturated Kinois had advanced from the village realm to the urban, from tradition to modernity. Similarly, moving from the poor shanty towns to the older and planned suburbs was meant to signify a vertical progression; the more a person’s life involved *going up* to the city (*monter en ville*) and a downtown elite school or business office, the higher she ascended on the modern social scale. Being uprooted from the rural locale, in order to attend school or engage in an urban profession, was a precondition for social climbing in terms of access to the prestigious social space of the modern city. Many Kinois felt reluctant of *going down* to the village (*descendre au village*) except for business or for the funeral of senior close kin.

According to the modern lens and discourse, zaireanisation, a term launched by the recourse to authenticity movement to replace the notions of acculturation and modernisation, could only succeed to the extent that people continued to be uprooted from the rural and tradition-oriented socioculture. Zaireanisation or the recourse to authenticity campaign still considered village life and ancestral traditions only through the modern discourse propagated previously by the missionaries, colonists, mass media and numerous development projects. The village was defined as the inverse of the “white” universe and was represented as negative space to be

converted or to be left behind, and whose paganism, polygamy and sorcery, like the oppressive conservatism of the elderly, were to be eradicated. In the eyes of the city dweller, the ancestor and the parent in the village represented avidity and persecution rather than vial sources of filiation and identity. The modern position, meanwhile, continued to affirm that the educated and future-oriented Zairean could indeed liberate her- or himself from the debilitating yoke of retrograde clan solidarity. One could often hear or read that as long as the emigrant families believed in all these outmoded things, they would remain incapable of assuming their proper role in modern society; it would have been better for them to have remained in the village. A lack of acculturation or Zaireanisation was considered to be a fault or a mark of the non-adaptive villager still bound to the traditional order of ancestral law and with their dispositions. The individual who persisted in not fitting into modern urban life, being out of step with or even actively rebelling against its life-style, was soon marginalised and labelled a villager. Until the late 1980s, the city dweller spoke disdainfully about rural modes of life and their initiatory practices, especially circumcision, divination, ancestral cult and the field of sorcery, which traditionally bound a person to an ancestral lineage tradition.

### An orgy of violence and ruptures in the 1990s

In the 1990s, Kinshasa offered a scene in which the potential military violence seemed only to be contained insofar as the diverse forces in place remained in some balance. If this were not the case, how is it that on the same urban scene are kalashnikovs and Belgian, Egyptian, French and Korean weapons, next to a parade of military experts from Belgium, Egypt, France, Germany, Israel, South Africa and the United States? Popular parlance alludes to the violence afflicting the Kinois by the expression “*ça ne va pas*” (it is no longer bearable). This relates to the extreme deprivations due to the collapse of the formal economy and civil institutions. Moreover, for most of the people the situation entails no longer being able to understand the course of things or distinguish between good and evil. For the mature individual these circumstances threaten the capacity in which to think clearly and to act according to one’s conscience.

*From illusion to fury*

Towards the end of the 1980s, glasnost spread a mood of liberation over Africa, yet political malaise intensified locally. In Zaire, during the first months of 1990, state authorities invited people from all over the country to freely express their disillusion with the oppressive party-state. In memoranda, people no longer hesitated to reject the failed state, the army, the country's deficient educational and economic organisation. Echoing this massive airing of grievances across the country, the presidential address of April 24, 1990 announced the dissolution of the MPR, the sole national party. The inauguration of a multiparty democracy radically changed the political scene and the whole horizon of public life in Zaire. President Mobutu's subsequent denial or correction, a week later, of this new course was unable to halt the march towards democracy which was already in progress; numerous parties and new political organisations were founded almost immediately following the April 1990 presidential address and a relatively free and varied press sprang up, albeit of a heavily moralising tone (de Villers 1992a: 5). Having become autocratic with the nationalisation of all foreign enterprises in 1974, the party-state lost its original millenarian appeal; in the late 1980-early 1990s, it fell apart and an extremely volatile and dangerous sociopolitical situation issued from its collapse. People in Kinshasa reacted with mistrust towards national politics. They, nevertheless, espoused the hope raised in 1991 by the Sovereign National Conference (bringing together some 3,500 representatives of the nation from all over the country) and its call for radical political reform.

An atmosphere of seeking good fortune appeared, among others, through games of chance accompanied by repeated acts of violence and extortion. Though the perspective of democratisation since April 1990 set the scene for people's hope of a better future, the expected radical political turnover proved increasingly uncertain. From 1989 on, a continuous production of new currency and rampant inflation eroded the value of cash. Money appeared to be a mysterious fantasy entity, retaining no relation either to labour or production. People came to seek refuge in an economy of fortune as a means to deflect economic disaster. The breweries and soft-

drink companies organised mass lotteries with games being inscribed on bottle tops. In 1989 betting on horse racing in France was organised for the first time in Kinshasa, making its debut in every part of the city under the name of PMU (*Pari mutuel urbain*). It was a completely new concept for the inhabitants of the suburbs, especially because money games of chance were unknown in most Zairean cultures. Horse racing in Europe was, subsequently, televised throughout central Africa by France Inter. These games of chance soon brought about incredible feelings of frustration. In August 1990 waves of violence broke out on the city's university campuses. People's frustration exploded on December 3, 1990. Luxury motor vehicles, apparitions of a rapacious state and its privileged opulent and self-indulgent officials, became the target of the violent exploits of the underprivileged youth and the people of below.

From the end of 1990 to May 1991 the series of lotteries, popular games of chance and pyramid schemes, called *promotions*, profoundly destabilised the urban economy. Promising, and initially delivering spectacular profits for minimal investment within a very few weeks, these money schemes attracted the whole of Kinshasa's population such that critical observers would comment: "the demagogy of the sensational drowns out the responsibility of effort" (Jewsiewicki 1992). Throughout Kinshasa and other urban centres, many people from virtually every social class gathered their often meagre earnings or proceeds from the sale of their used refrigerator, jewellery, car or other personal property, to place them in an investment bureau. People surnamed these investment agencies by names such as *Bindo promotion*, *Madova*, *Nguma promotion*, *Panier de la ménagère*, *Tontine* and *Trésor*. One of the first to establish such a scheme, Bindo Bolembé, acquired the nicknames of Moses, Messiah and Saviour. These agencies were organised within military camps, on university campuses or in the offices of civil administration. These savings schemes relied heavily on the ambivalent popular imaginary register of fortune versus misfortune, good luck versus bad luck. An initial investment was supposed to double or triple in value in the shortest possible period, first within two months and later within several weeks or less. During the first months, investors were usually reimbursed in kind and received a radio, television, sewing machine,

stove or refrigerator, imported straight from South Africa. But in May 1991 came the crash. The so-called investment bureaux could not maintain payments after having reimbursed several early investors at a considerable profit; it was rumoured that the first to be paid were military personnel, which only increased the tension. With such a large part of the population of Kinshasa involved in these financial schemes, the effects of the collapse on the economy and the informal sector especially, were disastrous. The bitter frustration of the people fed an imaginary of sorcery. Those duped and who had their lives ruined by the money schemes would soon turn to pillaging (de Villers 1992a: 102).

### *Proletarian uprisings*

In August of 1991, the fury of the masses reached a critical level following the collapse of the saving schemes, which saw a 48 per cent devaluation of the national currency. Thereafter, there was the authoritarian breakdown of the negotiations under the auspices of the National Conference, which left the people without a voice. These failures not only added to people's frustration but deprived them of hope and a sense of order. In their own fashion, the underclass of shanty towns replayed the violence they had internalised; their acts may be interpreted as symbolic assassinations of the life of ease by those who have been crushed within its grip. More and more people felt prepared to destroy anything that recalled the failure of the recourse to authenticity endeavour. The popular imaginary spoke of the cycle of the serpent, namely of its murderous attack followed by some long periods of digestion, sleep and reawakening. The expression came up in popular discourse following the formal dissolution and subsequent reversal of the president's decision to maintain the MPR as the sole party. The expression signified the contradictions of state politics, the pervasive anarchy and disregard for the public good and the hardships and increasing social divide which stemmed from these conditions.

At the end of September 1991, a form of military mutiny ignited a movement of massive uprising, civil unrest and looting that penetrated all the residential, commercial and industrial areas of Kinshasa and provoked pillaging in major urban centres elsewhere

in the country. In a kind of *luddite* or proletarian outburst of violence, — without the kinds of charismatic leaders characteristic of these movements in industrialising Europe —, men and women of all ages and origins attacked factories, businesses, industrial complexes, warehouses and dispensaries as well as the homes of expatriates and even several Zairean dinosaurs (as the richest nationals were referred to, being conservative and serving the interest of the president). Once there, they carried off goods, equipment, furniture, cars and machines without, however, physically harming the owners. By destroying, pace of two or three days both enterprise and private property on a large scale, it seems as though the masses of Kinois were seeking to exorcise false hopes awakened by the myth of modernity and by the imperialist technology of the north. For example, the Belgian School of Kinshasa, an almost private lyceum staffed largely by Belgian teachers and subscribing to the Belgian curriculum, as well as the Belgian GB (Grand Bazar) luxury supermarket were among the first targets: in demolishing these institutions the people rid themselves of a partly significant or alienating mirror of identification.

Dreams of progress and the hedonist luxury in the city, which have always fascinated Kinois, had never disappointed them as profoundly as it had at the end of the Second Republic, marked by disastrous inflation and increasing violence, extortion and arbitrary arrests by the military. Was this not the same Second Republic which had set itself at the head of the African nations on the course towards Objectif 80 and its full integration into the modern world? Through these paroxysmal acts of violence, the populace actually attempted, it would seem, to thwart and dispel the ill-fate, exclusion and death in misery which constantly threatened them. Given the rather curious complicity between the army and the poor classes at the time, people's revolts appeared to be acting out in an ambience of frenzy, envy, anger and muted anxiety, the inert violence embodied under the pressures of galloping inflation and a bankrupt labour market. The uprisings let loose both the law of the strongest and that of the hunter-trapper's cunning strategy which had already become widespread in the public space undermined by institutional failure and perverse omnipresent anomic.

As a collective outbreak of madness, the uprisings resembled to a large extent the carnival frays witnessed in rural areas following the death of an elderly and widely feared member. A night of theatrical and playful deviance served to chase away such spectre of death, sorcery and evil in the in-group. The carnival night of misrule, role inversion and its shocking license anticipated and legitimated the new diurnal and public order and, thus, the conditions for self-determination (Devisch 1993a: 93). However, the recent pyramid schemes and the pillaging did not lead to a new day of regeneration and order but rather to a regression into the imaginary world of the night with its curses, sorcery and misfortune. Since then, hundreds of firms have been abandoned with the loss of more than 100,000 jobs, according to estimates from the Employer's Union. Many Kinois felt ashamed of the destructive paroxysm that had seized the population. They withdrew depressed, pained and very worried about their future. It was then that more and more slum dwellers started to idealise the rural village for inspiration, help or retreat.

### *Positions of failure*

In the early 1990s, the value of money dwindled and the regular income of the majority of people faded away. A monthly monetary inflation, reaching 200 per cent and even more from October 1991 into 1993, deflated the salaries drastically, if they were even paid. Prices rapidly escalated. The regular income of the great majority of the population withered away. In January 1994, the wage of lower level state employees was not even 12 per cent of its 1988 value (Manwana 1988). The purchase of foodstuffs alone now absorbed the total formal and informal income of almost all inhabitants of the suburbs and shanty towns. An ever greater number of families lived on the edge of famine and were plunged into misery and total uncertainty about their future.

The daily search for some cash affected all sectors of life. The Kwaangolese population in particular, was condemned to subsist on a poor diet consisting mostly of cassava leaves and tubers, next to imported sea mackerel of poor quality. One would even hear it said that: "In the days of the Belgians [colonists], we could eat three times a day. During the First Republic (1960 - 1965) one ate



but two meals. With the Second Republic we can afford only one every two days straight. Where will progress end?” In the Kwaangolese slums a great number of families even went without a meal for three days. As mentioned previously, many mothers started some daily selling in the hope that by evening time, they would have earned just enough to buy food for the youngest children. In 1990, one-quarter of the children brought for consultation to medical centres were underfed. More and more families took to cultivating small patches of cassava along Kinshasa’s avenues and on the edges of the populated areas. The influx of cassava, the basic foodstuff from the hinterland, became increasingly scarce in the rainy season because of the recent decline in public transport facilities. The clothing that most could afford at this time had come from the flea market. For special events, young people loaned one another their few pieces of good clothing or jewellery. In a growing number of cases, one was actually speaking of the existence of an overall crisis of hospitality and even the erosion of traditional solidarities. Registration for secondary school and university was done by auction. Sometimes, patients were detained in the hospital until they were able to pay their bill. The destitute, alcoholics, insane and drug addicts were forced to leave the hospital and just left to the street where they fought with each other over scraps of food. Small craftsmen received only meagre earnings and were condemned to a life of misery.

An increasing number of city dwellers considered their severely precarious social situation to be a personal failure or some sort of curse or sorcery. People even developed the feeling of being divided against themselves: on the one hand, seduced by the world of the privileged few, and on the other hand being reduced to a bitter condition of misery and limited to a depressing position. While public transport, education and health were regularly presented by the media as working in the service of everyone, these institutions increasingly contributed to the interests of only a small minority (MacGaffey 1987, 1991). The populace spoke of the curse of the *petit*, namely the poor slum dweller and loser. Even their pitifully meagre earnings faded away in the unappeasable cycle of inflation. Kinois were, moreover, beginning to realise that their miserable fate was a consequence of realities much more general and global.



*Predatory economy of the street*

In the 1990s, the predatory economy of the street has become an informal and increasingly widespread means of survival for a growing number of people in the shanty towns. Survival in most of the suburbs and shanty towns is now more than ever defined by the infamous Article 15. It is fabulated as the code that regulates the life of the deprived and they therefore added it to the Articles of the Constitution which only benefit the wealthy minority. In people's imaginary, Article 15 refers to the predatory economy of the street, which I suggest is an urban version of the rural economy of hunting or collecting. This is a crafty, even malicious, sort of predatory behaviour, which is however not very violent in nature. For the oppressed, petty thievery acquires the status of a common mode of survival; it is their version of power, masquerading as something lawful under Article 15. The predatory economy of the street concerns, first of all, the proceeds of "goods that one has displaced" (a euphemism for petty thievery), such as tools, bricks, lumber, tires, piping and other construction materials. It further comprises acts of fraud and blackmail of all sorts which occur within a context of ruse and play; for example, the pedestrian or driver, by the simple fact of stopping in the anonymous public space, is quite naturally exposed to all forms of extortionist behaviour. All forms of barter emerge, such as the resale of boxes, wood, metal, stone, used vehicle parts, and so on, along the street and in the small so-called Kuwait market places. Various small crafts and traffic multiply: fare-collectors in the taxi-buses, the hand-driven carts, boot-blacks, errand boys, motor car guards. Their scant profits afford the petty thieves and street vendors a modicum of pride of being their own boss.

Men and boys refer to Article 15 with both self-conscious laughter and pride when in the presence of a stranger, for it at least brings them virile honour, if not at times providing more benefits than regular employment. Article 15 evokes the semantic and social space of the petty thief, crafty sorts of minor aggression and resourceful predation on others and upon the state. The concept seems to rework the imaginary depiction, in the rural milieu, of the sorcerer or hunter who bravely ventures into the very ambivalent depths of the dark forest, namely the imaginary space-time

framework of nocturnal and sorcerous banquets (Devisch 1993a: 86-93). Article 15 playfully denotes the capacity to manipulate or deceive another, by ruse or through bewitchment, for money or goods. As the expression indicates, while giving it the air of a constitutional article, this predatory activity mimics the rule and order which is exercised in the name of the state. In sum, the world of Article 15, of crafty plunder and enterprise, is a substitute for the gravely deficient and highly frustrating extant order: that of the postcolonial state and its law, salaried employment and regular income, in short, of the formal economy.

*Violence seeking to reverse social injustice*

“It so happens that all these disillusioned people seek refuge in another mirage: the libanga, article 15. In other words: survive at all costs and, if possible, enjoy the pleasures of Kinshasa as well. To achieve this, some become pickpockets at the Cabu crossways, while others become nocturnal ‘co-operators’ in the warehouses of the state.”  
Emongo 1989: 97

The imaginary universe of numerous slum dwellers continues to be haunted, through television and downtown scenes, by the life of ease and extravagance typified by fine clothing, expensive cars and luxury goods. This mirroring process simply reinforces social disparities and functions as a grid that stigmatises any individual or social space deprived of these goods.

The rather anonymous peripheral and transitional zones, like Kinshasa’s many public administration buildings and their surroundings — anonymous, neglected and even covered with refuse — seem to breathe lawlessness and the inert violence of a social order. It is one that excludes more and more people from the progress to which they feel entitled by their school diploma or migration to Kinshasa. The spaces of promiscuous transit, with their billboards advertising attractive consumer goods, next to the forceful display of expensive cars and passengers’ finery, awaken as many dreams as they do frustrations. Luxury goods incessantly confront the *petit* with the modern downtown city of ostentatious consumption which the people of below cohabit solely in an

imaginary way. Identity became increasingly marked by difference and exclusion from the privileged world of so-called exemplary civilisation or progress.

These anonymous spaces of transit are the areas where bands of youngsters flock after midnight on pieces of cardboard. It is strikingly apparent here how much the state and the civil services are adrift. Each quarter of the city secretes, as it were, its own peripheral zone, primarily in rundown areas near the transport terminals and the large junctions. There, anonymity and mixing appear to overwhelm any semblance of personal contacts and obliterate any ethical point of reference. One may go there to both “seize a stroke of good luck” and “deflect any misfortune” away from oneself and violently transfer it onto another person. Rituals of transition, such as funerals, especially those of young people or of the *ekobo* funerary tradition, nowadays appear to take on an air of carnival-like and deviant exploration of a realm of pure exteriority with neither bounds nor intimacy. For example, the crowd escorting the corpse to the cemetery violates the regular social domains and their regulations: it takes up the whole street, adopts shocking behaviour, assails passing pedestrians and cars, intrudes into nearby properties and market stands, and carries on with other aggressive conduct whose purpose is to circumvent, revert or undo the evil curse or fate.

Many deprived city dwellers come to the anonymous parts of town to recapture, in myriad scenes of petty provocation, just a little of what the party-state had promised and did not deliver. These anonymous non-spaces are a temptation to gratuitous violence, to the excitement of destructiveness. They, in fact, furnish deprived suburban and slum dwellers a last opportunity for some kind of violent redistributive justice: here poor youngsters may strip apparently well-off passengers of their few goods in their car or bag, namely the type of goods that the downtown city exhibits yet has the monopoly over. It is in these peripheral and transitional zones where bands, at night on the way from pillaging, are met by even more callous ones who demand ransoms. Social erosion and violence reproduce the anarchy of the negative space in which advertisements, swathes of anonymous motor traffic and deterioration of the urban environment offer the masses fewer and

fewer signs and chances to identify with urban ideals. These non-spaces are poorly adapted to the psychic space of the passers-by; they neither evoke any memory of some community nor do they relay any image of some attainable and dignified self-reliance. They bear no reference to any ethnocultural belonging and life's cosmocentred temporality, because of their being anonymous and undirected. They in fact elicit reactions of muteness, anxiety and negative imagery. One constantly hears: "Above all don't go there after sundown," being said without further explanation.

It is my interpretation that the waves of violence, the predatory economy of the street and pillaging in fact appear to actively recover traces of a collective and very archaic non-conscious imaginary. These are forms of violence evocative of fatal sorcery and the afflicted group's attempt to violently turn evil against itself. The collective imaginary associates predatory sorcery with the ambiguous space-time transition in which the antagonist forces make the victim unprotected and most vulnerable. Sorcery is spontaneously associated with the passage from midnight to the cock's first crow, or with the time of dark moon, as well as with those mornings on which the moon is at the horizon just at sunrise. The junction of paths, the dark ravines and other mixed spaces or gateways constitute a sort of double-sided mental boundary across which homeless youngsters and losers venture in order to tempt their chances at cohabiting with both the unforeseeable ominous crossing of bad and good luck.

### *Ideals and norms fade away*

"The truth is that the regime lacks safety fuses and undergoes an implosion of its system and a deregulation of its methods." Yoka 1994: 83

In the 1990s, the disqualification or disempowerment of political authority set the scene for, and is itself, a form of institutional order or moral violence; the era of connivance between party-state authorities and the people was truly over. Violence is the negative or inverse face of the institutional and occurs when individuals lose their confidence in social conventions, rights and civil services

while collectives lack the means to re-establish civil order and lose the capacity to consensually take a stance on current problems and projects. Silence and apathy, irony and destructiveness, then, tend to establish themselves primarily where leadership, the institutional framework, law or the collective and permanent point of reference fail. The rules of contact and discourse (*inter-diction*) and the order of law (*sensu* Lacan) fall short. The body of consensus and shared knowledge, by which people orient their many relationships and mobilise joint initiatives, withers away. This spells the end of the authoritarian chief, in particular president Mobutu as father of the nation-state. For two decades, he fed the collective imaginary and dreams by giving appeal and consistency to the Zairean party-state and the promising project of its citizens.

The economic crisis and the harsh survival struggle forced a profound feeling of disenchantment upon the individual's overall situation. It contributed forcefully to undermine one's militant or entrepreneurial spirit and ultimately the sense of any ethical responsibility for the public good. An air of profound uncertainty, dejection, apathy and collective haemorrhage pervaded the collective. There were no longer any collective guidelines or societal ambitions to mobilise the popular will. Common hopes are dashed, the mirrors of society shattered and the social fabric ripped apart. A generalised social entropy came to gradually engulf all of the poor classes; attitudes of entropy and lawlessness increasingly dominated the public domain and shattered the hope for a better future. Countless individuals feel engulfed in hopeless misery, anxiety and depression, locked into a time frame which has no perspective. Any possible ray of hope and redress disappeared, reducing the people to an impotent passivity. Confronted with an agonising predatory state and oppressed by a sinister, growing anomie, an increasing number of suburban and slum dwellers lived in an uncertain and parasitic way, being displaced and nomadic persons, who have been overthrown by urban life's dislocation and fatality. In the early 1990s, the disillusioned populace found no other strategies of escape or resistance at their disposal than collective claims-making and subversion against the destitute reality.

Moreover, many find themselves unthinkingly turning the rampant predicament of violence against themselves as depressed

and victims, and all of this in a seemingly perverse and imaginary attempt to homeopathically counteract the exogenous forces that may have caused the loss of their vitality and power. In early 1991, for example, two of the best known Yakaphone healers from Masina township were beaten to death by impoverished close family. Numerous youngsters abandoned the use of their proper names and preferred to be called by their nicknames, political epithets or by terms of derision, as if they neither knew nor had any kinship origins and ties, as well as any place in mainstream society: *Prince, Catcher, Platform 12, Buffalo, 4 x 4, Omnipotence, Speaker Burkina Faso, Tshise(kedi) High Commander*. They, thus, appeared to be self-made persons, masquerading behind a new name each time their life circumstances or social networks change.

*Poor and wealthy in a common void*

Many immigrants to Kinshasa, when considering the moral and economic costs of emigration from their rural parental home to Kinshasa, feel seized by utter discontentment. People very much sense the profound contradictions of the postcolonial situation and the capitalist economy, particularly when confronted with personal hardship, illness or the death of a close relative. Sooner or later the immigrant feels totally abused upon discovering the extent to which the dreamed of privileges or benefices of formal education appear illusionary. It provides neither income nor any satisfactory understanding of the eroded state of things. Education appears incapable of rewarding the very behavioural and imaginary conversion that it demands, such as the cult of the book and the disinterested pursuit of objectivity, truth and science. Many Kinois in the mid-1990s felt as though they were the victims of an enormous hoax. Having lost out on the reward of emancipation promised to them by their parents, school and church, their reaction, henceforth, is to distrust any pledge or project put before them.

Writing on the postcolonial state in Africa, Achille Mbembe correctly underlines the extent to which the state, within the context of the survival struggle and from the perspective of the moral economy of hunger, becomes the preeminent alimentary space: "the state and its public services, as well as its police and military forces

are perceived as both the source of foodstuffs and the instruments of extortion. They constitute the organisational loci of the forces of satiety and famine” (Mbembe 1985: 234-235). In the DR Congo, in contrast to many other economically emergent African milieus, the exploitation of the vast riches of age-old timber and rare minerals does not yield any profit for the great majority of the people hopelessly straddling an ever-deepening divide between themselves and the privileged, opulent few. Today, some rapacious extraction of mineral resources by transnational trusts also mirrors an ancient practice of many local dynasts’ self-serving collaboration with alien powers for the lease of lands, as it is reproduced by present political authorities.

As Gauthier de Villers has remarked, the “generalisation of the ‘politics of the belly’ has completely disqualified the powerful and wealthy elite and has undermined any legitimacy from the social hierarchy, thus provoking total confusion insofar as values are concerned” (de Villers 1992a: 91). Linked to food and constraints of giving, sorcery (Fisiy & Geschiere 1993) and the ‘night’ (de Rosny 1985, 1992) are the categories people resort to for qualifying the entanglement of themselves and state authorities into a common dead end. With the fading away of collective ideals and public ethics, the collective imaginary resorts to a dual worldview, where the anguish over evil and the utopian dream are like two sides of the same coin. In fact, the disillusionment with the party-state and the general lawlessness actually seems to allow for the re-emergence of hopes and ideals belonging to the colonial period. Indeed, some call for a new form of colonial government or for a return to the order of the village, now called *Mputu*; this is the term generally used for the place where the first white men had originated, namely from the other side of the ‘River of Salt’ or Atlantic Ocean, associated with access to the ancestral world.

## The ethical dawn of oniric regeneration

“One understands better the importance of the ‘*fashion group*’ as collective idolatry by focusing on a figure like Shungu Wembiado, known as *Papa Wemba*. The vocalist, who is extremely popular amongst young urbanites, declares in all seriousness that he is the



*Customary Chief of Molokai Village* who inaugurates the neighbourhood of Matonge, the heart of Kinshasa. At the same time he proclaims himself *Young Prime Minister*, promoting fashion “made in Miguel” [Miguel is Europe]. As such his style is imitated in detail by his young followers, who adopt his [Western style] eclecticism, speak indou-bill [a mixture of French and Kinshasa slang], and dress *rétro* just like him.” Yoka 1991: 34

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the oniric seemed to have offered an important inspiration for the emerging Kinois cultures and its parenthetical, hoped-for well-being. Urban life originally developed out of some kind of rupture with the village order and ancestral or historical heritage, often tainted by the many colonial humiliations and uprooting of people. The profile of distinction (Bourdieu 1979), characteristic of the truly emancipated citizen became nourished, in some way, at bars, night clubs and the charismatic power of ostentatious hedonist behaviour, in particular of the highly fashionable dress and innovative style of conduct and a subversive modality of speech. Dreamwork and new myths began to associate people’s emancipation with fashion and urban cultures. These devotees favouring the bar, dress, mannered posture, were seductive, well-spoken, charming, while adopting various other styles and myths of appearances. In line with the millenarian appeal of the party-state and MPR, they aimed at capturing and manipulating their fellow Kinois. The excitement and spectacle of the musicians and dancing at the bars and night clubs ignored any reference to the public and ethical order. Here the client could seek to protect her mind against the mimesis imposed by the MPR upon them as well as the contradiction between an ideology promising well-being for all, on the one hand, and the unreliable, if not downright exploitative conduct of the militants and what the common people experienced and endured, on the other. The client in the bar, for the duration of an evening, could relive the fascination that the ostentatious world of luxury mirrored by the myths of modernisation once possessed, while forgetting how very impoverished she had become by the rampant inflation and the bankrupt labour market.

From the 1980s onwards, lacking the money for feasting in the bars, more and more people joined some other communitarian



network. Thousands of prayer groups, neopentecostal church communities and healing communes of the sacred spirit sprung up in bankrupt bars and dance-halls, or in private houses and their gardens; the bible became ubiquitous and psalms could be overheard, even on buses. These faith communities organised themselves in the margins of the political scene. Through a very exuberant, but unquestioning, religiosity they seemed to recycle the charismatic ambience and leadership once mobilised by the MPR and the quest for elegance and sensual excitement in the local bar.

### Mimesis ends in exhaustion

“... the truncheon of propaganda and the authoritarianism of the state were so strong that it was impossible to escape its influence. In the 1970s people were in a muddled state.” Ciervide 1992: 220.

Three years after its foundation on December 23, 1970 and inebriated with its early millenarian appeal, the party-state dared in 1973-74 to nationalise public institutions, such as schools, hospitals and health centres, next to private enterprises belonging to expatriates associated with mass media, industry, capitalist economy. The watchwords of the young party-state and its programmes focused on work and production: *Pesa maboko*, *Retroussons les manches* (Roll up our sleeves). At that time the government called upon civil servants and young people to devote their days off to maintaining roads and to cleaning public areas. Participants seemed to enjoy giving rhythm to their work by chanting the party songs while regimented indiscriminate of gender or age and wearing the colourful MPR uniform. In the no man's land of the public squares, their labour took on the air of a propitiatory rite of both the seduced and parenthetically seductive civil servants. Terms such as idler, profiteer or thief were stricken from the vocabulary of the party's recourse to authenticity campaign in as much as they were stigmas of the colonial era and its evils to be exorcised. But these MPR programmes proved to be a social project that denied the local ethnocultural, hence, the individual emotional differences and

memory traces inscribed in the body. They thereby stifled the emergence of a new foundational and dynamic identity. It would, moreover, appear that the authenticity programme undermined itself by adopting obfuscatory and even repressive mechanisms. In sum, the pervasive redundancy of the party-state discourse erased the singularity of the individual citizen. In the terms of Jean-Claude Willame (1994), the programme imposed its own criteria of meaning while denying individuals an opportunity to inscribe themselves in difference, such as by origin, mother tongue, desire.

Mimesis leads to exhaustion. This exhaustion is one reason why public institutions had lost their credibility. Overcrowded schools, under-equipped biomedical facilities and disintegrating government no longer provided the city's populace with essential services; no one invested time anymore in these institutions, except in order to try some short-term benefit. Even colleagues of the same institution discouraged one another from starting any new professional initiative. Public administration no longer functioned and its deconstruction only served to amplify the widespread social paralysis. "The country has died," (*boka ekufi*) became, and has remained, a recurrent theme in contemporary songs. People who have, over the decades, been subjected to usurped orders and messages from the colonists and the party-state officials appeared no longer capable of showing any respect toward unfamiliar officials and their demands or belongings. Government was directed more and more by provisional solutions and denial of problems, as well as by resignation and inertia. Official documents and papers — such as travel permits, driving licenses, residential permits, legal settlements, court claims, vehicle registration — could not be obtained except by going through friends of friends and paying a compensation "for costs" and "for beans for the children." Since the end of 1991, many civil servants have done nothing more than make an appearance before their director and spent the rest of the day milling around with colleagues in the office's courtyard or the nearby street. Each morning, road work employees would gather on the work site while their broken down bulldozers and other equipment were strewn about with children playing on them.

## *Frenzy and ostentation*

“Her hands hover in a feminine gesture and come down with a slap on her buttocks. Without stirring, Lenga observes her.

Marie-Ange, you know who I am, the young man finally said. A poor peasants’ child, out there in the middle of the bush, without money and almost no future.’ ... Animation, calls, laughter, voices everywhere; among the boys, everyone wears “Lois” [brand of jeans] and *vengene* [jacket]; and among the girls it is miniskirts and leggings ...

*Éééé! vié, momi na danzé! Giné sapé! Giné démarche! Éééé! ...* [Old boy, your ‘momi’ is lovely! Look at her dress! Watch the way she moves!] ... She looked enchanting when she embraced the two friends. Omba could not resist complimenting her.

Lovely little lady, please allow a knight to bow before your beauty. I believe my eyes never beheld a more gorgeous *nzèle* [girl, ‘chick’] in this town. And all broke into laughter ... Hi! hi! hi! ... Thank you, Omba!” Emongo 1989: 203-212 passim.

“The Sapeur is very self-conscious. He becomes the mirror of his own self and tries by all means to convey the most brilliant and flattering image of himself. He seems to be able to provide a sensation of aesthetic bliss for those who observe him.” Gandoulou 1989: 161-162

“Names of clothes and dresses like *Tembe na Bambanda* [Challenge to my rivals], My husband is capable, *Liso ya pité* [erotic look], *Ebale ya Zaire* [Zaire river], *Super of Paris* ... certainly provide glamour to chimeras that are otherwise not very refined. Above all, however, they give glitter to a universe of challenge and confounded eroticism.” Yoka 1991: 35

In the 1970s and early 1980s, the frenzied ambience in some sectors of life in Kinshasa, such as in the discos or around markets, provided the libidinal forces and imagoes in the individual with an exciting arena for expression, just as it had done later in the popular uprisings. It closely parallels the way through which sorcery phantasmagoria escapes the conventional order of meaning and the distinction between good and evil.

Let me now broaden the argument of the last section, starting by the way Yoka Lye Mudaba, a Kinois author, depicts Kinois life of the 1970s-1980s. The hedonistic ambience of bars, dances and other spaces of pleasure in Kinshasa displayed “a vast theatrical play flashing all over the city where ceaselessly renewing forms of hedonism and narcissism are being ritualised” (Yoka 1991: 34). Saturated with an imaginary but ephemeral fullness of sensuality and enjoyment, the bars were able to withdraw from the manoeuvres of occultation which the party-state enacted in the public space.

The bar and disco scene appeared as the compensatory place for the party-state’s failure to fulfil people’s dreams of equal chances and progress. In the 1970s and 1980s, many sought to surpass the paradoxes of emigration to the expanding city. Their aim was to invest in an identity of distinction which was generated through narcissistic mirroring and by constituting an image of self in the gaze of peers. In the early 1970s, along with its messianic message, the party-state had further encouraged millenarian dreams of a life and an urban ecology of wellness. However, for most of the youth who were denied access to the benefits of modern life and social prestige, the expectations raised by the MPR led to a profound disappointment. At least until the early 1980s, the majority of young people bought into an esthetic cult of personal appearance, that is a cultivation of a sort of subjective accomplishment in which the admiring gaze of, and mimetic attachment to, the other was all important. Jonathan Friedman (1992) and Justin Daniël Gandoulou (1989), in their studies of juvenile social life in Brazzaville, the capital of the Republic of the Congo situated close to Kinshasa on the opposite bank of the Zaire river, called it the cult of beauty, elegance and the dandy look. Bars and discos provided the site in which the virtues of sensuality, frenzy and conquest were celebrated. In Kinshasa and Brazzaville, this cult was popularly called *Sape*, an abbreviation for *Société des ambianceurs et des personnes élégantes* (Society of Thrill-Seekers and Elegant Persons). The *Sapeur*, as the dandy was called, cultivated an ostentatious appearance, walking with an affected gait. He was occupied with amorous conquests, the frivolity of drinking and the competitive exhibition of elegant clothing. The economy of pleasure of the *Sapeur*, also called Social Dinosaur or Grand, and his or her fervent pursuit of conspicuous consumption

were to “give life its effervescence”<sup>7</sup>, according to a well-known advertisement for a popular beer. Papa Wemba, a famous singer of rumba (later known as *soukous*), was called the king of the Sapeurs.

Throughout the 1970s-1980s, in the bar a man or woman achieved superiority over companions and guests through sensualist or sumptuous behaviour. Every evening after the city centre had fallen still, social life began to bubble up in the bars of the cité, particularly in Matonge, the hub of the dance bars. While the drone of business life and the faceless masses at the commercial centre faded into the background, bars burst forth with festivity. Throughout the night, the best singers and musicians presented an androgynous universe as an ideal social model of openness; with their sumptuous appearance, suggestively ‘heated’ mannerisms and ludic messages they advocated a liberalisation of mores. In so doing, they excluded any reference to the world of ancestral law or the distinction of generations and ethnocultural origins.

The disco bars and singers portrayed a society in which the freedom and identity of the individual were vindicated — at least in terms of appearances and the capacity for pleasure — and offered a vision of an imaginary erotic world, one which did not require the normalising or the compelling structure of the law. For example, *Emorau* or *Joli bébé*, himself a dwarf, would dress like a woman and sing while sitting in a wheel chair. These Kinshasa bands, which became popular throughout west and central Africa, created the ambience of an oniric and fleeting universe which the public attempted to intensify and prolong by spending entire nights in the bars immersed in the music’s melodies and rhythms. The very volume of the music and the play of lights contributed to the creation of a multisensuous and delightful ambience that drowned out the frustrations of the day and the discriminations of age, income, class and ethnocultural divides. Mannerly speech became the rule.

The style of dance and musical forms in disco bars differed profoundly from the night-long dancing on the evening of full moon in the rural hinterland, but both do avoid any reference to the frustration and anxiety of daily life. The disco bar celebrated, to the fullest extent possible, the profligate life, the world of flight and *laissez vivre*. The whole of an individual’s earnings for one week, or even the large part of a month’s salary, could be spent in a single

night under these circumstances. The feaster actually believed that through the euphoric and imaginary spectacle of the libidinal potlatch, he or she could appropriate the characteristics of those individuals who had succeeded in urban life or might affect the behaviours which bring social esteem and allow the person to participate in the modern urban field of forces and meanings. Gandoulou's description of the Sapeur in Brazzaville is similar to Yoka's characterisation of the latter in Kinshasa:

"The Sapeur is permitted to escape the very precariousness of his daily existence ... The Sapeur has a profound conscience of his existence. He becomes his own mirror; he seeks to project the most brilliant and flattering image of himself. To all those about him, he appears to radiate an air of aesthetic accomplishment ..." Gandoulou 1989: 161-162

"If for example, Papa Wemba, the darling of the young Kinois, appeared on television dressed in retro style slacks called *Ungaru*, all the vendors of second-hand clothes in the markets would celebrate the next day, because all the fans of Kuru Yaka and all the other snobs of Kinshasa would do anything to procure a pair of *Ungaru* trousers. Similarly, a brief televised demonstration of a new dance in *Bionda* miniskirts by the young female dancers of showman Lita Bembo would suffice for all the chicks of Matonge to invade the city streets in miniskirt the next day." Yoka 1991: 36.

As the early 1990s are concerned, the mass media and particularly international television broadcasting, alongside the billboard advertising at major crossroads, still convey an image of hedonist leisurely life. They fuel an urban scene that fosters new identities indiscriminate of social origins. These hedonistic images continue to evoke a fascination with certain images of a luxury-laden west; Europe or Northern America are portrayed as being wealthy and prosperous, devoted to the pursuit of a pleasure-loving life and self-gratification. A category of young people, middle-aged men and married women, to a certain extent, still try to exhibit these same extravagant and hedonist values, pursuing a conduct of easy-going, sensuality and attractiveness, such as they imagined it to be among the wealthy minority of *la ville*. Erotic conquest at the disco, or the adventure of a trip to Brussels, London or Paris for the lucky

few allow these young people, who so crave modernity as their means for identity through distinction, to at least participate in the marginal fringe of this coveted universe. Some of those who made the pilgrimage to Europe returned with lavish clothing and expensive cars, as well as with new needs and aptitudes for consumption, which in their eyes were signs of success and self-achieved excellence. In Kinshasa, — just as in the imaginary-tinged journey to Brussels, London or Paris —, the quest for excess and beauty as well as for amorous adventure and sexual prowess constitute a magical formula. It is a quest for those who seek to tear down the walls excluding them from the kind of idealised and advertised world of glamour and consumption. These images, displayed on billboards along major but anonymous crossroads in rundown spaces, help some to dispel the despair and malaise of living in a society incapable of granting them the status of material success which it continually mirrors.

By affecting an air of ease, ostentation and self-assurance, the Sapeur demonstrated his or her successful bid to participate in the new era of the Second Republic and to disenfranchise one's forebears' material misery. This public display introduces a dislocation and inversion of the economic worlds opposing the wealthy downtown city and the shanty towns. In the terms of Gandoulou (1984: 190), the Sapeurs "make sport of turning the order of things upside-down; the economic sphere and its rationalisations do not fall within their field of interest. They prefer rather to distance themselves completely from it in order to belong to themselves alone, to be nothing but the object of their longings and dreams and that of pure, cold, objective and implacable reality".

In the 1970s and early 1980s, but less in the early 1990s, the same level of ostentation also marked the *Vieux* or *Vié* (literally, the senior, the respectable), namely the successful adult urban male who had experienced good fortune in progeny and enterprise. Cafés, bars, discos and nightclubs all offered the Vieux the perfect stage on which to display and reinforce his well-being. It was there that he publicly demonstrated a delight in drinking well and dramatised his "pride in possessing an active penis ... with sexual rights over subordinates" (Mbembe 1992b). These are the real scenes of the libidinal potlatch, characterised by an economy of ostentatious prodigality, of male



pleasure and majesty, which in turn reproduced a phallogentric and patriarchal system. The foremost mark of social mediocrity and lack of virility for the male of the suburbs was the incapacity to stun one's guests at the bar because of a lack of money or because of obvious dependence on only one woman, the mother of one's children, at least until the the currency inflation in the early 1990s. In order to augment and display his social prestige, the vieux would make a point of appearing in the company of his newest companion, ambiguously nicknamed *madame*, *nzèle*, *chérie*, *nana*. She is extravagantly clothed and bedecked with jewellery, and with her he would install a "second (third or fourth) office" — an expression indicating informal polygyny. Achille Mbembe considers the similar display of male sovereignty in Cameroon to be one of "anxious virility, a world hostile to continence, frugality, sobriety." (1992b: 9-10)

The economic crisis disrupted the libidinal economy; in the early 1990s bars got closed down one after the other. Beer sales apparently dropped by 30 per cent in 1990 and polygyny was waning. The neopentecostal churches and prophetic healing communes of the sacred spirit provided the popular means to appease the longing for distraction and frenetic exhibition while, at the same time, creating new and less discriminatory signs of social status. Moreover and as I will explain next, people started to explore the energetic potential of an oniric encounter with the mermaid or siren, *mamy wata*. Many, however, ultimately found themselves to have become deluded, lacking a set of sure values on which to rely. However, they remained ambivalent with regard to the local authority figures of lineage and family heads, family counsellors and, to some extent, diviners and healers (Yoka 1999).

### *Critique and creativity*

"'Foodway broadcasting' [*radio-trottoir*], this informal network of information, out of the formal broadcasting circuit, also short-circuits the versions of the official media. It is the privileged locus of anecdotal gossip and as such it is the medium of the poor. At the same time it is also a phenomenon of revenge and a rebuttal of censorship." Yoka 1994: 85



The totalitarian discourse of the party-state and the escape into the pride of displaying some imaginary self-gratification at the bars all became short-circuited by extraordinary verbal creativity, in particular among the Sapeurs and suburban youngsters. Their subtle twists of Lingala and French idioms reproduced, in their way, the chaotic and the rapidly deteriorating conditions of a life of misery suburbs and peripheral slums, akin also to the chaotic state of civil services. They, ironically, if not sarcastically described the hunger, insanitary housing and erosion of solidarity as *conjuncturée* (in a state of permanent recession) or *cadavérée* (littered with cadavers). In their verbal creativity they moreover refashioned the French language inherited from the colonists and dispelled its civilisational pretence. As Mbembe (1992b) demonstrates, this creativity was an imaginary way of counteracting the state's sources of power, namely through perverting those sources and "catching them by their tail" through a very scotophylic kind of humour.

What follows is the discussion of two ambivalent, but very popular, figures whose workings on the collective popular imaginary, from the 1980s onwards, attempted to tame both the patriarchal domination and the violent rapacity of the monetary order (Fabian 1978, Jewsiewicki 1991). The mermaid, as painted by the self-made Kinois artists, suggests how desperation might induce a man who is dispossessed and powerless, to eagerly long for money, goods and social success. He is even disposed to sacrifice the life of one of his children to *mamy wata* as a pledge of his love for her. *Mamy wata* is depicted with a fishlike tail and the torso of a very rich and seductive woman of white or mixed white-black skin colour; she wears a wristwatch showing five minutes before three in the morning. This is the liminal time between the realms of night and day when the murky forces of sorcery weaken as evoked by the cock crowing at dawn announcing sunrise. The mermaid embodies the interbodily libidinal forces that mimetically drive some individuals to deadly embrace mere hedonist values evoked by showy consumer goods from the West. Her blinding seductive power is equally fatal; in the imaginary logic of sorcery and the night, *mamy wata* is able, in a moment of good humour, to grant sexual favours, prestige, pleasure and an abundance of goods, only to those who offer her their total devotion.

The popular imaginary, thus, privileges a logic of exchange which is the inverse of the one governing matrimonial exchanges in a patrilineal descent system. In the case of marriage, the groom transfers certain specific goods to the family of the bride in order to compensate in advance the uterine filiation of physical life, health and fertility. Her progeny socially belongs to her husband's patrilineal descent. During their marriage the groom gives goods to compensate for the bride's future gift of life, the imaginary scenes involving many wata depict the lover as offering one of his children to her in the rash, if not utopian hope that she will reward him with material goods. This indicates that, in the popular imaginary at least, Zaireans understand the monetary order according to a totally different logic than that of the *homo economicus*; for the Zaireans, money is no longer a medium of purchase but rather a compensation or indemnification not for things, but for the gift of life. The mermaid is depicted as being seductive but unapproachable, a phantasmic figure of transience and of the perpetual seduction or call from the alien. In other words, people seek to domesticate and control the dream of the global north and, in particular, the criterion of monetary value and its constant decline. The more money becomes devalued, the less people recognise it as the univocal value of exchange. The salaried worker receives little more than a famine wage which cannot meet even a fifth of the family's regular expenses for food: he is condemned to make a fatal choice. He has no other alternative than to cheat or deceive his employers. In order to be physically able to continue with his job, the worker faces the impossible option of either exposing his dependent children to starvation, or demanding a salary based not on the number of hours worked but upon his needs. As needs become more urgent and multifaceted, requests for payment become more unrealistic. In other words, since wages are insufficient to reproduce his capacity to work, the labourer according to a desperate logic demands merely money on which to survive.

Dona Beja is another immensely popular imaginary figure. It was inspired in early 1993 by a Brazilian sitcom that had been shown on Zairean television. Dona Beja appears as a beautiful woman who many men have loved but none have married. Hearsay has it that she ensorcelled the new monetary denomination, a bill for 5 million Zaires, called from then on *pondesi* ("that which caused them

[soldiers] to murder [innocent people]”). The people of the suburbs and slums refused to accept the coming into common currency of the bill, valued in February 1993 at USD 3.00, even after its rejection had provoked mass pillaging earlier that year and soldiers had shot several women traders who had refused to accept it from the hands of the military. Dona Beja personifies the subjugation of a people both captivated by ostentatious consumption but increasingly impoverished by rampant inflation and its ruinous consequences, including the ever-deepening divide between the rich and the poor. It is moreover a means of turning economic domination and state power into something grotesque and satirical (Mbembe 1992a). Banknotes, exhibiting the symbols of autocratic state authority and the capitalist mode of production, are thus turned into enchanted images of destructive seduction.

### The dawn of a new cosmology

In the 1990s, christian churches and prayer groups, neopentecostal communities and prophetic healing communes, and also the villagisation of town and the proper feminine spaces (such as the house, the foodmarket and the fields) are bringing forth a new communitarian ethics. People feel more and more united around a common issue: poverty and the bitter struggle for survival. The crisis in the 1990s seems to have socially lowered and levelled almost everyone. By the mid-1990s, there is no longer a middle class: “all have become again part of the populace, sharing the same frailty, united by the same economic insecurity” (Ciervide 1992: 22). A lay committee is chosen from among the prayer groups, neopentecostal communities and prophetic communes of the sacred spirit. Such grass-roots initiatives among them mobilised the Marches of Hope on 16 February and 1 March 1992 (de Dorlodot 1994).

In the aftermath of the 1991 and 1993, neighbourhood networks began to strengthen themselves in a dynamic called villagisation around mother figures. If oniric escape from one’s own harsh reality organises itself around the *nanà* or *chérie* in the bar, the quotidian struggle for survival and against cannibalistic inflation is led by the *mama*, the mother of a household. Elders, diviners, healers, prophets in healing communes and popular songs speak of the “sickness of

money” (*yimbeefu kya mboongu*); they refer to the frustrations of contact with capitalist market economy and the vices of possessive individualism, together with condemning schools for the privileged minorities, joblessness, severe income disparity, miserable housing and mass hunger. From their side, diviners and healers label the following as “diseases of the city,” or “of the whites.” They namely refer to the chaotic public affairs, displaced persons, the breakdown of family solidarity and the insubordination of youth, as well as AIDS, that is, the experience of the contradictory socio-economic realities of city life.

The food market zones, which constitute the preeminent feminine domain of sociability and reciprocal concerns, are like an extension of the domestic and horticultural space of mothers. They sharply contrast with the public and masculine zones increasingly marked by anonymous mingling without either personal communication or the order of law. Many of the mothers in the suburbs and shanty towns now cultivate cassava, maize and peanuts on small plots of ground on the outskirts of town. Men and boys have no role there other than in helping the mothers as porters or by channelling irrigation for the gardens. The market and the field are the exterior habitat of mothers from the shanty towns, thus imbuing the public domain with a minimal amount of domesticity and, at the same time, providing them with an effective separation from the portentous social blending in the impersonal public area.

The christian prayer groups, the neopentecostal churches and the charismatic healing communes are matricentred associations acting as purveyors of new forms of moral accountability. Young women and mothers form the majority and are often the principal animators. These associations mould a new mentality, while rejecting and protecting against the presently lethal order of things. As they say, it is from within the rather critical sister- and brotherhoods that will arise “a new ethics of the person and of care for social rights, the revaluing of cash and why not, even sociocultural emancipation. From among these participants will come the leaders of tomorrow.” In their sermons and etiological assessment of sicknesses and ills, vices and the dangers of contemporary life in the towns, prophetesses and prophets suggest that the destiny of the individual is linked to the state of sin or to grace of all of the people of the

one God. The coming of the sacred spirit initiates healing whilst bringing about an end to misfortune. In this way these churches convert a situation of failure and suffering into an opportunity for grace. This is an abrupt and innovative mental break with the traditional paranoid logic of affliction through ensorcelling; the holy spirit bestows its vital breath and energy as a gift on those receptive and illuminated members of their congregation.

## Conclusion

In early 1993, the Kinois population massively rejected the hoax of the five million Zairean banknote and refused to allow it to enter into circulation. A few months later the initiative of a few Marches of Hope take place, followed by the Dead-Town Days. These diffuse actions initiate a new collective history: one of people in pain who discover in their midst the seeds of a qualitative change that breaks away from the utopian vision of a number of ephemeral but rapacious political parties or charismatic healing communes. This emerging sense of people's communal power, shared hope and the recapturing of truly communitarian ethics and sense of an equitable order of things in the making, perhaps explains the passionate endurance and resilience of the Kinois people.

## **Part 2**

Cultural embedding of the body, senses  
and meaning



## A dancing mask, estranged in the museum

The present essay examines the fate of a magnificent *kholuka* circumcision mask, estranged since a century into a curio at the Ethnographic Museum of Antwerp and since 2011 at the new MAS museum. Why is it that I grow quiet with sadness every time I see this mask as an exotic exhibit in the museum or as a catalogue or almanac picture? (Plate 3) In its milieu of origin in Yakaphone society, the *kholuka* initiation mask is the second in rank of the series of dancing masks involved in the performing of the *n-khanda* circumcision and initiation cult (Devisch 2017b: chapter 3). This event is organised every three of four years for the boys in each village community in Kwaango land. Here, the dancing masks appear as agencies which make present the local group's ancestors while they make visible and magnify mainly major culture-specific masculine ideals. The invisible ancestral potency is thereby explored and enacted as a tangible constituent of the local society's regeneration and reorigination. In so doing, and as briefly documented in our film (Dumon & Devisch 1991), the performances celebrate the climax of the initiatory seclusion of the recently circumcised boys and their coming of age in the local society. In Kinshasa's shanty towns, the circumcision and other elements of the *n-khanda* are set up per extended family in the context of the funeral for an elder.

Unable to take myself back to the early twentieth-century sea ports of Matadi-Congo and Antwerp-Belgium, I can only guess which fantasies incited the curator at the Antwerp museum to acquire the afore mentioned *kholuka* mask on the docks from a Congolese sailor. In this vein, let me here outline some of the questions this essay is struggling with. Where does this dancing mask in its home community draw its power from? Has this mask become a mere lifeless art object, bereft of its original vital weave since it was



reduced to the scopic imaginary world of the museum's show-case? And yet, one might ask under what conditions this mask, if kept in custody in a local museum in its original home area, could perhaps bear witness to the local society's invisible life-bearing ancestors? Could it, then, ever again bear its original existential aesthetics of blissfulness?

## The dancing masks

In Kwaango land, the facial mask is identified with, and displayed by, skilled dancers from among the recently circumcised boys. The dancing masks are reckoned as a manifestation of the male ancestors who, at the origin of the local society, instituted the *n-khanda* circumcision and initiation cult for the boys who were reaching manhood. Through their poly-rhythmic dance, the masked boys fuse with the founding ancestors and their reproductive potency. In essence, life and growth, as well as healing and vigour, are similar modalities of life-bearing rhythm. The soundscape of songs and drums, like the euphoric compulsion to dance, seizes the boys and the entire community during the male circumcision rite, ushering all into the adult and ancestral world. The drums and communal dancing exalt the rebirth of society and its life-world, as they do at all major transitions, such as on the occasion of a full moon, mourning, healing or initiation.

The squatting dancer, named *n-koluka* — literally, the one who makes protracted and sonorous calls, — hops around while mimicking the rhythmic flutter of some major bird, so as to evoke without saying an apparition mode of the lineage ancestors. The very sizable hornbill bird provides the principal identification model for the *n-koluka* dancer. The bird's heavy, puffing-like sounds and resonant calls (*-koluka*) can be heard at a distance. The omnivorous and monogamous hornbills travel in pairs or small family, often following the same routes on a daily basis. They are known to defend their territory fiercely, particularly when they are collectively nesting in old trees for cooperative brooding. Some sorts may also turn very vocal, making harsh calls that resonate in their horny bills.

During the initiation dances, the *n-khanda* priest-initiator boosts the life-force of the circumcised males. He spits the juice from

chewing sexually stimulating plants and tonic cola nuts on the parts of the body where the ancestral life-force appears most tangible. These parts are the forehead and the temples, as well as the zones of heart, spinal cord, genitals, loins and knees. The life-force manifests itself in the arterial pulse, tense muscles, vigour, sexual arousal and erect posture primarily (*kboondzu*). People consider that during pregnancy (see also chapter 8), the father gives shape to the bony parts of the unborn through repeated conjugal intercourse. The paternal life-force, transmitted through his semen, will endure in the descendant's bone marrow and brains. An agnatic descendant is, therefore, seen as a reawakening of his begetter, grand-father and great-grandfather. For each generation, a begetter's hollow bones, bone marrow and brains embody his father who lives on in him and who strengthens him with the ancestral life-force. The tonics and aphrodisiacs that the priest chews and spits upon each circumcised initiand also serve to invigorate the agnatic reproductive power of the progeny and the bond with the founding lineage ancestor. The boys performing the mask dances show that they are reaching manhood, true to the ancestral ideal, by appearing brave and energetic.

Following the circumcision, the dancers embody the essence of the mask which, as a dense intermediary space, gives shape to some major and exalted, intergenerational and interworld weave in the given socioculture. Indeed, in the richly ornamented mask that the dancer holds in front of his face, the core countenance of the ancestor and the newly circumcised male meet. More concretely, the mask evokes sexual reproduction as the tangible bond between the generations and magnifies that continuity in the beauty of the face and its mythic connotations. Indeed, the life-bearing forces in the ancestral originary soil, and in the local world, corroborate each other as enacted in the design and the self-addressed messages of the dancing mask. The *kholuka*'s sculpted face and colours — white and black, red and blue — wordlessly figure the culture-specific mythopoeic cosmogony in which the local society participates. I surmise that the slightly protruding or carved out circular shape around the mask's eyes and nose evoke the daily cosmic course of the sun. The eyes, in their shape and colour, signify stances of the life-giving and gestational potency of the sun and the moon

respectively. The up-turned — arguably erectile or phallic — nose evokes, in the collective mythical imaginary, the fertilisation of mother earth by the sun; this is when the sun, as a mass of water flowing along its subterranean and nocturnal journey, flows back upstream to resurface at dawn at the upper reaches of the Kwaango river — which irrigates the entire Kwaango land. In its daily nocturnal and diurnal orbit, the sun appears to encircle the locally inhabited world. The sun's orbit transfigures into a rainbow, *n-kongolo*, when, high in the sky and forming a curved band of different colours, its water mass boils over and pours out as rain (Devisch 1993a).

The dancing *keholuka* mask expresses *kyeesi*, a state of blissfulness in the dancers and also connotes contentment and cheerfulness, which entices the local community and their life-world. It celebrates the shared ideal of grace and connectedness, buoyancy and generosity. The various dancing masks, thereby, perform a fundamentally cosmogenetic and sociogenetic aesthetic which is crafted at the circumcision camp and enacted only in the n-khanda cult.

## A cult enactment turned into a curio

“During the twenties [in Paris] the term *nègre* could embrace modern American Jazz, African tribal masks, voodoo ritual, Oceanian sculpture, and even pre-Columbian artefacts ... A mask or statue or any shred of black culture could effectively summon a complete world of dreams and possibilities — passionate, rhythmic, concrete, mystical, unchained: an ‘Africa’ ... By the time of the Mission Dakar-Djibouti this interest in Africa had become a fully developed *exotisme*. The public and the museums were eager for more of an aestheticized commodity.” (Clifford 1988: 136-37)

“Exoticism is the luxury of the oppressor; it is included in the psychological toolbox of victory and serves not only to exploit but also to take pleasure in the Other. The colonial exhibits accommodated the voyeurism of the victor; they were ‘allegories of the European hegemony’ and manifestations of racial supremacy in which imperialism was transformed into ‘natural history’.” (Nederveen Pieterse 1990: 96, our translation)

The museum rationale behind showing the *kholuka* dancing mask reduces it to a mere representational or iconic thing, that is ostensible aesthetic. This reduction to the scopic puzzles me and gives rise to a number of questions. Does the museum show-case not turn the interworldly cult agency into a fragmentary image destined to catch the watcher's eye and fascination? What, then, remains of the cosmic-generative forces of the ritual process and its celebration of the realm of interworld vital bonds between the founding ancestor, the lineage ancestors and the emerging generation? Has the mask not become estranged, or stripped of its life-force, and turned into a curio?

I would argue that the museum and its alienating setting, an exhibition taking place in a foreign land of the north, certainly empty out the cult mask's complex forces, signifiers and initiatory potency. The museum project, grounded in a culture of literacy and iconic representation (Bennett 1995), is at odds with the mask's illocutionary *signifiante* (see thesaurus), multidimensional life-giving drama and initiatory intention. From her alien perspective, the museum expert determines the exhibit's arrangement and formulates its caption for the exhibit, causing the mask to converge with its ostensible aesthetics and eye-catching function in an exotic goggle-box. The aesthetic scope issues from a specular relationship between the art collector's fascination with some largely projective alterity and the museum visitor's scopic propensity. In this dual relationship, the explorer, collector and museum-visitor only show interest in a given cultural production by measuring it against their own criteria for beauty and an economy of pleasure. The mask is no longer an epiphany but a spectacle of an, as yet unguessed, aesthetic delight to be consumed. Indeed, the highly imaginary significance that the art collector and the museum exhibition attribute to the alien art object does not properly acknowledge the society of origin nor the deep-rooted and culture-specific initiatory enactment of a cosmo- and sociogenetic cult. The expert's eye and the voyeuristic impulse of the museum-visitor dismantle the mask's genuine unity of invisible forces, initiatory values and intergenerational continuance. The facial mask is reduced to some mask of hysteria in the objectifying or fantasising gaze of the explorer, collector or museum

visitor as well as in the museum display in particular, unreflective of its seductive awakening of the noxious or envious yearnings of others.

The fate of this *keholuka* initiation mask, as it appears to me, reiterates a relationship of subjection and paranoid othering between Europe and Africa, between (post-)colonial domination and submission, white and black, literacy and orality, voyeuristic impulse and display of resonance. This cultural othering re-enacts a longstanding intercivilisational rapport, one that was set up in the Low Countries of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries by the emergent patriarchal bourgeois male citizen and clergy. Collective fantasies regarding evildoers, deemed to be sorcerous or satanic, were then projected onto the allegedly insubordinate woman, such as the midwife, female surgeon, business woman, single mother, matron and the old peasant and poor peasant maid. These fantasies have been rehearsed in the phallogocentric imaginary, transferred along the so-called discovery of the New World onto the native Amerindian women (Bucher 1977), and later also reproduced in the Invention of Africa. This is the theme at the heart of Frantz Fanon's *Black skin, white masks* (1952). In line with professor Valentin Mudimbe (1988), we might also ask where the modernist penchant in the west for exotic Africana and fetishism comes from. And how should we account for the contemporary artistic hunger and imagination in the north for exotic exhibits of African hand-woven fabrics, masks and woodcarvings or popular painting? Suffering this same fate, African art speculations today outstrip European investments for sustainable entrepreneurial development in Black Africa.

## The masculine gaze and its incipient deconstruction

The uprooting in trade and museums of the African art's life-bearing meaning is perhaps a symptom of the Western connoisseur's prejudiced modern perception, paired with the economic principles for running an exhibition. The symptom's underlying phallogocentric rationale has a profound effect on the way in which we, from the north, relate to the cultural other and the extimate; this relation bears upon the unconscious exteriority or extimacy nesting at the very core of our intimate self. The dualistic rationale in mainstream

Western collective imaginary opposes west and east, public and private, male and female, white and black, labour and leisure. This rationale rehearses the moralising polar opposites of high/low, above/under, right/left, upper/lower body, orderly/chaotic, progress-oriented/static. It is the phallogentric, christian and modern, bourgeois and patriarchal, rationale that inspired the civilising mission in the colonies.

In a similar vein, the fact- or evidence-based applied sciences for their part also echo the increasing importance that Western civilisation, since the renaissance, has ascribed to visual perception, scopic scrutiny and rationalistic account. In applied science the researcher's gaze adopts a position of primacy or ultimate importance through measuring observations into an order of facts. From that perspective, the world is conceived of as a finite, fixed and ordered entity, like a text already written. Observation serves knowledge, explanation and control. The researcher records factual reality from an objective stance and a mental disposition that is uncritical of prejudiced and distancing implication. The inquisitive and sharp gaze of the researcher penetrates and assesses, while the word represents solely what the eye can capture.

In approaching the cultural other, immigrant or alien, the collective imaginary in the secularised west readily perceives or fancies the cultural or physical difference to be a threat to the normalised, virile, objective and self-assuring norm; white is associated with light, intellectual mind and truth, as well as sublimation and technological science, while black represents a lack of these qualities. Attributing to the cultural other what, deep within ourselves, we shrink away from is a defensive paranoid reflex. The insane, the contagious, the witch, the wild or the alien are some of the most common, almost archetypal, incarnations of the cultural other that sprout from some deeply-rooted and anxious imagining of depravity and decay, impurity and contamination, threat and danger. The old dual discourse opposing the civilised and christian north to the primitive pagan world in the south may very well have been consigned to the rubbish bin, but other and more sophisticated concepts have subtly taken their place. For instance, there is the identification of we-ourselves with the authentic, autochthonous, active and high as opposed to the cultural other, allochthonous,

passive and low. We, from the so-called centre, carry out our technological *tour de force*, while they, from the periphery, follow and conform to it; the track of the G20 major economies offers a major yardstick.

The art expert speaks from her position of higher culture, namely from a self-created authority position, albeit one that is uncritical of its own culture-dependent biases. Exotica manufactured by the cultural other have been promoted to the exclusive domain of the expert's sense of art and criteria of cultivated taste because of the increasing importance allotted in the museums in the north to the examining, analytical and normalising gaze of the art expert. The expert eye and the museum's unspoken options and interests determine, comparatively and in consensus with fellow experts, how to decipher some heterogeneous or alien aesthetic or symbolic code presumed to be loosely thought out or even unfathomable. This perspective, for example, reduces the *kholuka* mask to a readable object, fitting the expected canon and unreceptive for the ancestral epiphany.

In the 1970s, the new mind set that had emerged side by side with the liberation movements, began to deconstruct the normatively beautiful and the patriarchal modes of cultural othering. These movements challenged the old parochial and patriarchal ideal of orderly adherence to predefined and classical or tradition-oriented norms. Think of the feminist and constitutional rights movements launched by ethnic minorities; think also of the gay, lesbian and transgender liberation fronts, next to those of the disabled and cultural other un-conforming identities. We see the worldwide spread of thoughtful movements for peace, sustainable livelihoods and biodiversity, side by side with the green ecology and save the earth agendas. The critiques of the all too self-absorbed modern individual lead to a plural exploration of the cultural other and a less-prejudiced and tacit implication in their cause. All this intersects with the politicisation of the enacted self, more and more open to cultural otherness and to the living world in its diversity and frailty. (Jameson 1992, Minh-Ha 1989) In the 1990s, a great many of the artists interrogated the crisis of male subjectivity and patriarchal power. They felt interrogated by the human vulnerability and suffering, violence and war. The horizon of the new millennium became

haunted by the wasting and junk from the industrial era. The digital age deeply transforms and divides our world in line with classes and literacy. Social media and the worldwide market seek to seduce the better off, all the while monitoring contents and styles of the globalising flows of the multimedia and consumer goods. Meanwhile, manifold grass roots communities passionately invest in communal survival struggles for their livelihoods as well as their intergenerational connectedness, local society-bound language, culture and local world of the living.

### The mask's view upon the observer

“Anthropology is not a dispassionate science like astronomy, which springs from the contemplation of things at a distance. It is the outcome of a historical process which has made the larger part of mankind subservient to the other, and during which millions of innocent human beings have had their resources plundered and their institutions and beliefs destroyed, whilst they themselves were ruthlessly killed, thrown into bondage, and contaminated by diseases they were unable to resist. Anthropology is the daughter to this era of violence ... a state of affairs in which one part of mankind treated the other as an object.” (Levi-Strauss 1966: 126)

“Notre science [anthropologique] est arrivée à la maturité, le jour où l'homme occidental a commencé à comprendre qu'il ne se comprendrait jamais lui-même, tant qu'à la surface de la terre une seule race, ou un seul peuple, serait traité par lui comme un objet. Alors seulement, l'anthropologie a pu s'affirmer pour ce qu'elle est: une entreprise, renouvelant et expiant la Renaissance, pour étendre l'humanisme à la mesure de l'humanité... . Vous permettrez donc ... [que] mes dernières paroles soient pour ces sauvages, dont l'obscur ténacité nous offre encore le moyen d'assigner aux faits humains leurs vraies dimensions ... ; ces Indiens des tropiques et leurs semblables par le monde qui m'ont enseigné leur pauvre savoir où tient, pourtant, l'essentiel des connaissances que vous m'avez chargé de transmettre à d'autres; bientôt, hélas, tous voués à l'extinction, sous le choc des maladies et des modes de vie, pour eux, plus horribles encore que nous leur avons apportés; et envers qui j'ai contracté une dette dont



je ne serais pas libéré, même si, à la place où vous m'avez mis, je pouvais justifier la tendresse qu'ils m'inspirent et la reconnaissance que je leur porte, en continuant à me montrer, tel que je fus parmi eux, et tel que, parmi vous, je voudrais ne pas cesser d'être: leur élève, et leur témoin.”

(Lévi-Strauss 1973: 43-44 Leçon inaugurale de la chaire d'anthropologie sociale faite au Collège de France le mardi 5 janvier 1960).

I wonder whether the inability to genuinely appreciate the cultural other in her own identity and original creativity in life, in the end does not signal an inability to understand ourselves. It is as if the highly fantasised dark continent of the cultural other, serves to metabolise a deep fear and negativity or dark hole within ourselves. This fear often prevents us from questioning our ethnocentric prejudices and familiar thinking. In the 1985 movie by the French filmmaker Agnes Varda, *Sans toit ni loi*, the leading actress confronts every protagonist she meets during her wanderings in the Provence with their own, all too self-evident certainties and, finally, with their taken-for-granted way of life. Her unconformist conduct challenges them to take new roads, dust off the habits that have turned into mechanisms and to discover unexplored possibilities.

To understand the cultural other from the contextualised perspective and in the terms of the cultural other, all the while scrutinising the source of one's own biases, is the essence of the anthropological disposition that I am advocating. In some similar way, a new kind of ethnographic museum as a “community centre[s] involving local people in ‘nation-building’” (Rowlands 2011: S24) could contribute to unlocking the cultural ingenuity and voice of the great many local and common-language-bearing people and to revalue their cultural creativity. The task ahead, then, is one of mobilising a two-way openness and receptiveness that may lead to some mutual cultural comprehension whilst domesticating the cultural other's imperialist versus mimetic zeal. It is first a task to surpass — in the centre — the mere unreflective fascination with sociocultural otherness. This surpassing could favour some openness to the potency of the dancing masks, concretely and in this essay's terms, as a means to explore the invisible, the hidden, the mysterious

beyond words (*mbvuuka*), the uncontainable beauty (*-toma*, *kitoken*) and, thereby, foster a receptive comprehension or *co(n)-naissance* of the propensity of things (see thesaurus, *sub* perspectivism).

The *kholuka* mask may, then, offer itself as a holographic mirror that through unprecedented encounters grants us some more insight into ourselves. The ethnographic museum, more than functioning as a house of projective mirrors, could instead act as an intermediary space. It could offer itself as a forum for a transsubjective and interwordly scrutiny, fascinancy (Ettinger 2007: 116) and transcultural co-resonance. (Devisch 2011: chapter 8). This kind of forum would stimulate the interrelation between the human and interworld, the allochthonous and autochthonous, the strange and familiar, the far and nearby, and knowing and comprehending.



## Affects and senses in healing

The present essay focuses on the sensorium of the Yakaphone people primarily. It will draw in particular on my account of the sensory order in previous works (Devisch 1989, 1993a: 132-146, 1998c). In these, I have shown how the mobilisation of the senses contributes to a most vital, humoral interbodily balance between sensory fields of rhythms, sounds, smells, touch, colours, next to the ones between initiate, healer, co-initiates, kin group and the local world of the living (Devisch 1990b, Devisch & Brodeur 1999: chapter 3; this volume chapter 1). The chapter intends to examine what insights the *khita* 'gyn-eco-logical' healing cult (Devisch 1993a) may convey in the multifarious patterning of sensing, next to the local culture's articulation of opposite sensory modalities. This articulation may involve a duplicitous, janus-like blending of sensory capabilities, as explained below. More specifically, I will raise questions about the intersensory and intersubjective pattern that the *khita* gyn-eco-logical cult of affliction and healing offers to its female initiates. The latter appear to endorse an acutely sentient mode of being-in-the-world and yearning to be reproductive<sup>8</sup>.

The fact that *khita* healing heavily relies on metaphoric transposition and on the imaginary and symbolic registers of fertility suggests the extent to which the condition of the barren or defective woman is perceived to evince an overturning waste of her bodily and social capacities. Her body, either blocked or effusing, is not primarily stigmatised as disabled, but accorded a potentially reversible condition. Consequently, the research intuition, guiding the present exploration of the healing cult, concentrates on its janus-like thought pattern that triggers the inversion of the ailment or deficiency into renascent life. The cult, in so doing, furthers a homeopathic dynamic of re-discovery and re-education, as well as the insightful re-coordination of the bodily functions and the senses. This thought seems to be conducive to identifying the initiate with

the vital potential of some totemic animals, such as the bat and the hen, displayed in their inversion and surpassing of the habitual order of habits, dispositions and senses.

In approaching this topic, I shall proceed by way of three main sections. The first section offers a brief background concerning the meaning of affliction and healing cults. The second section sheds light on the janus-like blending of sensory capabilities in the khita cult of affliction. The issue of a homeopathic effectiveness is addressed in the third section, particularly by examining the cult's bordercrossing and borderlinking dynamic. The concluding remarks stress how much knowledge adduced in the ritual process is not declarative, but practical, sensory and bodily, all the while surpassing much of the divides between body and mind, emotion and idea, action and thought.

### Affliction cults' life-bearing meaning

Let me restate that my work brought me amongst the Yakaphone people with the intention of studying their version of African cults of affliction and healing. I empirically draw upon my anthropological fieldwork which was conducted in Kwaango land in the early 1970s and 1991, as well as in shantytowns of Kinshasa during some three weeks annually from 1986 till 2003. These interregional traditions of healing practices and health knowledge, which for centuries have been elaborated as cults of affliction and healing, pertain to what John Janzen (1989, 1991, 1992) has aptly labelled major African classical traditions of medicine; some have even spread from southeastern Nigeria down to the Cape of Good Hope. Today, in the DR Congo, these professional traditions maintain a place alongside biomedicine, folk curative practices and neopentecostal or like-minded independent prophetic healing communes of the sacred spirit (Devisch 2011a; this volume chapter 9).

Khita, one of the most valued cults of affliction among the Yakaphone people is today practised in almost every single village of the Kwaango region where the neopentecostals do not dominate people's outlook on life. Yakaphone people in Kinshasa turn to it in cases of last resort following unsuccessful biomedical

gynecological treatment or vitiated spiritual healing in the neopentecostal churches and charismatic communes of the sacred spirit. As demonstrated elsewhere (Devisch 1993a), the khita cult concentrates on a matrilineally transmitted affliction. It deals with 'gyn-eco-logy' in the broad sense of the term; that is, the propensity towards the transmission and reproduction of life with which each mother (cf. *gynos*), her conjugal home and cooking hearth, as well as the local universe of the living she inhabits are invested in. The cult entails the treatment of a lasting lack or excess of menstrual flow, next to barrenness, premature and still-birth, or the repeated death of sucklings, and when the gynecological symptoms become socially unbearable. It also treats uncommon fertility in the instance of twins or the congenital anomalies of the deformed, albinos and dwarves. However, the multidimensional and homeopathic initiatory treatments exceed a mere cure of symptoms.

Indeed, the term *khita* derives from *-kita*, to transform, evert, reshape, metamorphose and transfigure. The term designates the rite of passage with seclusion of both the afflicted and the major cult objects in the appropriate affliction cult. It also designates the seclusion of the chief to be installed, or of the widowed and primary kin in mourning. The term then designates the initiation which seeks to effect mutation or metamorphosis (*-buusa khita*). The term *khita* may also refer to the initiates' symbolic death in their former condition and rebirth into a new well-being and identity. Within the particular gyn-eco-logical framework discussed here, the seclusion seeks to genuinely ground the initiate in the cult-specific mode of bodily learning and practice, embodiment and sensitivity, intercorporeality and intersubjectivity. Moreover, the cult arouses a passionate, but culturally geared, embodiment of its highly sensory articulation of the multilayered gyn-eco-logy. The initiate is led to embody a reversed impairment of fertility and motherhood in the interbodily and intersubjective resonance with fellow women from her homestead, kin group and life-world. In other words, the cult triggers the culturally designed co-resonant gyn-eco-logical fields of body and home, healing management group and the common-language-based local society, along with the universe of the living.

## Blending of sensory capacities

In this section, I will focus on one of the operating healing devices of the khita cult. This effort will enable me to trace some of the culture-specific sensory modes along which the khita gyn-eco-logical cult informs or comprehends fertility and motherhood. The khita cult, as a whole, constitutes a rite of passage which begins with divinatory consultation and develops along the following steps. Family elders concerned are expected to join forces in a healing management group; this includes the akin initiates, the maternal uncle of the afflicted, the head of her agnatic family, her husband and his family head having contracted the matrimonial alliance. Follows the consultation of the divinatory oracle's authoritative unravelling of the history of the affliction and related familial problems along with the naming of the cult involved. Then, the healing moves through an initiatory seclusion process. It concludes with reintegrating the initiate back into her residential group and its life-world.

Prior to holding such a cult, the illness of the afflicted person must have reached a chronic or severe stage. When this is the case, the afflicted person's husband or his father, and occasionally uterine kin elders, — who are about to constitute themselves into the healing management group — undertake research into the family history. They seek to identify the potential sources of the ailment situated in-between their kinsfolk. This search focuses on the fields of interbodily and interworldly forces, and social authority relations, which may have been upset by the kin group of the afflicted person or that of her husband. It is a widespread belief that these forces must have brought about the affliction. To add authority to the scrutiny by family elders, as alluded to previously, the responsible family members call upon a diviner (Devisch 1993a: 169-179; Devisch & Brodeur 1999: 93-124). The diviner has the task of tracing the origin of the client's affliction within a field of persecution by spirits and bewitchment. Her uncle is expected to lay bare the state of disastrous effects in the fabric of family relations and the health of the family members. According to both popular and divinatory perception, severe afflictions caused by witches or vengeful ancestors hide behind one or another trance-possession cult (sing., *phoongwa kaluka*). The spirit's call to initiate the afflicted person into a devotee operates through the uterine line.

At this point, and prior to committing the afflicted to the care of a khita healer, her maternal uncle is invited to join the healing management group in view of the initiatory healing procedure. The maternal uncle is, namely, the wife-giver, that is the one who has given his sister (that is the initiate's mother, or the afflicted person herself) as spouse in marriage. The maternal uncle represents the genuine life-giving relations between the generations, in relation to the initiate's offspring, as well as the blood tie between the wife-givers and the woman given in marriage. Therefore, it is customary to offer the uncle a gift so that he may remove all possible obstacles to the fertility of his sister or sister's daughter and her cure. It is the task of the husband's family head to eliminate any impediment to life-transmission by the wife-takers.

The need to organise the khita cult is instigated by the council of family elders following the oracle's advice. They appeal to a healer from outside the kin group to run the healing process. The healer is, generally, male although in Kinshasa women healers may also perform the khita initiation and healing. During the healing process the husband of the afflicted woman and the head of her agnatic family assemble a number of valuables to metaphorically enact a kind of matrimonial or life-regenerating alliance with the healer and through him with the bivalent spirit able to afflict or mend. Similar valuables are also offered as gift to the afflicted woman's maternal uncle by way of formal invitation to join the process started by the healer's arrival usually planned close to new moon. The healing starts in the presence of the afflicted woman's virilocal residential community joining in near the very small house of seclusion (a bed and space of access) in the initiate's domestic space and towards the edge of the village.

Upon his arrival, the healer puts himself into a trance. This move mimics the symptoms of the ailment which has led to the initiatory treatment of his own mother or maternal forebear. It is the treatment which has led to his conception, or which he participated in as a child. I conjecture that this mimicry seeks to counter the anxiety in the afflicted and provide her with an initial identification model for the initiatory cure. As the healing continues, the healer takes on the temporary emancipating role of the afflicted person's maternal uncle. People designate the uncle, in his intermediary and borderlinking



role, as “male mother, male spouse or male source” (*ngwa kehasi*). This role consists of symbolically integrating a double or androgynous mission. The healer, through this borderlinking identity, represents the maternal uncle of the afflicted person and, thus, the uterine ascent of the afflicted. The close bonds he subsequently establishes with the initiate are playful and intimate. His touching and massaging of the initiate’s body are maternal gestures. But he may also adopt a more virile stance. For example, while holding in his right hand (connoting masculinity) his pharmacopoeia he bears witness to his authoritative initiatory knowledge and virile prerogatives. In this line, he is expected to offer protection against any particular contingencies and whims that may negatively impinge upon the healing process.

When evening draws near, the healing management group assembles with the co-residents around the initiate. They all gather near the house of seclusion. Family elders then invite the uncle to entrust the afflicted person to the healer’s care. The initiate is then exposed to a series of ritual inversions, back and forth movements, enchantments, transgressions and transformations. Concretely, the process leads her through the experiences of hanging from a pole, upside-down, comparable to that of a bat. Then the initiate’s and co-initiates’ seclusion phase follows which may last for some weeks up to nine months (Devisch 1993a: chapters 6-7). Two or more pubescent girls, from among the initiate’s classificatory sisters, are invited to join the seclusion in the first days or weeks. An initiate’s (classificatory) prepubescent daughter or son also joins in as a stable caretaker and relays information back to the village during the entire seclusion. The playful, hence carnivalesque or socially transgressive atmosphere in the songs and dancing reduces the shame (*tsoni*) inhibiting any ostentatious licentious joking or exaltation of sexuality and fertility in front of close kinsfolk and senior members of the other gender. The whole liminal context and ambience convey sexual arousal to the community and the local universe of the living. They set the scene while re-orienting the sensorium to sheer expectancy and exposure toward revelation, healing and replenishment. The rhythm and modulation of the drums and chants provide a moving ambience of sounds and melodies, which can be disharmonic at times, that envelop and carry the afflicted person into the affective and bodily motions of disentangling the affliction that has ensnared her.

Prior to the seclusion which begins in the late evening, the initiate is invited, literally, “to hang from the tree-like trunk of the parasol plant” (*-zeembala mun-seenga*). The initiate’s husband grasps the felled trunk of the parasol plant placed at the entranceway to the seclusion house: he carries one end of the trunk on his shoulder while the other end is placed on top of the entrance. By her arms and legs, the initiate suspends her body to the now horizontal pole of the parasol plant, with her feet at the end closest to her husband and her head toward the seclusion house. Her uncle, and sometimes the husband’s family head, stand to one side of the initiate and the healer to the other; they make her swing from left to right by taking turns pushing the initiate. Experts and commoners concur that the “initiate is suspended from the trunk like a bat, in order that she may recover her health”. In this association, between the initiate’s state and that of the bat — which is explicitly worded in the accompanying songs (see Devisch 1993a: 203 sq.) — the comments draw particular attention to the ambivalent, hence inversionary nature of the species; the bat is described as being a “bird-like mammal” (*phuku mubununi*) with excellent night vision. Since the bat hangs upside down, popular imagination holds that it eats where humans defecate and defecates where humans eat.

The more moonlight there is, the lower the bats’ level of activity (in contrast with the village community’s night long dancing and rejoicing at full moon light). In this cult context, songs associate the ambivalent nature of the bat with both that of the trickster figure as well as the transition which is undergone by the initiate from a given ritually staged life-form to another. In popular imagination, people are struck by the bat’s many characteristics that are either very human-like or their inversion. The bat is uniparous and also nurses its young with milk. It has forearms with four fingers and a thumb with claw used to manipulate food into the mouth. Bats mark their roosting sites with scent so as to make them traceable beyond sight. Moreover, bats make all kinds of sounds to communicate with each other. A bat’s touch-sensitive hair and echo-location device orientate it for catching food and directing itself. At birth, the baby bat is able to haul or deliver itself by means of its rear limbs. In order to be transported, it is held in its mother’s wing membrane or may cling to its mother’s fur with its teeth. The type of bats encountered in

Kwaango land feed themselves by eating insects and fish, or by sucking blood from small mammals and people in their sleep. They shelter in groups in abandoned houses, hollow trees or caves, and can stay in a kind of hibernation for several months a year.

The janus-like features of the bat are marked by some fertility songs rehearsed near the seclusion house, in which an overall libidinous ambience reigns, particularly when witnessing the use of the life-bearing parasol plant or palm tree (Devisch 1993a: 60-62, 204 sq.). In the social imaginary, both the palm tree and the parasol plant carry the equivalent and interchangeable meanings of ceaseless reproduction. The homeopathic dynamic of the ritual process is stated in its motto, as “Khita ties [the body of the afflicted] in, and khita may also disentangle it”, or more literally: “Khita binds and khita unbinds” (*Khita wuziinga, khita wuziingulula*). It turns out that the initiate’s hanging from a pole, in the manner of the bat, enacts the homeopathic value of the scene. This embodiment should help her to break out of the sterile and, hence, dead-giving fixity of her symptoms, bringing out their other polar side and, thereby, releasing androgynous self-fecundation. To corroborate this symbolic production, the healing management group and the representatives of the matrimonial alliance of the afflicted person in particular join in and take active roles in the event. Moreover, the position that the afflicted initiate, together with her swinging and the accompanying rhythm, prompt her to relive sexual arousal (*ndzala*, literally, hunger, desire, appetite, lust) and (self-)fecundation (*yivumu kibeese*, literally, ensuing fullness of the belly). This is part of what I would label as the (cosmocentred) order of things in view of life-transmission. Common parlance refers to the order of things as follows: “as is how it is”, *yibwaawu*, or “like it was handed down by the ancestors”, *yibwaawu bambuta basiisabwa*.

It is worth noting that the parasol plant is the first plant to grow back onto fallow land. It attains its mature height within the very short span of three years. Its foliage only develops at the top of the otherwise very smooth trunk. Like the palm tree, which also has a straight and branchless trunk and a leafy crown, the parasol plant signifies the vertical link between the sun and its zenith, which is granted male connotations, and the earth’s soil and subsoil, which acquired female connotations (Devisch 1993a: 61 sq.).

Another metaphoric transposition associates the initiate with game (one thinks spontaneously of an antelope) which is caught during hunting and slaughtered on the spot. Much like these kinds of games, the initiate becomes wrapped in its pelt and hangs from a felled trunk of the parasol plant, resting by one end on her husband's shoulder as though it were for transportation. Seclusion is an experience of dying that leads to rebirth, exfoliating the new inner core while infoliating a new skin or foliage from the vital life-world or surrounding universe of the living. The act of skinning an animal killed in the hunt is metaphorically transposed on the initiate's state of seclusion and her hanging from the trunk of a parasol plant. This leads her through a process of rebirth, or more precisely of shedding her former self and infoliating a new being. *Saasulu* may designate both the shady site in the forest where the game is butchered, like also the seclusion house. This substitution between butchered game and seclusion corroborates that of swinging from the trunk of the parasol plant evoking the manner in which game is transported but also the seclusion like a large packet wrapped up with string.

I now want to address how much the polysemy of the term *fula* (plur., *mafula*) sustains the inversionary or homeopathic dynamic in the ritual process. The term *fula* connotes transmutational energy and unmasking the tension at the interbodily and intersubjective levels. The healing process turns evil or illness against itself (*-kaya*) in a way that is intended to secure the restoration of the uterine life-flow and the initiate's regenerative potential. The term refers to particular physical processes that display a strong transmutational inside-outside dialectic. More factually, *fula* largely concerns the mysterious sorting out of the life-giving and death-giving forces. Healers suggest that *fula* means nothing more than the disclosure of sexual excitement. This excitement is variously epitomised by processes such as the goat's rut, froth oozing from the palmtree's rising sap, foam of the rapids and foam on a gourd of fermenting palm wine. Sometimes it is understood as a metaphor for the initiate's androgynous desire and capacity to regenerate herself. The initiate is led to identify with the bract and inflorescence of the palm tree from which palm sap oozes before the inflorescence develops into a flower cluster and, later, a regime of palm nuts. The bract and

inflorescence of the parasol plant are deposited in the middle of the bed in the seclusion hut. Lying on her bed of parasol wood and bract, the secluded is like the foliage of the parasol plant or the palm tree which blossom while feeding themselves on their rising sap. The name given to bunches of suffrutex, *n-kaanda* (“bouquet of leaves”) that the healer transmits to the initiate for vaginal douches and enemas, also evokes nascent life with all its potentialities. This term is a synonym of *lubongu hvataangu*, “a cloth or surface as varied in colour as the morning sun”, for the matinal sun connotes the act of fecundation. The collective imaginary considers that through the fermentation (*fula*) in the inflorescence of the palm tree, the (male) inflorescence grows into (a female) one that produces the growth of a stem of red palm nuts. The ritual drama, through the initiate’s swinging from the trunk of the parasol plant, transfers the value of the palm tree or parasol plant’s transmutation onto the initiate’s body and the cosmic body or local universe of the living.

The trance bears the hallmarks of an epileptic fit and also mimes mortal agony or social death. Collective imaginary uses the term *fula* (see above) to name the froth or foam spilling from the mouth of the epileptic during a seizure. In the context of the khita cult, such convulsions do occur in tune with the drumming, and relatively manageable trance (*-kaluka*). There is a heightened degree of awareness developed in the altered speech of the entranced initiate who voices the infinity of the life-flow and life-force outlasting the affliction or trauma; the tongue of the person in a state of trance appears to speak a language of rebirth (Heller-Roazen 2005: 149 sq.). The cult metaphors design this as a state of fermentation which excites the initiate’s body and brings her into close contact with the invisible release of the life-flow from the cosmic womb, *ngoongu*. The initiate, thereby, in a most vivid sensory and sensual way that overreaches the grasp of deliberate will, assesses her passionate commitment to the most fundamental values and life-source in her local universe of the living.

There is still another qualification of *fula*, related to the bordercrossing capacity of smell. The initiate is administered some fermenting palm wine mixed with palm oil so as to get rid of the affliction. The wine is provided in the form of a potion to drink or

apply as an enema, and/or as drops in the orifices of the senses: mouth, eyes, ears and nose. I venture to say that the potions seek to calm the senses by a restitution to the body of the virile “fermenting foam” (*fula*) and uterine life-flow (*mooyi*) which may have escaped from the body during the voiceless trance-possession while hanging from the pole. To increase the potions’ capacity to bordercross the orifices and make the senses receptive again, they are mixed with vegetal substances that give off strong penetrating smells (*tsudi*, *fimbu*). However, the initiate should avoid any form of contact with plants whose fragrance is off limits; she is forbidden to pronounce the name of, or to consume, any pithy or viscous (*leendzi*) fruit, or any vegetable or squash to which oil has been added or which produces a starchy liquid (*leendzi*) during preparation.

## Borderlinking and the dynamic of homeopathy

Let me now consider the dimensions of multisensory embodiment of at once bipolar oneness and duplication. In line with the sense modalities stirred up by the self-generative dimension of the cult, I would now like to move beyond a mere pragmatic focus on the performative meaning production and attempt to posit a proper comprehension of the senses drawn into a borderlinking pathos. I should, therefore, also take into account a number of characteristics of this culture of orality and of people’s subsistence modes of life. It goes without saying that people’s genuine multisensory perception of reality is spontaneously multidimensional. In a way, ritual dramas are a form of *techné* but which is not technologically mediated. They take shape in *uchronic* rather than in progressive time.

The dramatisation in the ritual process operates largely beyond the conscious or reflective level of representation and explicit discourse. It comes about in the dynamic and culturally structured weave of the fields of the sensory and official body, of the family or in-group (the social body), as well as of the life-world (the cosmocentric body). The highly dramatised janusian logic of oneness and duplication operates a metaphorical transference of the cosmological space-time order, and of its perceptual paradoxes or mutually exclusive properties existing together. The cosmological space-time and their perceptual paradoxes are transferred onto the

bodily experience in view of a transformation of the affected person's body-self. I would claim that body, in-group and life-world in the ritual drama constitute morphogenetic fields that, on one level, may appear consonant and corroborating, yet at other levels dissonant and disturbing. The collective imaginary does not consider the janus to possess or follow a lineal narrative or integrated architectonic structure. Instead, it develops into a multi-centric weave, or a multi-rhythmical and interbodily oeuvre.

Strikingly, the janus metaphoric bridging between polar conditions reflects a janus-like world order and thought movement in which opposite libidinal drives, sensory dispositions and life conditions are simultaneously embodied. They are at play, not in an antagonistic sense, but in an imaginary space replete with a plurality of options. There is the homeopathic or self-destructive turning of evil against itself. This is embedded within an ontological perspective of reality as being double-sided; each field of forces (say, of the forest, the function of chief or healer, day and night, beginning and end, past and future, here and there) is seen as equally capable of bringing both empowerment or deflation, good or bad luck, health or illness. In Kwaango land, spirits of non-ancestral cults are fundamentally ambivalent forces, lacking any stable orientation in themselves. In other words, these cults display plenty of avenues for seeing things differently, attaching the initiate, the lay healing group and the witnesses to a new view of things and, hence, experientially connecting to an alternative order of things. Both the initiate's receptiveness to wonder (*yipha*), as well as her ailment — and, hence, her vulnerability to bewitchment (*yiloki*) — is echoed by the healing cult's potential for both success and failure. This ambivalence never ceases to haunt the sensory, affective and imaginary space of the healing scene.

Indeed, the janus-like bisociation leads the initiate through the interwoven double-bound motions of both oneness and duplication, energised as they are by ambivalent forces. The gyn-eco-logical metaphoric identification of the initiate with the bat, and its paradoxically human-like and witch-like characteristics, are also evoked in the ritual drama's intersensory reliance on olfactory-libidinous interbodiliness, the keen sense of rhythm, percussionist



sound and metaphorical transportation. These paradoxical characteristics also pierce through the enigmatic space-time of trance-possession. It is a borderlinking pathos and convulsive intersensoriality that may be both empowering and deceptive.

This way of qualifying the borderlinking pathos (alluded to above) is evocative of Wilfrid Bion's (1962) unnameable register of raw sensory impressions. Bion speaks of "*beta* elements" which depict what he labelled as the "ultimate reality O", "the black hole". In people's ontology, this borderlinking is constantly amenable to an intrinsic alteration between life-giving and death-giving. The ritual borderlinking in khita is exposed to both sociable attraction and witch-like repulsion owing to ambivalent forces in smells, sounds, colours and vital textures. Hence, similar opposing cognitive or affective moods are played out in the relationship between healer and the initiate, or between the possessing spirit and the afflicted person. But this janus-like bisociation or interplay of opposites also suggests, to the initiate, that the solution or hoped-for state lies outside the perceptually obvious; such a janus-like perception does not aim at a dialectical synthesis of opposites into a third entity.

It follows, therefore, that order and disorder in the rite's ontology of Yakaphone people are not mere opposing concepts but are, instead, a conceptual pair simultaneously emerging and representing the fundamentally ambivalent character of the reality at stake. The janus-like notion of *fula* refers to a range of transmutational moves such as disclosure of the origin of the affliction, or sexual attraction and the capacity for transformation proper to foam, as well as the appeal to and breakthrough of healing. I reiterate that the key to understanding the healing value of the paradoxes is expressed by the healer at the very onset of his formal oration: "khita ties in [the body of the afflicted] in, and khita may also disentangle it". Moreover, this alteration induces the initiate to adopt co-occurring opposing cognitive or affective moods enthusiastically. The initiate is being attuned to the simultaneous overlapping and embodying of contrasting bodily processes or transactions, images, affects, gender positions and thought processes (Devisch 1993a: 269).



## Conclusion

From the preceding analysis, I would contend that a genuine approach to the sensorium in the khita cult and to Yakaphone culture and society more broadly can only be achieved if we regard the body to be both agent and locus through which some multivalent and paradoxical drama may take place. This realisation transpires at sexual, olfactory, tactile and visual experiences, or through poly-rhythmic drumming. The merit of such an approach lies in the fact that it transcends the traditional Western-tinged divide between body and mind, emotion and idea, subjective and objective, orderly and discordant, irrational and rational, lower part and upper part of the body, individual and social, like also action and thought. I have shown that the human body constitutes the basic scene wherein the human agent remoulds her bodily experience, such as in reproduction, gender and kin relations, as well as in healing. These experiences are intensified by the senses, affects, dispositions, intentional stances, gestures and activities that an initiate displays during the healing cult. The present study has also shown that the human body offers a sensory and practical web and loom for interrelating with others and the life-world among with new events.

From my research it has emerged that no precise and reliable information about the healing janus could be gleamed outside the context of performance, that is outside the context of the initiate-healer relationship. The measure of such a grasp is pragmatic; this means that it is a feeling and yet constitutes a know-how or competence. A few weeks after a cult initiation, a healer is unable to explain in detail how he performed the ritual drama; it is as if the embodied know-how and practical understanding no longer has the interactional, contextual and practical stimuli necessary for this expertise to become the property of reflexivity and public discourse.

In essence, the healing goes beyond verbal predicative mediation. It operates through bodily and multisensory experience which is embedded in the very awareness of being intertwined with family, ancestors, spirits and the life-world. The borderlinking pathos in the healing fosters an intermediate and potential space (Winnicott 1971). To study the impact of the ritually induced imaginary topography and multisensory shock to thought on the initiate, and

on her bodily *cum* sensory experience and expression in healing in particular, the following seems appropriate. Culture is to be conceived as a potential space. Culture acts as an interface between, on the one hand, the world of affects, images, thoughts, the sensory body and feeling-thinking and knowledge or reasoning and, on the other hand, the in-group and life-world. The borderlinking function is constituted and expressed primarily via the skin or the sensory and orificial body as a surface of both separations and contacts (Anzieu 1985). As a self-confined space and one of contact, the orificial and sensory body allows for the mediation between fusion and separation, bodiliness and language, subjective images and shared symbols.

The human body acts as “analogic operator” (Bourdieu 1980: 111 sq.), in that there is a level of communication and homology which occurs between the fields of body, in-group and life-world. The healing cults come to define the human body and the senses not only as a stage and agent of intertwining, but as a fabric and weaving loom. The body shell, orifices and sensory and communicative functions stand as poignant avenues through which an exchange occurs between initiate and healer, husband and wife, parent and child. The same remains true of the relationship that an initiate re-develops with her body, in-group and life-world. There is no better way to capture this than to say that the seclusion house, by way of metaphoric transference, is a bat and a skin to be wrapped up with respect to transmutation; it is where the human, animal and the cosmic interrelate in both decomposition and gestation while becoming less liable to bad or good fates.



## **Part 3**

The moral economy of the intercultural



## Salvation of souls: the Belgian masculine missionary

This essay focuses on a few intercultural dimensions of Belgian missionary work in the Congo, galvanised as it was by modernisation efforts instigated in the homeland by the parishes. It sketches the gradual evolution of male missionaries' various imaginary representations of indigenous society and culture. The essay also looks at the strategies for salvation of the soul from sin and its consequences through conversion and prayer, some selfdenial and abstinence. Let us recall first that the Congo gained independence in 1960. My analysis, which rests on a phenomenological and historical anthropological reading, bears in mind the missionary movement's declared intent and its sociocultural roots in an increasingly rationalistic and subjugating Western Europe. The reading should help to comprehend the relationship between the missionary and his mimetic convert. In various regards, the missionary enterprise was deemed to be an asymmetrical one: there had been no prior invitation nor negotiation whatsoever.

Part one sketches the late nineteenth-century Leopoldian extractive programme in the Congo Free State (1885-1908). Upon the invitation of King Leopold II, hesitant missionary implication joined in. With the advent of Belgian Congo in 1909, state, industrial capital and its trusts, next to the church formed in the Belgian Congo an unprecedented and unrivalled triad for Africa. Their "civilising programmes" in the colony were highly exploitative for the benefit of the metropolis. A paternalist colonial rule was meant to contribute to the "evolution of native culture and society by an overall rationalisation". In western Congo, colonisation was inspired by the French colonial model as operative in West-Africa, and in eastern Congo by the British style in Rhodesia and Zambia.

Part two overviews the gradual evolution and diversification of the male missionaries' styles of collective imaginary and strategy.

From the onset, patriarchal christian modernisation in Belgium prefigured the missionary endeavour in the Congo. In the 1920s, most missions getting established there worked towards evangelisation through indigenisation of the christian message of salvation. However, this approach was hampered by the very patriarchal nature of the missionary's position and alien strategy of conversion that involved few effects in local adult life. It was followed in the 1930s by an assimilation strategy where the convert was to take on the christian lifestyle of the missionaries' homeland. In the 1950s, missionary churches settling in nascent suburban centres aimed to establish a harmonious relationship between the so-called *évolués* and the colonialists. This optimistic approach epitomised the heights of the colonial enterprise on the heels of the second world-war.

Part three focuses on the missionary educational endeavour and examines its different approaches, which reflect those of the overall evangelisation effort. Congo's political independence, gained in 1960, and president Mobutu's recourse to authenticity movement in the 1970s-1980s, next to the second Vatican Council in 1962-1965 and the subsequent *aggiornamento*, set an important scene for internal questioning of the Atlantic civilising missionary movement.

Because I did not spend any time in the Haut-Congo or in central and eastern Congo, this study lacks the kind of temporal and spatial differentiation characterising the missionary and colonial complex. Indeed, what is true for colonial and/or missionary ventures in one region may markedly differ in another. Based on the extensive literature concerning the colonial and missionary endeavours in general, and in the Belgian Congo in particular, however, I dare to present a socioanalytical interpretation of the mental structures, civilisational approaches, and (inter)cultural and (inter)subjective dynamics at play in the missionary project. This bold socioanalytical reading of the deep prejudices and implicit mind set that shaped the missionary endeavour also draws on my own observations from Kinshasa and southwestern Congo periodically from 1965 until 1974 and 1986 until 2007, thus spanning nearly three decades.

My critical retrospective interpretation of the Belgian missionary work, which demystifies the non-explicit or at least non-reflective doxa of the colonial and missionary projects, might appear

problematic for those Belgians who, in accordance with colonial rhetoric, gave themselves “body and soul” for the Belgian Congo. The provocative nature of this retrospective mainly stems from the appalling living conditions I witnessed in Kinshasa throughout the 1980s-1990s, marked by relentless disintegration of the civil services. My plural analysis aims at understanding some of the reasons for the widespread anomie in the public sphere, as well as for the uprisings and looting that occurred in Zaire’s main cities in September 1991 and early 1993. They seemed like paradoxical attempts to overcome disparaging colonial and missionary imperatives and symbolic structures, and to take down the postcolonial public institutions and forces of increasing inequality, which actually stemmed from the colony itself, in particular from the unequal educational opportunities (Devisch 1995a, 1996b, 1998a, b, 2000, 2003b, 2011a).

### The “civilising mission”

The Leopoldian regime in the Congo Free State initially disguised and later justified its straightforward exploitative ambitions by its alleged goals of suppressing the slave trade and modernising the peoples along the Congo river. Small companies with little capital organised forced collecting of spontaneous produce, such as rubber, copal and ivory, at least in the Equatorial basin, Kasai and parts of Katanga. They reaped profit in the short-term through the speculative rubber boom of the late 1890s and early 1900s. The Leopoldian enterprise turned out as a violent conquest, of notorious reputation for its exploitative compulsory labour particularly for rubber along with the construction of railways in the Lower and Upper Congo (Stengers 2007, Vangroenweghe 1986).

When the vast territory (eighty times Belgium) was handed over to the Belgian nation in 1908, colonial officers and missionaries in the Belgian Congo initially shared the feeling that something was to be done for the evolution from within of “native culture”. They defined their enterprise in terms of a *mission civilisatrice* and philanthropic involvement with the Congolese people. It would simultaneously offer the Belgian nation a new civilisational mirror for its self-emancipation. The more the colonial enterprise from the



1930s was opting for an overall rationalisation of politics, economics and industrial modernisation, the less it kept a nativistic interest in local culture. Beside its huge mining and plantation enterprises, the colonisation in the former Belgian Congo became increasingly centred around christian salvation or God's deliverance from bondage and estrangement, suffering and ills. Moreover, the colonial enterprise was also centred on hygiene, general education and an entrepreneurial work ethos. Pacification and modernisation forwarded by a centralising and pyramidal colonial state in the make, developed under the patronage of the Crown and the Belgian government. From the 1940s, the sanitary and educational programmes, along with the new workers' camps and towns were to re-enact the reformist endeavour from the late nineteenth-century in Belgium, set up towards uplifting the working class and peasant population. In the colony, these programmes were to advance the economy of the people and free them from intestine conflicts and the overall "reign of darkness". The tasks also involved re-culturalising the converts in christianity's universal civilisation in line with God's salvation or redemption of humanity. Rational and self-responsible decision-making next to monogamy were the most strategic target in the christian modernisation of mores and society, away from the collectivist ethos.

The intersubjective and largely unconscious and unreasonable transaction between the coloniser and colonised was mobilised by one another's construct of the cultural other. The colonial relationship was indeed greatly an imaginary or unconsciously designed product of a unique historical and discursive process. Missionary and colonisation agendas were moulded by their largely imaginary constructs regarding the alleged kin group-bounded societies and subsistence production of the Congolese, their group-oriented dispositions and their irrational beliefs in spirits and sorcery. Belgian employers, colonial officials, next to the missionary and educational staff, did set up a great variety of highly moralised and transactional stages. These were largely ones of "image power" (Taussig 1993: 177), in view of fostering the Congolese to join the world system of higher civilisation, salvation and technocratic capitalist economy. Sharing for that sake the same broad evolutionist perspective, industrial capital, the state and the christian missions have formed a cooperative triad in the colonial mission of

emancipation and progress, the kind of alliance that however was unthinkable in the mothercountry itself (Van Bilsen 1993: 49). Employers, administrators and missionaries were echoing one another's version of self-aggrandising or narcissist awareness and insistence on the superiority of all things "white". In contrast, the colonised were being associated with a general state of "lack" of deliverance of dangers and ills in general, in particular of individuality and selfcontrol, abstract thought and planned order. This state also referred to preventive health care and efficient protection, next to access to modern welfare and consumer goods. Through this combination of parochial and partly unconscious selfprojective and paranoid constructions, *colonialism's culture* (Thomas 1994) produced enduring *Inventions of Africa* (to paraphrase Mudimbe 1988).

The parallel emancipation movement in Belgium during the interwar period had considerable impact on the rhetoric regarding the task to achieve in the Belgian Congo. The colony was depicted as a faraway and backward extension of rural areas in the homeland awaiting elevation to a better life. The collective imaginary considered the thousands of men and women missionaries leaving for the Congo as heroic explorers disseminating roman christianity and offering new identities. The numerous enterprising women who, by becoming nuns and hoping to replicate their own emancipation, enhanced the general feeling that evangelisation was carried out by "our finest sons and daughters." By "sacrificing their lives to liberate slaves, to fight against endemic epidemics and to free from the darkness of idolatry", these men and women afforded colonial expansion with a moral credit in the eyes of the Belgian people.

## The Belgian missionary endeavour in the Congo

### *Christian modernisation in the homeland*

Let us examine the ways in which the missionary endeavour was rooted in the homeland. Indeed, missionaries' attempts to modernise the largely rural Congolese population stemmed from a similar strategy in the rural Belgian parishes. The upheaval caused by massive industrialisation in the nineteenth-century prompted a

christian awakening, which rallied around the emergent personalist christian movements. Belgian parishes, and therefore also the missionaries leaving for the Belgian Congo, spontaneously drew a parallel between the emancipation goal of the so-called reformist modernity in the homeland and the mission's religious, educational and sanitation projects in the colony, in view of "people's awakening".

For their part, Flemish cultural and spiritual leaders, such as Guido Gezelle (1830-1899), Hugo Verriest (1840-1922) and Albrecht Rodenbach (1856-1880), all of romantic influence, called for the dignifying emancipation of the people through a spiritual and cultural awakening seeped in Flemish values. The re-evangelisation of Flanders, in part to counter the Francophone elite's liberal, rational and pleasure-seeking influence, would infuse values of self-discipline, obedience and reverence, as well as hard work and sobriety, deprivation and abstinence (Vlasselaers 1985: 52 sq.). Some leaders dreamed of locally rallying dimensions of the Flemish medieval theocentric tradition. The patriarchal and phallogocentric bias inherent to this form of christian humanism was obvious within catholic families, boarding schools, religious communities, seminaries and universities. In addition, it was firmly believed that philanthropist christian values would help reconcile individual and collective interests and the different social classes. Gradually also drawing on the enlightenment ideals, most notably the promethean view and the rationalisation of progress, noteworthy Flemish novelists such as Jacob Kats strove to become social pedagogues contributing to the cultural and moral elevation of the working classes and rural population in general.

Around 75 percent of Belgian missionaries in the Congo — both men and women — hailed from working class and rural Flamandophone backgrounds. Just like the colonial administrators, Francophone missionaries came from the urban middle- and bourgeois-classes. The total number of Belgian missionaries worldwide increased from 2,686 in 1922 to 9,327 in 1956. It reached its peak in 1961 with a total of 10,070 Belgian missionaries (Art 1979, Dujardin 1989: 145), but dwindled to less than one-third of that by the year 2000 because of the decreasing number of religious vocations and an ageing population. Nonetheless, in 1961, this equated to one missionary for 720 working-class Flemish inhabitants

and one missionary for every 1,600 Belgian Francophone. Based on partial data only, I infer that 70 percent of these missionaries went to the Congo.

After the first world-war, parish communities in Belgium urged working-class and rural families to claim their stake in the modern-day welfare state and to participate in christian organisations. This was starkly contrasted with depictions of colonised peoples' sociocultural otherness. Until the second world-war, Belgian reformist modernisation policy considered the Congo as a distant tropical extension of the underdeveloped suburbs of the industrial cities, and the rural areas in Flanders, the Ardennes and Luxembourg. Flamandophone parishes ran vast networks of emancipational projects within working-class and rural milieus, setting-up literacy and sanitation initiatives and fighting alcoholism. As Jozef Van Haver (1995) has shown, the roman catholic lifestyle, so widespread in Flanders after the 1914-1918 world-war I and centred on the parish and persuasive volunteers, embraced the pervasive aspiration of reformist modernisation of the times. As such, it implicitly promulgated modern bourgeois profit-maximising calculations and ambitions for modern functional comfort.

## The missionaries' styles and strategies

### *Indigenising or the adaptation effort*

During the first decades, a large part of the missionary endeavour essentially endorsed a nativist or adaptationist strategy for the indigenising of the christian message of salvation and emancipation. This was the objective of the White Fathers (in northern and eastern Congo), the Sacred Heart Fathers (in the Equator province) and the numerous Scheut Fathers (in Yombe region of the Lower Congo, and around lake Leopold II, as well as in Lomani and in the Kasai). For their part, Jesuit missions in western Congo, including Yakaphone society, initially inspired by the *reducciones* in Spanish America, opted for a neatly planned village life for the converts combining local material culture with the christian ethos concerning sexual reproduction, collaboration in group and new farming methods. These nativist approaches had a profound mistrust for

the materialistic and sensual leanings of the increasing urban individualism and consumerism epitomised in the popular nightclubs of suburban workers' camps and townships.

The missionaries advocating indigenising and assimilation were caught in a real paradox. They spoke of the fundamental equality of God's children but rejected local sociocultural institutions, which they considered backward and pagan. Themselves heirs by education of an inherently Western christian modern reformist worldview which was imposing an evolutionary perspective upon cultural expressions and local traditions, they uncritically developed a modern and paternalistic approach to evangelisation. They rejected all rites of passage, local power institutions and polygyny as forms of alterity that could never be assimilated or christianised. As a result, according to missionary rhetoric, primarily the poorest and most destitute people turned to the missions for adoption into their parish community. But in spite of the christian gospel's tenet that fresh converts be welcomed as "brothers and sisters in Christ", the latter had learned to address the missionaries as "reverend father or reverend mother" and were only integrated as "spiritual children." The first converts were mainly young school children. Indeed, the adaptationist approach worked wonders on malleable children and the missionaries afforded them the major part of the time they spent in villages. They also infantilised both the catechumens and the new converts. In their Rousseauesque paternalistic approach and rhetoric, some missionaries banked on their young converts' innocence and responsiveness, since they had not yet been perverted by local customs or modernity. In a nativist slant, children's stories and local sayings were seamlessly used for christian acculturation. In their attempts to instil christian values, ethics, and the fear of satan and his machinations, missionaries also handed out pictures of Christ, the saints and European christian life. Mission efforts also used the local oral traditions, such as proverbs and selected children's stories which they deemed appropriate to recodify local values, attitudes and modes of socialisation.

Because of the missionaries' patriarchal position, converts hinged on their benevolent but exogenous gaze. As such, in the missionaries' view conversion implied some sort of christian atonement and rehabilitation effecting a higher form of humanity and new sense

of dignity, pure and “white”. Converts learned about the many exemplary saints and martyrs with European names who were always ready to intercede on their behalf and especially for their namesakes renamed through baptism. Sermons instilling eschatological fear of hell and the final judgement called for conversion and a lasting loyalty to rural Eurocentred christian values (most notably hard work, reproduction and a sober lifestyle), next to faith in the redeeming powers of the christian sacraments. On the whole, in their attempts to further God’s reign, missionaries not only imparted the modern Western legacy of christian faith but also of moral, material and bourgeois values.

As missions gained in importance, they increasingly provided the converts with educational, health and agricultural programmes, thereby transforming the missionaries’ initial focus on faith and salvation into attempts to control both the convert’s life and environment. The lifestyle that the missionaries promoted, suggested that conversion would enable access to the modern era and help overcome the pervasive state of shortage: lack of knowledge and poor social regard, along with scarcity and inadequacy of technical means. Of course, conversion also entailed renouncing paganism and customary beliefs.

Concretely, conversion to a new whitened humanity entailed mimicking the master coloniser by wearing “decent clothing,” bearing a christian name, making the sign of the cross — preferably with holy water —, genuflecting, praying, participating in religious services, learning Latin hymns and knowing the christian names of parishes. Conversion also meant distancing oneself from poverty, obscurantism, witchcraft, affliction and healing cults, and any other cult, which were all banned by the missionaries. Conversion to a more respectable whitened identity also led to important spatial changes. Converts were encouraged to build a new house either near the christian praying area in the village or close to the parish itself, in contrast to their pagan relatives who “live lost in the bush”. Within these new spaces, converts were also invited to openly break off their ties with the non christian lineage members. In villages, people referred to school educated converts as whitened blacks (*ndedyandoombi*).

In missionary propaganda, as well as in colonial novels and cartoons, the young Congolese were stereotyped as yearning for a new lifestyle and identity. This was exemplified by taking on new christian names, wearing imported clothing, learning to speak French and living in some apparently modern accommodation. The Congo's division into distinct linguistic groups and administrative sections indirectly helped legitimate the Flamandophone versus Francophone reform to occur in Belgium. Colonial administrators' and missionaries' tales, as well as the exhibits at the Congo museum in Tervuren, also helped shape the bourgeois ambition for capitalist enterprise and modernisation. As such, the colonial enterprise was transformed into an edifying spectacle of exploration, domestication and education. Bragging about its civilisational triumph, the Belgian aristocracy delighted itself in accounts of colonial pacification and organisational efforts (geographical, ethnolinguistic, taxonomic and legal), and achievements in infrastructural, health and sanitation, as well as industrial development.

In the 1930s, catholic missions in the Congo also nurtured faith in the converts' material progress and social evolution, in line with the *Action catholique's* efforts in rural Belgium to extend its educational, health, and apostolic programmes to rural working-class and agricultural populations. There, youth were encouraged to join the "eucharistic crusade" (*eucharistische kruistocht*), an elite group of perfect christians, non-clergy apostles, and ennobled knights roused by the saint eucharist (Van Haver 1995: 197). Similarly, Congolese converts were urged to form movements that aimed for local betterment. At this time, expanding Congolese missions developed a vast network throughout the country thanks to donations from Belgian parishes for construction, health care, education, production for the market.

In the 1940s, a Flemish Franciscan missionary called Placide Tempels instigated a campaign called *Jamaa*, aiming for the indigenising of catholic communities in Elisabethville (later called Lubumbashi) and hinterland, particularly centred on the Luba culture. With his *Bantu Philosophy*, Tempels wished to provide the adaptationist movement with a strong foundation, and from the 1950s onwards he aspired to strengthen christian families and communities through his indigenising pastoral work.



### *The assimilation strategy*

Starting in the 1930s but most influential throughout the 1940s when the second world-war left more autonomy to the colonial authorities, the church's assimilation rhetoric depicted conversion as a liberating force that gradually infused christian and modern values such as subjectivation, literacy and sophisticated knowledge, medicine and the market economy. Unknowingly, this discourse pre-empted the associationist modernisation movement of the 1950s which brought the coloniser and the colonised together in a collaborative project. Through education, missionaries wanted the converts to come to christian moral life decisions — mostly concerning monogamy — and stigmatised fetishism, witchcraft and polygamy as backwards. In the modern environment created for the converts, the missionaries presented these backward practices as an appalling breach of christian values and advancement. Conversion to christianity thus entailed a break from the victimising relationships supposedly found within so-called traditional village settings, and converts were instead encouraged to nurture a strong inward sense of individual guilt and repentance. Although polygamy served social, political and economic reciprocity purposes, missionaries fiercely advocated against it. Christian ethos considered it a complete denial of a woman's moral dignity and the proof of possessive unrestrained adulterous love on the part of a husband. Instead, the monogamous christian couple, "a divine blessing", modelled according to the patriarchal European family, living in individual housing and purchasing consumer goods, bore witness to the One God's unconditional patriarchal love for the chosen.

The assimilation strategy explicitly aimed for a new European-style, parish-based civilisation in the tropics. To achieve this, some parishes in the Congo drew heavily on the Belgian agricultural union (*Belgische Boerenbond*). Through its projects, which Belgian rural communities gained emancipation during the interwar period by joining forces with the local savings bank and the *Raiffeisen* micro-credit institution. Evidently, assimilation looked to completely whiten the converts, denying them their genuine African inventive solutions for social and economic emancipation.



In practice, however, families and village communities never ceased to consolidate ancestral demands concerning filiation, inheritance, solidarity and birthrights. For example, during drawn out funeral rites involving the extended family with christian converts included, entitled family elders did not hesitate to assert the traditional etiology concerning sickness and misfortune. In this way, they confronted the christian members of their family with the customary ethos and all the obligations it carried.

### *Harmonious association attempts*

From the late 1920s, the apostolic vicar Jean-Félix de Hemptinne, in line with the roman catholic church's universal ambitions and backed by Vatican's apostolic delegate in Léopoldville (1930 to 1949), the most reverend Giovanni Dellepiane, endorsed the idea of an urban christian civilisation in which the évolués should gradually integrate into the christian, European, Latin and technocratic civilisation, in opposition to so-called primitive collectivism and fetishism which, in their opinion, levelled down individual skill and dedication to hard work. Hailing from a Francophone aristocratic family in the industrial city of Ghent, the most reverend de Hemptinne was naturally concerned with reformist and elitist social engineering. The *Union Minière du Haut-Katanga* shared this vision for the évolué and the project for a new civilisation, since the copper industry needed highly qualified Congolese technicians who were much cheaper to employ than their European counterparts. Indeed, in the Haut-Katanga, capitalist enterprises and the church agreed on the fact that conversion to christianity and education should instil modern bourgeois notions of discipline, self-control, perseverance and obedience to public authorities. According to de Hemptinne and Dellepiane, intensifying indirect rule along with the adaptation strategy could lead to an unfortunate divide between white and black cultures within the colony, which would subsequently undermine colonisation's noble intention, heralded from the 1940s onwards, of achieving "harmonious development."

The term association — initially coined in the 1950s by governor general Léon Pétillon — was increasingly used to define the moral basis for a Belgo-Congolese and even Belgo-African sociopolitical

union. It replaced the civilisation project and offered a strategy of global “rescue” through liberation, salvation, sanitation and education; it hoped to provide a civilising architectonic model that the coloniser and the local elite could implement throughout the country. Pétillon’s call came on the heels of the church’s move for association and harmonious development which the most reverend de Hemptinne was advocating. These notions increasingly resounded in the prevalent economic thought and political interests during Belgian’s late capitalism, mostly concerning workers’ aspirations for social well-being and individual rights. Exposure to this type of urban and industrial modernity emphasised the necessity for christian-inspired discipline, order, faith and solidarity. In addition, it was generally held that harmonious association would prevent unfortunate confrontations between the colonised and the colonialists in mining regions where the colour barrier prevailed.

### *The whitening trap*

In his foucauldian analysis, Jean-François Bayart (1998) shows that, on the whole, the missionary endeavour in West Africa, including the Congo, contributed to the establishment of a bio-politics, whereby the natives essentially were summoned to surrender their physical, material and social lives (including reproduction, nutrition, health care, education, housing, economics and migration) to the colonial and the missionary ethos of subjectivation and redemption. The church was concerned with the converts’ souls but also with their bodies and it acted both within the invisible space of their personal and social imaginary and within the physical and imaginary space of colonial power. The more the Belgians perceived the local as a cultural other, the more the missionaries threw themselves in their efforts, hoping to create a “new type of man” and modern christian institutions that would usher in a “new moral economy.” The convert would be modelled into a moral subject, a “citizen” and employee or craftsman with a good work ethos who adhered to the authority of the administrative state and participated in the market through their production and economic consumption.

In conjunction with the colonial administration, missionaries established territorial distinctions, which would later result in the classification of fixed ethnolinguistic geographical divisions. As far as the colonial administrators and missionaries were concerned, these maps showed the hierarchical ties between local people and their regional customary chiefs and with their new colonial masters. The mission, conversion, schooling, health care and above all paid employment called for the converts and évolués to settle in non-customary areas. These were set up on the outskirts of pagan villages or around the missions themselves, as a symbol of their split with “primitive ways.” Conversion entailed the adoption of a new material culture and participation in all the church’s liturgical events.

Concurrent to the development of important colonial enterprises, converts were captivated by missionary and colonial images, models and rhetoric which, through their modern technological expertise, denigrated traditional lifestyles in the villages (Vellut 1987). In public, around the mission or within the workplace the évolués flaunted a gentle submissiveness to this new order of things and in doing so, ironically accentuated the colonial stereotypes.

In private, and in the face of colonial expansion, the traditional elite easily mocked the ways of the whites and firmly resisted Western judeo-christian, liberal and individualistic values, all the while making fun of their own mimetic behaviour (Ceysens 1975). In the 1920s, Koongo prophets built bridges between these two opposing worlds. There was their hybrid religious movement that stemmed from interactions with the brutal enterprise of building the railroad between Matadi harbour and Leopoldville. Most had first been converts of a British, American or Scandinavian evangelical protestant church. Congolese employees in colonial administrations and enterprises considered the white personnel working in the bush to be very different. They used the derogatory term *Bafalama* indifferently for “bush” missionaries and the colonial personnel on plantations or in the territorial administration; they were for the most part Flamandophones.

For many, conversion was a total uprooting. The country’s political independence in 1960, the many new neopentecostal “awakening church communities” (*églises du réveil*) and the prophetic healing communes of the sacred spirit (see Devisch 2006b: chapter

6) came up with ways to put forward symbols important to local cultures. They also fiercely rejected what they considered the “pillaging of Jesus” next to the white man’s civilising pretence and Western-imported rampant consumerism (see chapter 4).

By interweaving colonial and missionary imageries with those rallying their own rewarding proper identities, an increasing number of Kinshasa’s inhabitants attempted, by the 1990s, to harness and ensnare the colonial enterprise’s profound westernisation of their culture (De Boeck & Plissart 2005). Indeed, a process of domestication, which began in distant suburban areas and was coined villagisation in 1993, enabled the people to increasingly turn to their local cultural resources, in a way reconciling their ethnocultural reassurance with a semblance of a global consumer culture.

## The educational endeavour

Catholic missionaries were responsible for approximately 75 percent of the educational work in the Belgian Congo. Belgian public authorities considered that civilisation through education was an ethical compensation for their exploitation of the country’s rich mining and plantation resources. Schooling remained, however, a powerful tool for subjugating the population. Marvin Markowitz (1973: 35, my translation) noted this and wrote that “one of Belgian policy’s main objectives was to use missions as a means of educational control. By instilling feelings of respect, fear and submission, one could hope that the majority of the Congo’s regions would let themselves be governed equitably and peacefully, and with minimal effort.”

Between 1908 and 1954, christian missionaries controlled almost all the schools, even those that had been built by the colonial state. The colonial administration encouraged the church to take responsibility for education by granting it concessions for fallow pieces of agricultural land: for every new school, a mission obtained some 200 hectares of land, totalling 150,000 hectares by 1960 (Foutry & Neckers 1986: 140). This missionary involvement allowed for important cost reductions for the colonial administration. As previously mentioned, approximately 75 percent of schools were run by catholic missions; of the remaining 25 percent, 22 percent

were run by American, British or Swedish missions and mainly attended by European, American and Asian students, and the remainder were run by the colonial administration itself. Catholic priests, who were familiar with the local population and their language, claimed to ensure the moral elevation of the colonised next to their loyalty to the Belgian crown and church hierarchy. The priests' lifelong apostolic commitment and their vow of chastity enabled them to maintain continuity throughout their education mission. Every mission built a boarding school with enough workshops, fields, cattle and poultry to be self-sustaining. While catholic schools initially emphasised religious instruction and character-building activities, protestant educators imparted good reading skills so that students could go on to read the bible themselves as a first step towards individual emancipation.

The missionary church envisioned the convert's total integration, not so much in terms of submission to authority but rather of introspection for an emancipating "normalisation." Through conversion and education, the individual contributed to the overall push for christian subjectivation (*sensu* Michel Foucault) by participating in christian institutions such as schools, hospitals, missions, marriage, religious expressions, employee ethos and bureaucratic management. By whitening their aspirations, their souls, their modes of consumption and their social relations, converts fulfilled their socio-economic progress and personal redemption.

Clearly, the implemented educational systems foreshadowed the main paradoxes of post-independence north-south relations. Education, which conveyed Eurocentred knowledge, ethics, social relations and material praxis (such as regarding clothing, diet, housing and production), partook in the broader agenda of introducing modern reformist governmentality and the commodification of social life. In social imaginaries, mission shops tied christianisation and the white man's civilisation mission to a conquest for material consumption. What is more, missions considered the emergence of modern material well-being as crucial to maintaining converts' loyalty to the church (Vinck 1995: 336). This shows the extent to which the conversion and education programmes of the missions contributed to the creation of a *homo economicus*. They brought about an invisible conversion in terms of salvation and a visible one in terms of access to "nice goods".

### *Schools and books as subjugation*

Mission educational programmes greatly expanded from the end of the 1920s onwards, as the Congolese population increasingly sensed that schooling was key to accessing the knowledge and material goods instrumental to the white man. But schooling and learning to write further accentuated the asymmetrical relationship between the colonised and coloniser. Indeed, educational programmes and a diploma were actually crucial instruments in the church's Eurocentric civilising efforts. The white man's imaginary hierarchically pitted modern America and Europe against Africa, white against black, the coloniser against the colonised, christianity against paganism, the lettered against the illiterate, rationality against credulity, and civilisation against traditional lifestyles. Every school's absolute objective was its civilising mission, which implied one-way only communication between the European and their Congolese students. As such, students could not muster any national or ethnocultural pride; they were instead subjugated to the missionaries' control and were inculcated patriotic love for the Belgian authorities, homeland and king. At the time, religion and moral instruction were more important than actual schooling, thereby preventing the creation of an intelligentsia.

Starting in the 1930s, catholic missions' drive to civilise the masses — in addition to their evangelisation efforts — was modelled on the reformist emancipation initiatives in Belgian suburban and rural areas that lasted from the end of the nineteenth-century to the 1950s. Indeed, the teachers' authoritative stance, keeping regular praying times, displaying good manners, and respecting order, punctuality, cleanliness and hygiene were all an integral part of the education programmes throughout Europe until the 1950s.

In addition to religion, reading, writing and mathematics, mission schools taught geography, hygiene, handiwork and social skills such as teamwork and sharing responsibilities. Missionaries taught in one of the four main languages, namely of Koongo, Ngala, Luba or Swahili. French was only used in the second half of primary school or in urban centres. Boys were trained to become reliable craftsmen with a good work ethic. Nuns taught girls to cook, clean, garden, look after poultry, take care of children and charm their husbands;

all this to ensure a “cohesive, welcoming and serene christian household.” From the 1940s onwards, school- and mission-sponsored youth movements aimed to infuse moral and religious values and foster white-black encounters in controlled settings.

The civilising mission, which led to moral elevation, was justified by its own purpose: ensuring that indigenous populations became aware of their obligations, all the while instilling in them a new sense of self according to the new order of modern progress. It also aimed to free local populations from backward customary leaders, traditions and beliefs. The purpose was to teach as many children as possible about christian and Belgian values such as piety, charity, brotherhood, obedience, honesty, volunteering, self-respect, self-discipline, perseverance, moderation, sobriety, frugality. They moreover comprised enthusiasm for hard and productive work, a sense of duty and responsibility, and a passion for “useful and beautiful commodities.”

### *Different styles of education*

Research by Marc Depaepe and Lies Van Rompaey (1995), and by Honoré Vinck (1995) shows that the extent of mission educational programmes in the Belgian Congo was unique in colonial Africa. These programmes aimed for “gradual learning” that would avoid creating a new class of bitter rural youth fleeing their native villages (Markowitz 1973: 104). The number of schooled children increased every year and went from 74,000 in 1913 to 357,000 in 1930, 733,841 in 1938, of whom at that time 99.22 attended only primary school (Depaepe & Van Rompaey 1995: 98-99); in 1958, the primary schools were attended by 1,533,000 children. In the 1940s, only one in twelve pupils finished primary school and less than half of these went on to secondary school. Schooling was initially reserved for boys with the first girls schools opening after the second world-war. “Compared to neighbouring African countries, Belgium highly developed the schooling system in its colony. Upon independence in 1960, the rate of primary education was 58 percent in the Congo, much higher than the 4 to 34 percent reached in nearby French colonies” (Depaepe, Debaere & Van Rompaey 1992: 269). Depaepe & Van Rompaey (1995: 41-42) show how education systematically took the white man’s superiority and natural authority for granted,



while Honoré Vinck (1995) explains how boarding school textbooks indirectly bequeathed the Mobutu regime with the symbols and legitimisation of an autocratic state.

### *The indigenising approach to education*

Over the first decades, education took on an indigenising approach. The White Fathers considered that Africans were less evolved than Europeans because of their paganism and collectivist character (Roelens 1920). The indigenising approach involved giving a christian education based on and in respect of the population's cultural background. Children, and notably those freed from the slave trade, were the first to be educated, in conditions that did not contrast too starkly with their daily routines and poor life conditions. Initially, education was carried out one-on-one. Considering the African's "practical and sensual mind," arithmetic was reduced to the bare minimum. Inspired by medieval monasteries, missions organised agrarian centres. From about 1911, the White Fathers began training autochthonous priests and in 1917 Stéphane Kaoze was the first Congolese priest to be ordained.

*Evolués* were first recruited as teachers in the 1930s; to achieve this, they had to be smart, lead an exemplary christian lifestyle, foster wise opinions and also strong connections with the missionary effort and in particular its evangelisation efforts. Technical schools provided training in carpentry, mechanics, ironwork, sheet metal works, plumbing, agriculture and bookkeeping. As a result, craftsmen, drivers, cooks, and various types of employees went on to find work in the colonial administration and in different industrial enterprises. Just like in Belgium during the interwar period, the church considered that teachers were to form the local elite (Van Haver 1995: 157).

Eight-year secondary boarding schools were progressively established. These initially served as small seminaries preparing candidates for priesthood or pastorship which comprised eight additional years of formation at the "grand seminary." Priesthood training was slow to take off in catholic missions: only 12 Congolese priests were ordained by 1934, and approximately 245 in 1950, compared to some 600 protestant pastors over the same time frame (Van Bilsen 1993: 49-50).



A small group of Priests of the Sacred Heart in Coquilathville (Mbandaka) developed an indigenising approach at their study centre called *Aequatoria*. This included Gustaaf Hulstaert and Edmond Boelaert who arrived in the Congo in 1925 and 1930 respectively. They headed an indigenising educational programme in the region from 1933 onwards and were later assisted by fellow members Albert De Rop and Frans Maes, as well as by the governor of the Equator province, Georges Van der Kerken. The *Aequatoria* considered that the African life-world was simple, which enabled Africans to live in great harmony with nature and therefore with God. In the missionaries' imaginary, rural African people appeared close to European medieval societies and able to encompass themselves in the interweave and encompassing resonance "from earth to sky." School children therefore had to be shielded from the urban, capitalist, industrial and expansionist European civilisation and its individualistic and materialistic modernity.

Boelaert and Hulstaert's romantic and static sociocultural perceptions were reminiscent of the Flemish nationalist ideals of the 1920s and 1930s. At the Coquilathville technical secondary school between 1933 and 1943, Gustaaf Hulstaert and Joris Van Avermaert translated Flemish textbooks, including Latin and arithmetic manuals, into the local Mongo idiom. The *Aequatoria* wrote detailed studies on the Mongo language and oral literature for the Mongo elite; their French and Flemish exotic albeit mollifying accounts of marriage customs, initiation rites and clan life were written for a European audience. In 1938, Fathers Hulstaert and Boelaert launched the *Aequatoria* magazine, with the explicit aim of promoting the "beautiful and very nationalistic local poetry" and unifying the closely related tongues or dialects; between 1939 and 1951, Father Hulstaert published 74 articles in the magazine. His studies mainly dealt with lexicography and the different dialects' geographical breakdown. For example, Hulstaert compared the different Nkundo-Mongo tongues and their shared myths concerning their common ancestor, the illustrious Mongo. In line with his strong Flemish nationalistic convictions, Father Hulstaert aimed to strengthen the local communities' ethnolinguistic grounding and to support their will to maintain their common territory and pride, despite the absence of centralising chiefs.

Taking students' reactions into account, high authorities in the catholic church put an end to indigenising, deeming it excessively negrophile.

### *Towards a practical education, but unsuccessful*

Missionaries living in the bush, generally adventurous and practical-minded, often had a pessimistic take on children's abstract education. Indeed, they considered that excessive bookish knowledge would make them loose their minds, while practical education in agriculture and craftsmanship, through manual and methodical work, would instead elevate them morally. In addition, such practical skills would also protect them from the strong temptation of migrating to suburban centres, far away from village life. To the missionaries' profound dismay, however, this type of practical training did not incite the youth to remain in their native regions. The majority of them actually did migrate to suburban areas in search of white-collar jobs considered as endowing power.

As their evangelisation and educational missions developed, missionaries were increasingly submerged by their missions' institutional and organisational concerns. As a matter of fact, from the 1920s onwards, over half of mission personnel were dedicated to teaching and/or planning and building schools. Many missionaries were deeply ambivalent in the course of their daily work, torn between elevation and denigration of local culture. Their dedication to "the people's well being" actually involved significant intrusion into people's personal lives. Missionaries often stigmatised the contrast between the order at the mission and the teachers' and catechists' work ethics, and what they considered to be "primitive and unpredictable village life, closed to change". Nevertheless and despite their recurring doubts as to the population's capacity to become civilised and to the sincerity of their conversions, missionaries expanded huge efforts towards local development.

### *The association option*

In mining regions and upcoming urban centres, the process of secondary school democratisation and the ensuing expansion of

educational programmes began in the late 1950s. The democratisation was signalling the beginning of a harmonious association between the whites and the Congolese. But it was slower in catholic schools than in state-sponsored ones. Non-denominational state schools — mostly attended by European or East African students of Asian descent — were created in the country's main cities as a result of political decisions in 1952 and 1956 which aimed to align the colonial schooling system with the one in the metropole. In the 1950s, when Congolese applicants were first admitted to secondary schools, which were initially reserved for the white elite only, a special commission was created to evaluate their erudition and other social, health and family criteria. Less than 200 Congolese students attended these schools in 1956; by 1959, their number, 1,493, had not even reached 10 percent of the total secondary school population and in 1958, only 17 Congolese students had graduated from a technical secondary school. As stated in Depaepe, Debaere and Van Rompaey (1992: 269-270, my translation) "in 1961, 90 percent of African students attended primary school, 9.6 percent attended secondary school, and 0.4 percent attended higher education institutions. In the Congo, however, these percentages were respectively to 95.8 percent 4.1 and 0.1 percent. At that time, the rate of attendance in higher education institutions worldwide was 3 percent."

### Higher learning and university

The Jesuit-run paramedical and agricultural school in Kisantu, in the Lower Congo region, was a notable exception to the systematic segregation of Congolese and European or Asian students since the Kisantu school was reserved for children of the évolués and local elite (Depaepe & Van Rompaey 1995: 161 sq., Markowitz 1975: 67 sq.). In collaboration with the Catholic University in Leuven, the Jesuits founded the *Formulac* School in Kisantu in 1925. *Formulac* stood for *Fondation médicale de l'Université de Louvain au Congo* and offered nursing courses. Until the 1950s, it was the colony's only secondary school that accepted Congolese girls. In 1936, it also opened a medical assistant programme. The *Cadulac* — the

*Centre agronomique de l'Université de Louvain au Congo* — also jointly operated by the Jesuits and the Catholic University in Leuven, opened in 1932 to train Congolese agronomist assistants.

With the creation in 1947 of the *Centre universitaire congolais Lovanium* as Lovanium University's forerunner, the Jesuits were the first to offer higher education programmes for medical and agronomist assistants. They also organised business and administrative training at the *École supérieure des sciences administratives*. Fearing the rise of nationalist or dissenting voices in the colony, the Belgian government and the colonial administration waited until 1952 to start working with the Jesuits when they reluctantly co-financed the construction of the Kimwenza university campus on the outskirts of Léopoldville. Only in 1954 did they acknowledge the university's status, albeit not the law and philosophy programmes. The World Bank financed most of the construction costs, thus compensating for uranium extraction in the Katanga region, which had proved decisive for the Allied Forces during the second world-war. Nuclear physicist Canon Luc Gillon became Lovanium's first rector. It was the best research university in intertropical Africa until 1970. Its faith in scientific and technical progress and in the intellectual emancipation of Africans, next to its church and foreign capital tutelage, came in conflict with the second republic's nationalist politics and recourse to authenticity. The university subsequently declined into a postcolonial institution divested of any national sponsor or rallying project (Devisch 1999).

Compared with the French colonies, university education took off relatively late in the DR Congo and only concerned a tiny portion of the population initially. The socialist Belgian government founded the first state university in Elisabethville (Lubumbashi) in 1956. In 1952, Thomas Kanza was the first Congolese student admitted to the Catholic University in Leuven. At the time of independence, aside from the approximate 500 Congolese priests and 400 graduates of agronomy, nursing and administration programmes, only six Congolese students had obtained a university degree in their country and 24 abroad. The Congo was slow to catch up, with around 200 students graduating from secondary school in 1960.

## Epilogue

The essay has looked at the missionaries' evolving strategies for salvation of the soul through conversion and for promoting emancipation in the villages, galvanised as they were by modernisation efforts in their homeland parishes. In the 1920s, the for the most part Flemish missionaries took great interest in local languages and customs and, in this first wave of missionary enterprise, advocated for indigenising. They thereby unintentionally contributed to the regional and ethnic compartmentalisation of local cultures. It was followed by the assimilation strategy, which only became prominent after the second world-war, under the influence of the most reverend de Hemptinne, apostolic vicar of Elisabethville. He considered black cultures inferior, encouraged the best students to completely assimilate Euro-American civilisation in order to transcend their own cultures' weaknesses. The harmonious association approach made this explicit. In the growing suburban areas of the 1940s, parishes promoted association programmes between the black évolués and white colonialists' children to foster a new type of individuality and sociableness consistent with modern christian civilisation and intercultural encounter.

The tumultuous years of the end of colonial rule in the late 1950s showed the extent to which the notion of association had actually provided the évolués with a platform to take charge of their future, rights and aspirations. Indeed, it gave them a discursive resource to set up different political movements and argue their right to independence. Through nascent political parties that were able to legitimately represent both the aspirations of the people and the nation's political future, the main players entered into animated debates both amongst themselves and with the colonial authorities. In effect, association grew into a strong longing for independence, forceful enough to turn colonial administrators to mere interlocutors for the up-and-coming claim by Congolese leaders. It ultimately forced the colonial master to relinquish this authoritarian monologue and pretence at a philanthropic civilising mission.

Congo's forces of mutation in the 1960s-1980s set a new scene for hesitantly questioning the civilising missionary movement: major force-fields were Congo's political independence gained in 1960, next to president Mobutu's nation-wide recourse to authenticity movement that started in 1971, as well as the second Vatican council in 1962-1965. The root question was whether missionary christianity offered an authentic Congolese moral system and a culturally rooted authoritative public institution susceptible to offer a moral backbone to the young nation-state. From the 1970s, authoritative Congolese voices came up in favour of some indigenising of the church's liturgical life, that is, whose form would be inspired by the local culture's age-old ritual life and thus rehearse an innate and authentic attribute of people. They primarily urged a full africanisation of both the clergy and the inherited patterns of church organisation, granting the Congolese ecclesiastics the right to gradually enter the leading positions. Indeed, the africanisation gave the christians a different sense of their being in the world. The prominent Congolese ecclesiastics became the interlocutors with the Vatican and with the former sponsors in the north of the missionaries' endeavour. In favouring indigenising, the local churches became aware of forming a hybrid christianity. On the one hand, African ecclesiastics attempted to maintain the rationalised missionary church forms and their materialities. On the other hand, these inherited forms appeared to empty out the indigenous moral sensitivity and practices, for example, in view of tempering the anxiety-ridden beliefs regarding the invisible 'forces'. This ambivalence flattened out people's personal conscience and sense of sin. Conjointly with many Western-born ideas launched by the authenticity movement, the indigenising of christian life failed in its capacity of nation building. Retroflexion suggests that the mutation in the early postcolony and following the second Vatican council's rationalised version of christianity has not stopped offering a favourite condition for christians and non-christians, in massive numbers, to join a community of "born-again" (as I show in Devisch 2017b: chapter 6). These communities enforced local force-fields and new orientations connected with a world-wide spread of charismatic and neopentecostal church communities.



## Anthropology cataloguing classical African medicine

*René Devisch and Mbonyinkebe Sebahire<sup>9</sup>*

This essay begins by evaluating the potential contribution that the “African classical traditions of medicine” (Janzen’s expression, 1989) could offer to community health care in ‘Africa’ — a shortcut in this essay for Bantuphone Africa<sup>10</sup> and neighbouring people who have assimilated these traditions. This question leads invariably to the indispensable revaluation of local people’s practical knowledge in matters of keeping or restoring good health in the family primarily. This is an issue being raised, with increasing urgency, by the world’s younger nations, including Congo. The essay develops along four parts.

The first part narrows its focus to the Ngbandi- and Yakaphone peoples, that is to northeastern and southwestern DR Congo respectively, as well as to the city of Kinshasa. Part two sketches some culture-specific perspectives on the human body and good or ill health, as is evidenced in people’s everyday practices.

Part three examines how the popular views, as also specialised divinatory etiologies, envisage the co-affection of family members. This topic may need some preliminary clarification. According to divinatory etiology, the fabric constituting and confining an individual ties the latter into a gender- and kin-related encompassing weave of either life-regenerative vitality or affliction. The vitality of the individual and her close kin draws from both the primordial source of uterine life-flow in the mother and the world of the living, and of the agnatic life-force personified by the ancestor-founder of the patrilineage. Good health is interconnectedness or being tightly connected in with both the uterine life-flow and the agnatic life-force. Ill health issues from a curse and/or a bewitchment which may cause two major syndromes; the first entangles the afflicted



person into a state of coldness, constraint or frigidity, and the second concerns a loosened fabric or state of excessive heat, effusion or emptying out of the body and dissolving selfhood.

Part four inquires into the elaborate African cults of healing that seek to tame the most pernicious symptoms and oppose the forces of bewitchment. The synergism of healing procedures and cultural inducers of treatments seek to neutralise the origin of the initiate's illness or disablement, whereby the affliction is homeopathically "reverted against itself self-destructively", thereby releasing the forces of healing. The treatment or initiatory seclusion ends by consecrating the initiate into a lasting devotion to the cult spirit and a code for handling social contacts. The initiate is authorised to regain her autonomy and return to her conjugal, parental and societal roles.

## Classical African medicine and health care

Recent annual UNDP Human Development Reports and the annual UNICEF states of the World's Children Reports refer to the situation of poor health in many parts of suburban and rural Africa. There is no precise, up-to-date information regarding people's art of living and the effectiveness of the various forms of preventive and curative health care apart from general surveys regarding malnutrition, infectious diseases and epidemics. Some aspectual inferences about the state of health in these countries can be drawn from local studies and from data regarding health service providers, such as small health stations, clinics and hospitals. In this regard, most African cities and townships show a variable pluralism of biomedical and classical African health care practices. In addition to this, many populations find themselves exposed to war or displacement and/or desperately struggle with problems of malnutrition, epidemics, sanitation and destitute health care infrastructure.

Let us first look to the African classical traditions of medicine. The optimistic and progressive ideology of the 1960s sustained the belief that local forms of healing would disappear following the creation of Western-style — later called cosmopolitan — biomedical services. Today, we see that the classical African medical traditions are alive and well, with their practising healers or folk doctors in the towns operating alongside the biomedical services. The health care

provided by African healers or folk doctors are, as a matter of fact, rooted in age-old traditions of medicine which re-assert the habitual attitudes shared by a common-language-bearing group. It is noteworthy, then, that these healing traditions are performed in the language and style of the culture of origin and are, thus, likely to be adapted to the kinship allegiance and worldmaking of a health seeker's group. African medicine has incorrectly been labeled as parallel or alternative medicine. It was meant to be replaced by the colonial programmes of preventive and curative biomedicine. It now appears that the various modalities of African medicine remain bound to their given common-language-bearing people and their culture. Many individuals find it difficult to deeply trust a health care system alien to their own local one, from which the daily care for health and well-being draws its dynamics and mobilising meaningfulness.

I would contend that fifty per cent of the healers' clients in town consult an initiated cult healer or a herbalist from a common-language-bearing group other than their own. Prospective clients cross local cultural boundaries easily because the healing practices in some large areas have a common cultural substratum; this can be seen in the ritualised treatment strategies and inducers of healing, like also in the metaphoric processes related to the — physical, social and cosmic — body. They often develop alongside other subverbal practices, such as dances, mimes, body decorations, ritual objects, massages, fumigations, medicinal substances and, above all, trance-possession. Many ritualised gestures of daily life (such as blessings or curses, invocations of peace, visits by maternal uncles or purification) continue to influence the physical health and mental balance of adults in both towns and villages of central Africa. Reliance on well-recognised folk remedies remains common, if not predominant. Sellers of medicinal plants and recipes can be found at most marketplaces and near bus stations.

The National Association of Traditional Healers — whose activities are more or less formally recognised by the civil authorities — has a membership of more than 1,000 healers in Kinshasa alone. Who are these practitioners? They are known as herbalists, diviners or specialists of major cult healing practices, such as *bazu*, *bilumbu*, *elima*, *khita*, *kimpasi*, *kubandwa*, *(ma)baamba*, *mbwoolu*, *mikanda-mikanda*, *mizuka*, *mpombo*, *munem*, *ngoombu*, *n-luwa*, *nzonde*, *tembu*,

*yingoma*, *zébola*. Cult healing generally depends on a divinatory etiology of the illness or affliction. While they may have their own specialisations, most of the Bantu-African medical traditions rely on ritual practices and ritualised use of plants. Afflicted persons, for their part, do not resort indiscriminately to a given treatment but, instead, choose a healer based on her or his reputation of effectiveness.

The unique survey covering the major Zairean/Congolese cities, conducted in 1974-1978 by Gilles Bibeau and collaborators (Bibeau *et al.* 1979, Bibeau 1984) suggests that Kinois women between the ages of 21 and 30 account for a clear majority of those seeking the help of a main healing cult. This study, carried out by some thirty investigators interviewing about 5,000 patients or health seekers and 500 healers, revealed, contrary to common belief, that in town most health seekers turn first to the Western-type or cosmopolitan health care system. The most frequently cited reasons for resorting to African medicine were as follows (Bibeau *et al.* 1979: 15-16): (i) the failure of Western-type biomedicine; (ii) the wish to know the (interpersonal) cause of the affliction; (iii) the presence of particular symptoms that immediately indicate involvement of witchcraft or ancestral wrath; (iv) the cost of biomedical care, particularly the pharmaceuticals; (v) a referral to African medicine by national biomedical health personnel.

In the towns of DR Congo, the function and prestige of these healers has grown steadily (Lapika 1983, Mahaniah 1982). Since in 1972 President Mobutu launched the movement to “resort to authenticity”, healers have emerged from semi-hiding and have re-affirmed their initiatory associations. However, till today they do not benefit from any legislation that recognises their status or inserts them as contributing to the national health care structures. Mass media and popular songs both praise and criticise the role of the healers while ostracising the quacks of questionable ability.

Let us briefly turn to biomedical health care. Since the 1980s, the proportion of public resources budgeted for public health care has been drastically lowered to less than four per cent of the GNP in most countries of Bantuphones. This reduction is a setback of the “politics of the belly” (Bayart 1989, Mbembe 1985), or is due to the priority being given to the project of nation-state building,

including infrastructural works, national elections, military expenditures, as well as investments in the hard-currency-related export of timber, coffee and tea, cocoa or cotton. Generally speaking, in most African countries the national public health systems appear incapable of adjusting to the high population growth, poverty-linked infectious diseases and malnutrition. The community health centres that draw upon external financing, are often set up by established christian institutions and NGOs, and have a broad coverage in Congo's major cities. Meanwhile, the small number of well-staffed and well-stocked private clinics have, from their inception, served a well-to-do minority and expatriate client-base in the downtown and other affluent residential areas.

Households primarily seek biomedical treatment for wounds and the sudden outbreak of infectious disease, along with their self-help recourse to home remedies. However, individual recourse may also depend upon the distance and availability of the health care facilities, next to the cost of pharmaceuticals; these costs often are disproportionately large due to the ceaseless devaluation of national currency. We have estimated that for most low-budget health seekers, today, pharmaceuticals may absorb over 70 per cent of their total health care expenditure with 20 per cent going to fees for treatment and 10 per cent to transport. Households tend to spend twice as much per adult as they do per child per bout of sickness. The number of pharmacies and small, privately run medical centres along the major urban thoroughfares continues to rise; buyers quickly avoid those of inferior quality. Poverty-stricken people in need end up with lower quality health care by buying medicines over the counter from pharmaceutical shops, often run by untrained personnel; here, improper self-medication is widespread. Impoverished people claim that, "buying a pill from time to time remains a cheap substitute for the more costly daily bread".

Locally organised voluntary health insurance schemes for hospital treatment are being set up here and there by funeral societies or NGOs (Ahrin 1995, Benoist 1993, Criel *et al.* 1998, Demoulin & Kaddar 1993, Vuarin 1993). Likewise, charismatic faith healing is locally offered by numerous neopentecostal congregations or by hundreds of independent prophetic communes of the sacred spirit (see Devisch 2017b: chapter 6).

From the 1980s onwards, World Health Organisation reports (Akerle 1990) testify to a growing number of African governments who have subscribed to the main options formulated by the African Committee at the 1976 Kampala meeting of the WHO. This Kampala assembly endorsed the promotion of, and collaboration with, associations of healers, in line with the WHO's resolution on "Traditional medicine and its role in the development of health services in Africa" (WHO 1976 Assembly, Kampala, Resolution WHA 28.88). In its attempt to revalorise people's health practices, the World Health Organisation has defined folk medicine as "the sum total of all knowledge and practices, whether explicable or not, used in diagnosis, prevention or elimination of physical, mental or social imbalance and relying exclusively on practical experience and observation handed down from generation to generation". The term *traditional medicine* refers to the practical knowledge systems that have developed over generations in a particular common-language-bearing group. There are systems of information, imageries and healing procedures or traditions to improve health that are transmitted (in Latin *tradere*) within the fabric of family or initiation groups. These traditions are characterised by their great capacity to invent, adapt and incorporate elements across Bantuphone cultures. A further question remains concerning the professionalisation of healing procedures, their effectiveness and ethics (Feierman 1985).

In Lesotho and Nigeria, as also in Zimbabwe in the 1970s and 1980s, there is a search for a centrally directed, institutional cooperation, negotiation or joint effort between the biomedical services and those healing traditions stemming from age-old African civilisations. A few university departments of Psychiatry and Public Health have also begun to enquire about the practical application of the African traditions of medicine in their domain.

Due to a lack of means, many joint ventures between biomedical community health centres and African medicine have been prematurely called off or never allowed to reach the stage of large-scale implementation. Today, in most African countries we still find ourselves waiting at the starting gate. The few centres for African medicine that have enjoyed some formal recognition, also tend to comply with their sponsors' wishes so as not to lose their essential sources of income. This places the focus, then, exclusively on the

chemical-curative qualities of plant, animal and mineral products, while neglecting or disregarding the broader psychological and sociocultural dimensions of African medicine, or omitting the final clinical evaluation of the healer's total performance.

Moreover, many projects envisaging a revaluation of African medicine are deemed to fail when healers are invited to work in a hospital setting or under the supervision of biomedical doctors. From the outset, this relationship between healer and biomedical doctor proves biased, asymmetrical and unsustainable. The healer's perspective is at odds with that espoused in biomedicine. In these situations, healers are not accorded any autonomous, self-centred status in their own right; their initiatory mandate is blatantly ignored. Biomedicine becomes the sole arbiter of their activities, depriving healers of any institutional control over their intervention (Dozon 1987: 16).

The biomedical help offered by physicians, polyclinics, primary care centres and pharmacies are embedded in, and to some extent reproduce, an institutional, intersubjective and Western-tinged rationale of the nation-state. In line with a commodity economy and the ethos of capitalist entrepreneurship, the disease is restricted to the patient's physical condition, severed from its basic interweave into the kin group. Clinical or curative biomedicine is, chiefly, concerned with the physical disease rather than with illness and sickness. Inasmuch as she works as a scientist, the doctor neither shares nor wishes to influence the patient's social network. The diagnosis is to be objective and the disease is to be objectified. Any reference to context, subjective and interpersonal understandings and cultural meaning is left out of the picture. Disease is biomedically defined in terms of a predominantly instrumental or functional view of the body. In the clinical setting, the biomedical doctor fights the disorder allopathically. The doctor approaches the patient as a distinct instance, in a dyadic relation characterised by unequal competence and one-sided responsibility. In biomedicine, authority and dependence are generated and concentrated on a scientific basis and in the name of therapeutic commitment and effectiveness. To top things off, the payment of the fee terminates the therapeutic relation.

## Local cultural perspectives on body and health

The medical anthropologist, through participant observation in a common-language-speaking group, investigates people's collectively shared practices, ideas and values related to health, the sick and illness, as also to health care-workers, healers and healing; all of these fields are approached and analysed in the terms of their particular culture. Viewed from the collective angle, a culture is a body of common knowledge, methods and skills practised and shared by a common-language-bearing group; these are both inherited from former generations and steadily reshaped in response to the changing socio-economic, plural ethnocultural, environmental and global-informational context. Observed from the individual's cognitive capacities and compared to others in her native common-language-bearing group, culture moulds the individual's inner world of dreams, feelings and emotions, as well her bodily acts, senses, practical thinking and conscience. The work of culture is simultaneously a transmitted and an inventive encoding and moulding of daily practice, primarily enacted in and through bodily transactions, particularly sensory and orificial ones. In the Yakaphone milieu of orality, culture is envisaged as an ongoing weave, fabric or drama, and not as a constituted narrative or text(book). To study culture's impact on the afflicted person, and in particular upon bodily experience or acts and thoughts that shape sickness or illness and healing, it would seem appropriate to view the work of culture as an interface. A people's culture exposes the body's unconsciously manifested affects, symptoms, bewitchment or spirit possession, to both the common-sense and the divinatory etiological interpretations of affliction. Local culture's socialising, informative and evaluative function is constituted and expressed primarily via the body, its functions and interactions, particularly, sensory, commensal and conjugal ones.

### *The life-force and life-flow*

For the Yakaphone people the real source of health, individual development and healing are both the agnatic life-force (*ngolu*) and the uterine life-flow (*mooyi*). The highly value-laden notions of *ngolu*



and *kboondzu*, literally vigour and erectness, refer to the vigorousness, tonicity and muscularity of the limbs or even the entire male body; it also refers to the erectile life-force of the genitor's spinal column that extends into the male organ. All members of the patridescent group tap from the agnatic transmission of ancestral life-force, symbolised by the river flow in the vicinity that drains the rain from the homestead and its environs. The notions of *ngolu* and *kboondzu* also refer to the power of resistance or counter-attack that a father must possess in order to stave off any bewitchment that might befall his offspring.

A segmentary lineage system regroups Yakaphone people within a given region, spanning a half-a-day's walk or so, related by agnatic descent to the founding ancestor. The patriarchal worldmaking also gives support to this lineage order. The sexually life-generating man is praised for his *kboondzu* or tense muscularity, which in fact denotes the erectile force evocative of the patrilineally transmitted ancestral life-force (*ngolu*) by tapping it from the genitor's cranium, backbone and limbs. Concretely, this agnatic life-transmission is channelled through the erectile transfer of semen to the foetus, which then hardens to form the cranium, backbone and limbs of the newly begotten child. In other words, the genitor transmits bony or skeletal erectility to his offspring via their fontanel. Generation after generation, male descendants witness to this paternal erectile power in their prowess, vigour and daring, while female descendants do it in their sense of gracious bodily balance, mentioned above. The input by the physical father (*taata meenga*, literally the father through blood, a notion that also connotes the genitor's semen) is very much associated with the first months of foetal development during which the genitor stirs up the intergenerational life stream through repeated intercourse with the pregnant spouse exclusively; in this way, the transmitted semen enters a generative stage of fermentation seen as the male equivalent to the female process of life-bearing cooking (Devisch 1993a: 90-91, 110-111, 134-136). The genitor, thereby, re-links the decomposition of the paternal semen in the maternal womb with the renewal of life along an auto-generative process of "fermenting" (*fula*) in the bony parts of the foetus which will grow into the skeleton and, later, the bodily prowess and sexual erectility



of the descendant. Generation after generation, the bony parts are begotten from the paternal semen that flows from the genitor's cranium, spinal cord and other hollow bones. The seminal flow, thereby, connects the forefather-genitor with the agnatic descendants. Namely, it is the physical father who "opens and shuts the door" (of the dwelling or of the vagina) and transmits bony or skeletal erectility to the foetus. He is the one who enjoys the rights in his spouse as bearer of children and those of the physical father, even if he has not sexually begotten the newborn because of impotence or extramarital relations on the part of the mother-to-be.

Agnatic descent transmits social identity and membership in segmentary patrilineages; the house (*ndzho*) is the basic social unit of kinship organisation and patri-virilocal residence. One's name and position in the kin group, in short the individual's social identity, are passed on through the agnatic line. It is the main duty of fathers and elders to extend the flow of sacrifices into a mode of commensality with their forebears so that the latter may continuously reinvigorate the life-force or potency in their descendants. The words of elders are empowering when they re-enact tradition, that is, when words spoken long ago by the ancestors are reawakened to once again interweave ascendants and descendants, humans and their life-world. These words of power, thereby, establish order and link up with the agnatic life-force originating from their "nameable ancestors" (sing., *khaaka*) or mythical "primordial founder" (sing., *khulu*) of the patrilineage.

The uterine bond that ties each subject to her or his mother, her mother, maternal grand- and great-grandmother, and other close maternal relatives, is a life-regenerative tie with the chthonic womb of all life. The matrilineal or uterine line does not commemorate any ancestor. The chthonic womb is an unnameable and cyclically self-regenerating uterine source of life and is situated in "the primordial life-spring of the earth" (*ngoongu*). It is cosmologically, but not strictly geographically, associated with the wellspring of the Kwaango river which drains the eastern side of the Kwaango region of its rain. The mythical stock of the highly vitalising "kaolin-like clay" (*pheemba*) is closely associated with this wellspring. The tree, with its roots, base, trunk and top, symbolises the matrilineal bonding with the chthonic womb of all life (Devisch & Brodeur

1999: 51-55). This primordial chthonic life-spring may bubble up and bulge out at the multiple transitions, moments and marks in the daily and lunar cycle. The house of seclusion in the healing cults evokes this chthonic womb along with the maternal womb, the home and the women's nurturing agricultural or life-bearing activities.

Agnatic descent and uterine filiation coalesce in parenthood, -*buta baana*, literally, the drawing forth of children. Cult ritual processes express sexual reproduction and parenthood as a form of weaving or fabric; this is evocative of the paradigm of matrimonial exchange, itself a result of previous exchanges. In this weaving, the virile contribution in sexual reproduction is associated with the shuttle that rhythmically interweaves the feminine warp — connoting a horizontal movement — with the masculine woof — that connotes a vertical movement.

Keen perceptiveness (-*teemwasa*) is associated with the healer and diviner, and a form of vital exchange (Devisch 1990). It is generated both by an intense energetic life-flow and powerful life-force between healer or diviner and client. The client, moreover, has the power to awaken and absorb, or smother and deflect the life-force of the other. This second sight is said to interrelate with a heightened scent and sense of smell. The use of odoriferous plants in initiatory cult healing draws on the metaphorical connection between heightened sense of smell, sexual attraction and life-giving. In this context, odoriferous plants (from the forest if for men, or the savannah if for women) are used to combat infertility. Fragrant plants cover the initiate's sleeping mat or enter into her by smoke or steam baths and enemas (Devisch 1993a).

Smell represents something unconfined that easily crosses bodily borders and spatial limits. In the amorous encounter, the sense of smell alternatively plays the roles of source and witness to the partner's arousal (literally, sexual hunger, *ndzala*). A term for erotic transport, -*nyuukisana*, translates literally as "cause to mutually scent the odour that one excites because of the other". Bad odour, by contrast, may evoke the obliteration of boundaries, possibly incurring the perversion of reciprocity. Filth and repugnant odours can, thus, be found at the base of moral sentiments such as the rejection or condemnation of the behaviour of a foreign individual or group.

The dog which, attracted by a bitch in heat, sniffs the genital parts and even mates with its own mother fuels imaginations and beliefs about the witches' nocturnal promiscuity. This also explains why a suitor or a particular woman may be rejected for marriage based on the allegation that s/he eats dog flesh. If a stray dog regularly enters a dwelling, the inhabitants are entitled to seek symbolic reparation from its owner. The perpetrator of incest is believed to expose himself to leprosy. In this line, incest is regarded as negating the skin's very function of minimal limit between blood relatives. The revulsion pertaining to incest and leprosy refers to the tainted genital smell, as do the aversions to the non circumcised adult man and to haemorrhoids, which appear to mix anal excretion with menstrual blood. Such ghastly mixing will "bring misfortune" (*-beembula*).

The link between smell, sexuality and health is also expressed in the cultural association between rotting and fermentation, reproductive killing (in the hunt) and regenerating potential (through cooking). Fecundation is seen as a partial death of the genitor, followed by the fermentation or bubbling within the womb of both the male seed and the blood of the *genitrix*. Genital scent is considered to be a special form of organic energy transforming decay into regeneration through sexual excitement. The vital unifying function, performed by the body's odour, is compared to the odour given off by the carcass of game. After hanging one night, in a hide constructed for the occasion at the fringe of forest, the game will give off its life-force, evocative of the transformation through fermentation or cooking. The hunter-trapper can even transform a trackless area into a much-visited place simply by urinating on the ground on either side of his trap. His prey, attracted by the smell of ammonia, will run up to lick the uric acid salts, with scent and gluttony being the inducements. Thus, attraction, odour, commensal food, reproductive sexuality and health are metaphorically connected as conversions of decay into regeneration.

### *The gendering of health*

Humoral criteria are used to classify a large number of gender-appropriate activities, qualities and health risks, as well as states of good and ill health along with ailments and remedies (Devisch 1993a:

chapter 4). The qualification of the female or male body and the gender specific syndromes are, thus, dependent upon the humoral system. The solid, hard, dry or cold parts, such as the skeleton and muscular constituents of the body are thought to be transmitted by the father and to connote virility. The moist, soft or warm parts of the body, that is the vital organs and fleshy skin, are transmitted by the mother and have female connotations. Ingestion and excretion contribute to the humoral balance of hot and cold, soft and hard, moist and dry body parts and functions, as well as the effect of sweet and bitter, cooked and raw aliments. The diligent use of medicinal plants is basically an offshoot of this humoral view.

Humoral imbalance is said to disturb the bodily function. Abdominal pain and congestion, gastric upsets and disturbed faecal elimination disturb or weaken the humoral balance of the body. Imbalance causes infections or weakens the blood and other fluids of the soft organs, particularly the lungs, stomach, bowels, liver, bladder, uterus or male organ. The symptoms are abscesses, rashes, sudden weight loss, pinkish-brown skin, pulmonary congestion, constipation, impotence, bouts of fever, chills, fainting, colds and otitis. Excessive discharge is another humoral imbalance, such as coughing, phlegm production, vomiting, constipation, diarrhoea, intestinal bleeding, menstrual irregularities, next to incontinence or days-long vaginal secretion.

The clearly gendered map of human anatomy and bodily functions also extends to time and space. The dietary taboos observed by the household, especially rules about eating together and about bodily and conjugal intimacy, contribute to differentiate the household space, which is feminine and maternal, from the outside space, which is masculine, under the control of the public eye. Eating is a strictly diurnal activity inside or in front of the family home, whereas conjugal communion should only take place at night in the conjugal bed.

The reproductive virile life-force, linking each male to his patrilineal ancestors, has a metaphorical equivalent in the forest. Through shedding blood, the hunter transforms his catch into highly prized food; he, thereby, re-lives society's origin associated with the founding ancestor's immigration and bloodshed. The virile strength flooding into the tense muscles and, in particular the tonic

vigour of the hunter about to kill his prey, are exalted both in immigration stories and in banter. The same imagery is used to praise a speaker's combativeness. On their return from the hunt, men praise the coital act because of the physical experience of their overpowering virile strength, and claim to repeat rather than to prolong the intercourse.

The maternal womb transmits and shapes the infant's fleshy parts (its skin and organs), yet this is not seen as conveying much personalising public social identity onto the child. The maternal body acts as a metaphor for the home as an inner space for keeping food and food remnants and in which the community of table and bed are found. One enters and leaves the house through the only aperture. Outside the home and its vicinity, the woman's behaviour and speech remain dominated by male values. In broad daylight, embarrassment and a sense of shame (*tsoni*) rule out all open expressions of female or marital sexual desire in public. But amongst peers and outside the village realm, women, it is said, may jokingly express their sexual fantasies.

This obvious gender inequality is also present in the spatial and temporal gender-based division of labour. The woman works indoors or within circumscribed areas. A regular pattern of food gathering, farm work and household chores links her to the family dwelling, her fields of cassava and ground nuts, the marshes where cassava is detoxified and the spring. This daily pattern also links the woman to the nearby river and source from which water is fetched, as to the savannah when the time has come to collect food. In contrast, the man's work takes place outside in the central village meeting-place and in the forest or marshlands bordering the rivers; namely in areas having either a transitional or a vertical connotation. It is the man's task to slaughter the domestic animals at the edge of the village space. In the forest and marshlands, he fells trees in view of the manioc garden and for firewood, taps palm sap, cultivates plantains, traps and hunts game. He performs his tasks with an intermittent rhythm.

## Symptoms and cultural etiology

Medical anthropological studies, regarding central African societies attest to how clearly people distinguish a trivial indisposition from serious disorders. The latter are submitted to a specialist diagnosis by the diviner or the healer. Their culture-specific definition of disease, sickness or ill health helps us understand how severely the affliction is conceived as both an effect of, and threat to, the individual's vital insertion in the group and life-world.

### *Diagnosis*

Upon the arrival of the representatives of the afflicted person — who most often stays home —, the diviner offers a scant disclosure of the essential elements of the case without prior information. Following some consent, the diviner withdraws until the next morning. Then an etiological inventory of the affliction at hand is developed and which brings up the major afflictions and social wrongs involved in the life and ascent of the afflicted. The oracle should enable the healer and the family to intervene.

According to Bibeau (1978, 1981a, 1983), the Angbandi of north-eastern Zaire/Congo work out their intervention systematically at three levels: the symptoms, the etiology and finally the treatment *per se*. The Ngbandi language contains more than 1,000 names for diseases, including 22 for skin diseases alone. The same ailment may get different names at different stages in its course. They designate an ailment with reference to various physical, affective, emotional, social and cultural elements. The names may refer to: (i) the site of the complaint, for example, skin diseases; (ii) an appearance that resembles some feature in the plant or animal world, for example, some “fish-scale” or “pigskin” dermatitis; (iii) a major symptom, such as leprosy, which is labelled as *ndiba*, “the machete that does not cut”, because of the patient's lack of sensation, to itch, which is the generic term given to the various forms of pruritus; (iv) a cause traceable in time, such as some heavy sweating, an exposure to dirty water or another uncleanness; (v) a failure to observe a major rule, suspecting that the late closure of the fontanel stems from the parents' premature resumption of marital intercourse;

(vi) a treatment method: a stiff neck may be called “the spear-shaft disease”, because the healer treats it by immobilising the neck between two spear shafts.

It is worth noting that 38 of the 43 Ngbandi healers, with whom Bibeau had extensive dealings, can be considered specialists, since they limit their activities to one type of ailment such as epilepsy or fractures, with treatment being limited to manipulation, massage or medication based on close observation and questions. The five other healers treated disorders caused by spirits. The specialists were consulted by some 457 (60.4 percent) of the 757 patients surveyed. For 300 cases seen by the general practitioner-healers, 176 of the disorders (58.7 percent) were caused by spirits, more precisely 91 by ancestral spirits and 85 by water and forest spirits. Bewitchment was implicated in 77 (25.7 percent) cases, and what Bibeau qualifies as magic in 29 (9.7 percent) cases. The data also revealed that 282 patients admitted partial responsibility for the cause of their ailment; only 18 clients (6 percent) were considered free of such responsibility, but found themselves victims of bewitchment.

The Ngbandi nosological system refers to a multiplicity of causes. Here specialists clearly distinguish the how from the why; the former concerns everything perceived directly by one of the five senses, whereas the why question relates more to the multiple social and extrahuman sources of interference (Corin & Bibeau 1975). Moreover, Ngbandi etiology distinguishes between two types of cause: the predetermining or initial cause and the main one. The main cause may stem from a faulty action by the afflicted person herself (for example, transgression of taboos or breaking with tradition, insubordination towards the family head or towards the in-group, particularly manifested through jealousy and anger, refusal to share and theft). These various transgressions trigger a search for the cause, which implies either an ancestral spirit or a water or forest spirit, or also a conflict involving the close family or the lineage hierarchy and thus different generations. So the etiological approach may start at the physiological level, to shift then to some psychosocial dissension or transgression, or some invisible agency such as spirits and witchcraft. The reference to the invisible agency enables the afflicted person to transfer an internal conflict replete with anxiety and aggressiveness to a nameable intermediary such as the witch's envy. This, in turn, should open up the road to recovery.



People try to join the rare biomedical health centres, especially for infectious diseases, or invite a trustworthy healer who himself recovered from the same type of affliction.

### *Cultural idioms of distress*

Both the healer and diviner work from a broad etiological frame of sicknesses and illnesses. Two basic syndromes regard the maintenance or, on the contrary, the trespassing of boundaries at the co-resonant levels of the physical body and intercorporeality, the intersubjective body-self (the family, residential group) and also the cosmocentric body or local universe of the living (Devisch 1993: 146-147). This approach and perspective applies to the Koongo- and Yakaphone societies and their neighbours in western and southwestern DR Congo (Bockie 1993, Buakasa 1973, Devisch 2012 a, b, c; Jacobson-Widding 1979, Janzen 1978, MacGaffey 1986, Mbonyinkebe 1989, Van Wing 1959).

The first syndrome concerns the contraction or exceptional closure (*yibiinda*, *-biindama*) of the body or of bodily functions. The afflicted may suffer from some exceptional pain (*phasi*), a feverish chill (*kyoosi*), a cooling down of the blood (*-holasa meenga*), or emaciation and boniness (*n-kasu*). It is a stigma “when one’s skin dries up and peels” (*pfukupfuki*), evocative of scaly animals. Ulceration and inflammation (*yitobu*, *kobu*, *phuta*) are considered to be a kind of decay of the skin — whose manifestation very often resists local modes of healing. Closure may, moreover, cause respiratory difficulties, suffocation, severe cramps, chronic constipation, paralysis, or the obstruction of female fertility (*yibiinda*, *-biindama*). An inner gnawing (*rumu wuluundza*) or a distended belly (*khami*) may, at times, suggest significant “degrading” (*yiviimba*) of the blood or of fluid on the lungs, liver or womb. This, moreover, externalises in difficult breathing, an “anaemic rosey brown skin” (*luutu lubeengedi*), and in the discolouration of the hair (*tsuki makalu*). It may also involve unremitting vomiting or chronic diarrhea (*-homa maamba*, *-suta*), or pus discharge (*mafina wutika*) from ulcers or even through the coughing up of phlegm and mucus (*-khubula*, *thomu*).

The syndrome of contraction also concerns some imbalance between major symbolic constituents of virility, as distinct from



femininity, such as cold versus warm, bone-hard versus fat-soft, tense muscles versus rounded bodily forms. Virility, thus, connotes *keboondzu* and *ngolu* — examined above —, that is, vigorousness, tonicity, and erectile strength in the joints in their ability to strike. Impotence is associated with bone fracture or tendon rupture and both are treated by the same healer through similar ritual procedures. “Skinny and stiff legs” (*n-swaanya myamaalu*), pains in the joints, rheumatism, or any other form of chill, including difficult breathing, threaten this virility.

The female body is associated with the ideal of a body with rounded, and thus fat forms and a qualified openness. Gynecological anomalies result from an imbalance in these bodily substances, involving obstruction or hindrance (*yibiinda*, *-biindama*, *-ziinga*) of the body, versus some excessive openness. Immoderate menstrual flow, along with the inability to hold semen or miscarriage, are described in terms of bodily fluids which are “overflowing” (*-selumuna*) because of high bodily heat or fever (*mbwaan*). These gynecological anomalies, similar to the heavy sweating of a parturient, can be referred to the woman’s alleged adulterous violation of her bounded domestic space. Given that menstruation is considered to be a kind of internal wounding (*-lwaala*), dysmenorrhoea (*-suta*) is said to lead to emaciation and to the loss of bodily heat. On the contrary, emaciation, amenorrhea and “obstructed breasts” (*mayenu makaangama*) bear witness to a state of bodily coldness. Any pungent exudation, just as with women’s rectal piles prior to reaching menopause, are considered ominous (*-beembula*) for their husbands. Moreover, they may entail physical injury and heavy bleeding, dysentery, lasting diarrhoea, festering wounds, ulceration, the discharge of pus.

Backaches that tie the sufferer to the home to rest for the whole day in a state of helplessness, or no longer responding when spoken to, is a threatening symptom of closure of the body-self. The associated symptoms include dumbness (*-yungunuka*), extreme timidity, loss of desire, and even madness (*-lanuka*). The afflicted person may feel harassed by envious looks, backbiting, haunting ghosts again and again. This intrusion dissolves selfhood and the deflated person may wander around, at the risk of winding up in the forest.

Defects of the senses, or of one's cognitive capacities, reduce the sufferer to an infrasocial state. People say: *Meni muutu yibeela*, "I suffer in my person, my social functioning"; *Meni muutu yikolaku*, "I lack identity, strength, alertness". "Always being at odds or enmeshing with others" (*-zekwala*), such as also by talking to oneself, all suggest "loss of senses and madness" (*-zoba*, *-lawuka*). Furthermore, related symptoms also entail "unthinking or uncontrolled, incoherent or obscene speech" (*-yungunuka*, *-boyila bwiingi*, *-sya n-tsootsu*), the inability to get along with others, as well as the refusal to speak or to share one's income, along with withdrawal from social contact, being stifled by sadness or despair, apathy or melancholy.

Deafness, like blindness, is also considered to be "a most serious decay of the life principle" (*mooyi mibuungeni*). It figures as a mark of social death. It is ascribed to bewitchment, which is the very essence of social subversion. An epileptic attack (*lawu dya yizenga*), involving only a temporarily loss of the senses, may be taken as an ancestral warning.

A second, but inversely related, syndrome involves the effusion or deflation (*n-luta*, *phalu*) of the body or involves a dispossession or dispersal of the body-self. The bodily boundaries may be weakened or deflated (*-bwaala*) to such a point that they are no longer able to withstand or to filter most of the impulses to which the afflicted person is exposed. She may come to experience an unsettling intrusion, agitation, irascibility, and unbalanced aggressive speech (*-sya n-sosu*, *-boyila bwiingi*), or even some epileptic crisis (*lawu dya nyambu*). Addiction to alcohol or cannabis, and the continual violation of the rules which regulate the sharing of goods and sexual relations, suggest a loss of control. Prolonged anger (*-buundila*, *-bula boondzi*) and pent-up rage (*-nyuku*, *-bwa yiwaanga*) bear witness to an individual who is no longer in possession of herself or who is outside herself (*-zyeta*), bewitched, hallucinating or insane (*-lawuka*).

The symptoms are attributed to encroaching forces, such as sexual aggression, thievery or bewitchment, all of which break up interbodily and intersubjective reciprocity. The ill, as an effect of an assault or a spell, unties the weave that interlaces the exchange between body, self, in-group, and world. This deflation of bodily limits may result in other disorders of the body-self still, such as

insomnia, nightmares, depression, intemperance, disorientation of the senses, fear and nervousness, fainting, and anaesthesia. It may moreover lead to some ominous blending of orificial — oral, sexual, anal — transactions and their ‘norm-alised’ space-time order (for example, vomiting or flatulence during a meal, ejaculation outside coitus). Adultery in the conjugal home signals the irruption of something that falls short of the social and the thinkable; it appears to unleash an alarming power. The sexually assaulted may lose control, burst out in rages, and be unable to keep cool or to control his or her temper any longer.

### *Divinatory etiology*

The diviner’s keen perceptiveness is an innate gift (*yibutukulu*), inherited through the uterine line. In case a young uterine descendent of a recently trespassed diviner repeatedly suffers from epileptic attacks, sleepwalking and trance-possession of a particular pattern, they may be attributed to the spirit of divination (*ngoombu*), and call for the initiation in the art of shamanic-like divination (see also van Binsbergen 1991, 2003, 2013). The maternal uncle and the responsible of the household may then induce the afflicted “to undergo the gestational seclusion” (*-buusa khita*) under the guidance of a master diviner. This initiation should consolidate the initiate’s enhanced sensory abilities and her art of etiological examination. Through the keen sense of flair, the initiated diviner-to-be — who may be male or female — enters into a bodily-sensuous exchange with her client, whether living or dead. The hunting dog’s keen flair (*fiimbu*) for tracking game, through metaphorical transposition informs the diviner’s keen sense of smell (also called *fiimbu*). The tuning up of this gift and training to scrutinise the hidden or invisible is publicly tested.

For an oracular consultation (see also Devisch 2012a, b; 2013), the representatives of the afflicted, upon their arrival at the diviner’s home and without saying a word, give the diviner a piece of cloth (*yiteendi*) or some kaolin which has been in contact with the body of the afflicted person. This cloth and kaolin clay function as a substitute and message-bearing representative of the afflicted, also referred to as the client. In the copresence of the representatives or

consultants, the diviner must be able to bring up a few characteristics of the misfortune which prompted the consultation. Following the representatives' scant confirmation of her preliminary reading, the diviner will withdraw until the next morning. Devoid of any factual information about the case, she draws upon her dreamwork and acute flair for laying the client's concern bare.

The next morning, in the copresence of the consultants, in her oracle the diviner submits the dream visions to an etiological grid and, without any direct help from the consultants, the diviner's oracle may delve into the family and personal past of the afflicted to lay bare past offenses, misdeeds and curses, and to judge them in relation to the various stages of the life and affliction of the client. These enable the diviner to set the compensation to be paid to those family members — principally in the uterine line — who, feeling wronged, hampered the afflicted client. The oracle, first and foremost, addresses the maternal uncles who represent the transmission of physical life by the line of mothers (the mother, the mother's mother and the maternal grandmother connected to the primordial uterine source of the life-flow). This should enable the uterine kin to dismantle the hindrances to the transmission of life. The diviner is considered to be competent enough to handle a wide range of problems. Consequently, she is consulted about every persistent, malignant and supposedly lethal illnesses, mental disorders, problems of reproduction and sterility, skin diseases, noticeable and sudden weight loss, repeated bad luck in hunting or in finding a job, cases of theft, fire or other accidents.

A few of the fundamental and recurring aspects of the divinatory etiology (more fully analysed in Devisch 1991c, 1993a: 169-178, Devisch 2012a, b, 2013) may be described as follows. In more general terms, diagnosis by divination establishes an etiological argumentation based on an unavoidable and recurring history in the uterine line. Faced with a grave illness, the diviner's diagnosis first attributes the problem to a recent infraction of the rights and obligations defining the position and relations of the members of a uterine, matrimonial or conjugal network which the afflicted belongs to. From the perspective of the oracle, this distortion amounts to a transgression of a prohibition whose sanction has already been put into play by a curse attached to some previous violation of a similar

nature. Pronounced by a uterine ancestor, the curse threatens the whole of the uterine descent. In other words, divinatory interpretation is derived from a structural redundancy, juxtaposing the notions of communal law ethics, exchange, prohibition, transgression and sanction. The ailment or affliction (whether theft, sexual abuse, intrusion into the intimacy of the home, disturbance of another's hunting domain or bewitchment) is the result of a contravention of or incursion upon the rights and interests of the parties involved in a process of enduring exchange between the last three generations of wife-givers and wife-takers concerned; this incursion amounts to an abuse or a violation of a duty or prohibition. It is the curse, pronounced by the afflicted or her protector (a parent or uncle), following the abuse that summons the affiliation as a sanction for that wrongdoing.

The rule of exchange is certainly the foundational principle that underlies and guarantees the transmission of life along maternal lines. Any act contrary to exchange — theft, bewitchment or sexual abuse, which common and ritual discourse qualifies as theft, — is naturally associated with a disruption in the uterine life flow, possibly in the former uterine generations, among which the great-grandmother stands for “the base of the life-tree”. According to the divinatory etiological perspective, rules or prohibitions enter into the problematic only when an individual suffers a wrong that is recognised as damaging to the interests of the group, and when, through palaver or oracle, the violation has been judged as illicit. Divinatory etiology inscribes the story of the misdeed in the familial saga (for example, a violation of the intimacy of the conjugal home, hence of the conjugal body) and in the subsequent curse that instituted the prohibition and retaliatory sanction. This means that the etiology submits the wrong to the fundamental rule of exchange, as applicable to that particular kin group, and which by its very nature tends to perpetuate itself. Exchange, then, conditions the transmission of life, undergirds familial and social life and serves the symbolic function. In other words, the oracle sketches a sequence of contingent facts in an order of first evidences and founding axioms. In that perspective, the oracle (in line with the perspective of the curse) directs itself towards acts that are inimical to the uterine and matrimonial circuits of exchange. It thereby reintroduces

those concerned and their cults into an order of discourse and reciprocity and re-activates it by way of public pronouncement. Thus, the oracle brings the diviner and the client's representatives to articulate the problem through speech, within the order of the symbolic that re-weaves the family web. The oracle carries out what is required by tradition, in some public wording, and thereby accomplishes its own aims in a performative fashion; namely, the reinsertion of disorder or abuse into an order of language and exchange, which serve as the foundation of human life and society. In this, the oracle refers to the order of the founding events and foundational institutions of society, but the diviner does not herself personify any public authority or beholder of an order of law.

Consequently, an affliction is not considered in its physical nature of disease effected by a chain of natural causes primarily, but rather as a symptom of disturbed or transgressed relations between the sick person and her kin group, or between herself, her parents and in-laws, her spouse or children. The etiological diagnosis, thus, becomes a culture-specific analysis of the social and cultural texture woven by the afflicted individual and her intimates into her relationships with others and with the world. Illness, so defined, can be equated with a social and cosmocentred deconstruction (Davis 2000, Devisch 1991, Janzen 1978, Yoder 1981).

## Treatment

Before sketching the various steps in the following section on treatment, let me first focus on the healer's essential role. The healer's intervention begins by neutralising the sickness, namely the conflictive interbodily and intersubjective relations in the kin group of which the affliction is a symptom. The healer — who in the Kwaango region is most often a man — is also concerned with the illness; he tries to counter the origin of the sickness and illness, and to return it against itself self-destructively; this is done in a holistic, multifaceted and symbolic way. In Koongo- and Yakaphone societies and related ones of Western Congo, the healer is referred to as “the one who unties” (*-biindulula*) the afflicted person from being tied into, or blocked by, knots, or from her being disconnected from the vital weave; the healer seeks to remake and revitalise the insertion of the afflicted in the life-world.

This section on treatment develops along three steps. The first concentrates on cults of affliction. These provide a setting for the most elaborate, centuries-old forms of healing. The second part analyses the healer's attention towards developing life-enhancing resonance or synergism between the various healing procedures. In the third part, we will deal with some major devices of transformation and other culture-appropriate inducers of healing.

### *Affliction and healing cults*

Widespread forms, ingrained in people's cultures over the centuries, have shaped the ways in which the therapeutic notions from the Islamic East, or from Western-derived science and christianity have been received. Only a few anthropologists and historians have started to trace the interregional history of African medical traditions, paying particular attention to the etiologies, diagnostics and healing procedures. These traditions develop by way of rites and cults pertaining to translineage and interregional traditions in the Bantuphone cultural zone. Cults of affliction and healing (Devisch 1993a: 147-160) involve so-called "middle-range spirits" (Janzen 1989: 237). These spirits extend into life-granting translineage and interregional networks of cult members throughout the cultural zone of Bantuphones. Some cults have spread from the equator down to the Cape of Good Hope (Balandier 1965, Bonnafé 1969, Devisch 1984, Dupré 1975, 1981-82, 2001, Dupré & Féau 2001; Lima 1971, Turner 1968, Van Wing 1959, Yoder 1981). John Janzen (1982) studied the important *lemba* cult in Koongophone society; moreover, he documented the related healing cult *ngoma* (Janzen 1992) that has spread over large parts of the area of Bantuphones. More systematically than Feierman (1974) in eastern Tanzania, or van Binsbergen (1991, 1992, 2003, 2011, 2013) in western Zambia, Janzen (1989) offers a thorough analysis of the classic views of Bantuphones on well-being and affliction according to which local groups develop their etiological assumptions and healing traditions.

Contrary to instances in which ancestral spirits remain somehow out of easy access for residents in urban centres, cult spirits are within easy reach in town. Indeed, in the case of DR Congo, urban



people acknowledge that ancestral shades are bound to their home region's soil where the more original branching from the agnatic life-stream most physically connects the forebears to the primeval space-time of origins of the local world order and the social order of their descendants. Among the Yakaphones, ancestral spirits are 're-membered' in the ancestral shrine, such as through paternity, agnatic descent and the function of head of the homestead or the lineage. On their side, cult spirits that operate through uterine filiation renew their initiated devotees in the span of three to four generations. Concretely, following the death of a cult priest, hereditary traits and the unforeseeable fate may turn one or another uterine descendant into a devotee receptive to being seized by way of possession or affliction by the cult spirit.

Cult spirits make themselves felt particularly in the individual's unbridled and disturbing affects, desire and imaginary shared among the family. As already hinted at, cult spirits are seen as ambivalent agencies, stemming from distant lands, woods or water, which the afflicted find themselves interconnected with through matrimonial exchange and long-distance trade. Cult spirits, by inflicting particular symptoms, may also be both destructive and regenerative, persecuting and healing, deflating and invigorating. Think of exceptional bodily-sensory perceptiveness such as acute flair, sharp nose and heightened intuition and sensitivity. Or of anomalies and symptoms, such as giving birth to deformed babies or twins, or anxious fantasies and nightmares, restlessness, speechlessness and aggression. Some anomalous conduct may imply a chaos-generating confusion (*mbeembi*) of bodily orifices and alimentary, sexual and anal functions. The initiation leads to a life-long membership of the afflicted in the given translineage cult.

Through their association with persecution, cults and spirits provide an etiological framework for the illness and, consequently, a pattern for the subsequent initiation or healing; curing the victim of such a vengeful curse amounts to initiating the ailing person into the cult. The initiation reorients the initiate's every practical engagement, from which it is possible to view the everyday flux of things and forces. It opens a new field of perspectives from the great many translineage networks of initiates in one or another of a dozen affliction cults (see chapter 9). For example, fertility problems



and congenital deformities are almost always — although not exclusively — related to the khita cult causing and treating gynecological disorders.

Cult healers, known as *ngaanga* or *ngaanga phoongu*, are former initiates whose initiatory seclusion in the appropriate cult led to their recovery from the type of incapacitating illness, which they may consequently address in their clients. A boy, born shortly after or as a result of his mother's initiation in a healing cult, can embody some traumatic memory traces along the uterine filiation. This affliction in his turn may predispose to become a cult priest. Furthermore, since healing heavily draws on interdependence, healers are intent on making lasting allies among those people who suffer from an affliction like theirs. To put it provocatively, throughout their careers healers also seem periodically to require initiates-to-be of their sort in order to help repeatedly re-enact the healing process for themselves. Each time, the initiatory process reminds them to step out of the persecution logic and to cleanse the indefinable and inconsistent from their imaginary load, as a case without a cause.

The affliction and healing cults determined specific reactions towards the exogenous power of European colonialism, urbanisation and industrialisation; this power appeared increasingly dependent upon the state, wage labour, capital-intensive transport, capitalist marketing of basic food, public supply of water, electricity and urban sewage system. In the towns of postcolonial central Africa, the African traditions of health and health care today appear to hold alongside the biomedical health systems. However, the institutional collaboration between these traditions and biomedicine is rare and superficial. In the downtown areas, the biomedical services tend to become the privilege of an increasingly smaller part of society. In the suburban milieus and shanty towns, where wage labour remains subordinate to kinship solidarity and communitarian economy, cults of affliction do survive the violent attacks from christianity and prophetic healing communes. Here, divination is in no way threatened by the biomedical reference to laboratory tests and science, and people consider pills to be more effective when paired with a kind of client-healer interaction (Van der Geest & Reynolds-Whyte 1988).

In the 1960s and early 1970s, public health experts had expected the so-called traditional healing arts to die out in the face of African modernisation, particularly as biomedical services became increasingly accessible to health seekers. As a consequence, national governments stressed the widespread implementation of primary and community health care programmes, and the managerial organisation of preventive campaigns to combat malaria, malnutrition, severe diarrhoea, smallpox, leprosy and sexually transmissible diseases. The end of the 1970s, however, saw a movement towards rediscovery and revaluation of African traditions of the healing arts on the international scene. In the throes of cultural decolonisation, it was increasingly recognised that much of the meaning and usefulness of African practices of healing elude a biomedical understanding and valuation. In the 1980s, at the onset of the dramatic crisis of the state, effective biomedical programmes and expenditures appeared to be far too expensive for a growing number of African countries, particularly owing to the costs of the training of personnel and of importing hospital infrastructure and pharmaceutical supplies. It is against this backdrop that some biomedical programmes have tried to reevaluate the contributions of the different categories of healers who live, are trained and work in the rural or popular urban milieus of Africa.

### *The synergism of healing procedures*

Gilles Bibeau (1981a, 1983) examines how Angbandi healers device their treatments in view of reorganising the life-style and social position of the health seeker. The healing procedures address the body's physical recovery by its own. The quality of the client-healer relationship and the etiological examination of the problem at hand are of the utmost importance. Bibeau closely analyses the work of two Ngbandi healers running a village hospital with a capacity to accommodate some 30 client-initiates, each accompanied by a family member. The village hospital was organised around three poles, each offering specific forms of physical, social and ritual care. All cases were first treated in the centre of the village at the ancestral shrine. Sacrificial offerings were also made at the shrine for the water spirits located on the riverbank. At a third shrine, at

the edge of the village, forest spirits were summoned to fend off evil spirits and witches.

The treatments involved some ten ritual procedures addressing specific affective-emotional states and social relationships, namely: (i) transferring the evil out of a person into an animal; (ii) confession and self-reconciliation; (iii) mutual washing; (iv) washing a guilty person; (v) bathing in a stream to re-establish contact with the water spirits; (vi) making offerings to the water spirits; (vii) sacrificing a fowl or a goat and sharing its meat amongst kinsfolk as a substitute for the afflicted person; (viii) establishing a pacifying pact with the spirits; (ix) barring the path followed by the witch; (x) breaking the power of a charm or ritual agency of sorcerous 'forces'.

In the terms of Bibeau (1983: 47): "These ritualised operations take place in a dramatised, emotionally charged context. [ ... ] The social reality [is] rearranged through its symbolic expression and drama, repositioning each participant in his role. Such a dramatisation and symbolisation, with the emotional context, combine to create in the individual and the group positive psychological states able to enhance the endogenous healing processes".

In a Yakaphone milieu, the council of family elders seeks to resolve the current tensions and problems amongst the close relatives of the afflicted person. They then pay the maternal uncle to remove the obstacles (curses, moral debts, bewitchment and evil words) to the uterine transmission of life. The illness is a sign that this hindrance is at play. The uncle publicly commits the afflicted person to the healer's care; the latter only treats the type of affliction that he himself recovered from after his own initiatory healing. Following the formal invitation, which comes from the family, the healer-initiator starts by examining the scene. About to physically meet the afflicted person to be initiated, the healer-initiator enters into a trance which displays the symptoms that have led to his own treatment: he, thereby, offers a concrete model of the healing process.

The afflicted person, for her part, may no longer be in control of her body or temper because someone else has taken possession of her; irascible, she easily bursts out in rage, is sexually aggressive and disregards family ties, and people suspect that she has been

bewitched. The healer's task is to combat the exogenous evil by reverting it so as to realow access to the life-flow and life-force that the affliction has smothered or deflected. The life-flow, essentially vested in the blood, spreads into the nooks and crannies of the heart, comes into contact with what the heart knows or wants and is waiting to re-emerge in the initiate. The re-emergence in the health seeker of her most vital potentialities is featured by the metaphor of weaving. Treating a client means reconnecting her with her reintegrated life-flow in the uterine weave, and releasing the life-force which is transmitted in the agnatic line.

### *Transforming devices and cultural inducers*

Treatment is a process of re-launching or re-energising bodily processes and a reconstruction that relates the individual again to the group's language and world order, unlike disease, which is equated with some deconstruction of the physical and social functions of the afflicted person. Healing entails a systematic handling of paradoxes whose dual meanings — such as of separating and linking — is alternatively or simultaneously, if not self-destructively, mobilised at the level of the body, family and the life-world.

A particular set of transforming devices are committed to bringing these paradoxes and mobilisations into play; as core constituents of cult healing, they may be seen as cultural inducers of healing. They operate at the interstices between several specific domains or dimensions of life. These dimensions are the vectors that underlie the cultural image of the body and are mapped out by coordinates such as inside/outside, high/low, front/back, before/after or left/right. According to divinatory etiology, in Yakaphone society, illness inverts, blocks or disconnects the coordinates so that they function only in an unbalanced or haphazard manner. Healing techniques very often bring about a reversion by re-directing the disruptive imbalance against itself in a self-destructive way, in view of restoring the bodily coordinates and their vectors.

The homeopathic reversions (*-kaya*), in healing evil, closure, blockage, effusion or deflation in the body, spur the development of defence mechanisms. Reversion and reversal may at the same

time effect the unravelling of a crisis that has been frozen in a long history of blocked conflicts. More fundamentally, these healing initiatives indicate how much the subject's recovery is one which depends upon un-doubling. When the initiate becomes aware that she should delve into the very root cause her suffering and its history, most notably reveals how much she has been dispossessed of the very core of her being. In other words, the client is paradoxically and simultaneously led through the processes of experiencing and becoming aware of contrasting directions and moods. For example, trance-possession intermingles the experiences of the transition point in mortal agony, orgasm and fecundation. The sacrifice evokes the interfamily aggression resulting from the bewitchment of the afflicted person, whilst it also convenes the family for a commensal meal where a part of the sacrificial animal is shared.

The key to understanding the healing value of the paradoxes is expressed by the healer at the very onset of his formal oration: *phoongu wuziinga, phoongu wuziingulula*, "the spirit ties the body [of the afflicted person] yet may also disentangle it". This implies that the healing alters and frees the initiate's body and unbinds the persecutorial relationship between spirit and the afflicted person. Moreover, these cultural alterations, which draw on a homeopathic rationale, induce the initiate to simultaneously and enthusiastically adopt contrastive cognitive and affective dispositions or moods. The dual experience of borderlinking and bordercrossing of body and self, as also of the contrasting bodily processes, images, affects, gender positions and thoughts, that the initiate is led through, seek to release the crisis centred in the afflicted as the outbreak of a long history of thwarting conflicts in the family and the afflicted.

We will now discuss a few examples of culture-appropriate inducers of healing; although we have traced them in Yakaphone society, the comparative literature suggests that they have a much larger extension or relevance:

- a. *Incorporation and expulsion*: Healing aims at expelling whatever has physically, or through bewitchment, invaded the body to make it ill — such as effecting an imbalance of humours, an obstruction or closure, a deflation or dispossession. The healing simultaneously seeks to restore the humoral balance, unblock the body or foster whatever

is missing. For example, fragrant ablutions or emetics (*bilukisa*) are prescribed for dry cough, weight loss, and amenorrhoea. Men may take a lukewarm enema made from a cooled concoction of boiled ligneous forest plants. For an anal or vaginal rinse, women employ either lukewarm mixtures of ligneous savannah vegetation or cold infusions drawn from herbs of the savannah; these mixtures are meant to give shade or to cool the belly, womb or bowels. Other decoctions aim at “sweeping the belly clean”. Others still “give whiteness or purity to the belly” so as to prepare the initiate to be fully interwoven again into the social fabric. When sexual desire has to be stimulated, next to taking enemas from flowering and odoriferous herbs, the client may also have to ritualise her stepping through the doorway of the house and bedroom. Massage or ointments, scarification or cupping horns may seek to refashion the skin’s borderlinking function, next to the affects and bodily energies, all this effected through the enactment of their metaphorical equivalents. The basic metaphors of hunting and one-night hanging of the game in the forest, or fermentation and cooking, sexual communion and weaving, explore and produce a multi-layered relaunching of synergies between the body, the major group processes and the life-world.

b. *Left/right crossover*: Clients who are seriously depressed or insane are given massages, or cross-like ligatures over the chest to circumscribe the unity of the body. Diagonal lines of kaolin are also drawn through the bodily intersections at the navel, above the heart or between the breasts. This is done at nightfall, preferably when the moon is waxing, at the edge of the village, while the close family is present.

c. *High/low reversal*: Some hot enemas, prepared with fragrant plants (plucked from treetops exposed to the sun), must be taken at sunrise to counterbalance, in line with the humoral logic, colds or dry coughs, chills at shoulder level, or heat rising to the head or descending to the abdomen.

d. *Inside and outside dialectics of the body and the inversion of the orifices*: The orifices make up the essential in/out orientations of the body. When an orifice is blocked or inverted, the entire body is disturbed and in

danger of being itself wholly inverted; vomiting converts the mouth into an anus, whereas anal enemas aim to counterbalance the harmful effects of ingestion or hearing life-threatening words. During the treatment of his anorexic niece, the maternal uncle may prescribe any of the following remedies: warm herbal teas made from flowering young herbs picked on the edge of the village (the site of lovers' trysts), saunas, self-massages with a red paste. This red paste may be obtained by rubbing a section of the red wood of the *n-kula* tree against a wet stone and mixing it with palm oil, which is associated with the maternal blood in which the foetus is bathing. It may also be mixed with a fern having a rash-like appearance, or with the first urine of the day passed by a pregnant woman, for "only a woman who contains *in utero* can also be a container". The same logic governs the practice of blessings with saliva. In this case, each member of a family group spits on the initiate's forehead or chest at the site of the heart — associated with a person's conscience — to attest publicly that there is no resentment that might hamper her recovery.

*e. Inversion of rhythms:* The notion of biological and social rhythms is basic to healing. The loss or distortion of a rhythm is a sure sign of a major intrusion of the afflicted person by witches or spirits. The trembling of the hands, legs or the entire body during a trance-possession marks this loss of rhythm, for trembling shows the internal rhythm to be cut off from any coded or social rhythm. This exposes a person's breath or life-flow to the spirits' envy. Insomnia is also a symptom of disrupted rhythm and it robs the subject of her most intimate possession: her sleep and dreams, and the cure — as described in g. below.

*f. Past/present:* The notion of a cycle is important, particularly when plants are used. The plants should be found and used during the first phase of a seasonal cycle, when the sap is rising in them and their vitality is still very strong. However, they may also be used at the end of a given cycle or the day before the start of the next, so as to stress a transition between day and night, past and present, life and death for both the plant and the symptom.

g. *Transferring the illness from the client's body to another holder*: The ailment is transferred to an object which acts as a non-human, sometimes immolated container. The object is buried at a crossroads at midnight or is thrown away over the left shoulder in a remote spot to be eaten by a wild animal. The evil is then substituted by the good object, such as a protective spirit. One variation of this shifting is the transfer of the offense or evil to a scapegoat animal that the healer then chases into the forest. In that perspective, a ritualised trance-possession aims at converting the ailment into a controlled manifestation of the spirit that is, thereafter, allied with or married to the possessed person. Sacrifices also carry out a form of transfer. The spirit is incorporated into the sacrificial animal, then transferred to the miniature altar, erected next to the small seclusion house, to honour the same spirit. As Zempleni (1985) recounts, "his clothes being stripped off, the sacrificant covers his body with the animal's fresh blood. He [the healer] then wraps its intestines around his body and puts one of its organs — stomach, bladder, gall bladder — turned inside out like a bonnet, on his head. Not being able to turn the body of the possessed inside out, he [the healer] turns the body of an animal, identified with the subject by displacement, inside out, thereby allowing the body of the sacrificant [the initiated] to be turned inside out symbolically". In anointing, coating or washing the initiate's body, the healer is symbolically turning the body inside out. The outside becomes the inside, the content becomes the container. The initiate gets a facelift through a cycle of death and rebirth. The sacrifice may appear to be the link reversing the negative relationship between aggressor and victim so that it takes the positive direction of healing.

h. *Function of the object*: Healing makes only a moderate use of speech; it relies more on musical rhythms, objects and staging or performance. The object — a medicinal plant, drug, charm around the neck, copper bracelet, string crossed over the chest — represents the memory of the transferential relationship maintained with the healer; "if I do not wear my charm, something bad will happen to me". The object socialises or diminishes both the expectation and the illusion in the healing relation. A somewhat enigmatic object — such as a rooster's comb hung around the neck for a case of impotence, which is analogous to the pain caused by the initiation,



questioning the treatment — invites the client to maintain an open, questioning attitude: “Is it a game?” The object also commits the wearer to seek some higher truth accessible only through the initiation and warranted precisely by the accomplishment of the rite itself. Otherwise, such a truth remains indefinable.

i. *The homeopathic entangling of evil.* Homeopathic inversion or “fighting evil by turning it back against itself self-destructively” is a basic postulate in healing. It seeks to destroy the evil by entrapping it in its own manipulations, that is, to turn its own destructive game against itself through a ruse as the hunter may himself create a source of attraction by urinating on the ground on both sides of the snare; as stated previously, drawn by the odour of ammonium the animal will come to lick the salty crystals. In fact, the real trap is the appetite and envy of the malefactor or assaulting agency. Here, the healing takes over an imagery of game hunting and transposes it for its own use. That notion also underlies the view that the spoils of the hunt have to undergo a decay similar to fermentation that transforms palm sap into wine, or that of the possession-trance which authenticates the vocation of the afflicted person to initiation in a spirit cult. The nature of the gifts that the client, via the family head, gives to the healer in payment for his services indicates that the latter is invested with the role of trapper-hunter. This solidarity between life-giving and death-giving evokes a basic maternal experience; in people’s imaginary, death is always near in delivery. Healing rites and those of passage, next to divination, dream life, parturition and maternity, hunting, cooking and plant life, share a close connection with the recycling of decay into flowering.

Homeopathic reversal expresses a particular ontological perspective. The relation an individual establishes with the realms of ancestral spirits, or “forces of the dark forest and the night”, may appear as double-sided; they are as equally capable of bringing good luck, life and growth, as they are of hindering or harming a person. Order and disorder are not simply opposing concepts; they are seen as twinned, coextensive and solidaristic terms in the sense of conceptual pairs, such as good fortune and misfortune, health and illness, fate and anti-fate, abundance and famine, excess and lack,

autonomy and intrusion. All these phenomena are accepted as occurring together just as opportunities and risks are thought to come through in one's household beyond the daytime realm. This ambivalent quality of reality shows itself through the various images given to witchcraft and exorcism as a power whose finality can be modified or redirected by means of inversions. Cults posit homeopathic reversion to be a basic process in healing; it is an action that turns the malevolent agent against itself through symbolic means and paradox itself. The power of the bewitching aggressor discovers its counterweight in the ritual power a victim might solicit in order to turn the aggression against the aggressor. At times it is indeed the victim who triumphs in the struggle, with the result that the witch is killed by the very forces which she intended to wield against the bewitched.

In short, the many modes of healing are rooted in the subtle use of paradoxes, similar to the work of the sculptor who handles the spatial polarities of inside/outside, high/low, incorporation/expulsion so as to give relief, historical depth and spiritual power of the living to his work. Illness indicates the disruption of both the basic articulation and unity of the client's body, and of her spatial and temporal insertion in the group and the universe. The body, especially the skin, the orifices, senses and abilities to communicate, are a privileged site of exchanges and meetings and, thus, also of healing. In effect, it is at the body's surface that most visible activities and transactions are performed. The healer restores to the skin and various orifices their role as border and borderlinking, such as between inside and outside, low and high, left and right, female and male, child and mother. In so doing, the healer reorganises the initiate's unity. Moreover, the healing is a community and cosmic liturgy. Cures play out real sociodramas, rearticulating synchronically and diachronically amongst each other and with the encompassing local world, a host of invisible entities, principles and symbolic processes, actors and relationships, social rules, and axioms (Tumer 1968).

In the ritual staging in the encompassing daily environment, the adults of the residential group reaffirm their ties and fortify their solidarity. The community, the ritual scene and the entire healing drama offer a space-time array within which a manageable

metaphorical refiguring and rearrangement of emotions, energies and bodily functions occurs. The ritual enacts a resonance between processes, functions or objects in the environment, the life-world, group processes and the body. As Andras Zempleni (1982) so aptly comments, "In this sense, traditional healing is the art of connecting each body condition with the condition of the social bodies by means of magical-religious symbolism."

The end-of-treatment ceremony fences off the initiate's body from the pernicious interbodily relations. It consecrates the initiate into a lasting devotion to the cult. The healer transmits more of his art of healing, in particular of his herbal medicines. The initiate leaves the avuncular relation with the healer and is thereby authorised to regain her autonomy and rejoin her conjugal, parental and societal roles. This transition develops in a highly festive atmosphere (Devisch 1993a). In the towns, the close kin, friends and neighbours all participate (Corin 1979). By covering the cost of the festivities, the close kin recognise the initiate's new condition of recovery. Upon leaving seclusion, the initiate visits her healer, telling him, "I have come to you to emerge from between your legs", implicitly referring to his symbolically reproductive function. The healer is, henceforth, considered to be an allied kin, a relative by marriage, who at the same time fosters his initiate's autonomy. This regained autonomy is ratified by the payment of a fee for the services rendered and by offering a piece of clothing to the healer, which implies rehabilitation and separation.

The healing rituals, which end with moments of festive relaxation, are themselves open to the imagination, improvisation and the unexpected entry of the sacred in the trance-possession (Mbonyinkebe 1987). It is moreover a space left open to the individual's creativity. Let us not forget to emphasise the creative potential of play and illusion in healing. Indeed, to cite just one example, a number of healers display a mischievous or even a malicious appearance. Through speech, looks and touch, they develop a playful interaction with their initiates and the family representatives; these relationships are similar to the joking relationship between the uncle and his uterine nephews and nieces. This aspect of play seems to us to be rooted in a religious element that in turn influences both assertion and make-believe in a

continuous interplay. The sacrificial gestures, so frequent in healing identify the initiated and the close kin with the spirits. They all share the sacrificial meal so that the sacrifice corroborates the distance separating the order of the human from the realm of the spirits. Through sacrifice, the human being tries to overcome her own limits.

## Conclusion

This limited study suggests, on the one hand, the very need for field investigators to take into account the total reality of the folk health care systems and to conduct investigations into the knowledge practices involved, on the other. Such research is to be carried out from a phenomenological anthropological perspective, since most other aspects and knowledge acquisition belong to the natural and biomedical sciences. A relevant approach consists in recognising the rationale specific to each of these health care systems, and to facilitate communication between the diverse systems. The scenarios of collaboration should include a controlled circulation of the healers' appropriate classical African health care practices, and its related culture-specific comprehension. It should also comprise the polyvalent health care settings where healers and medical doctors would selectively refer cases to one another and possibly meet to follow-up.



## Plural health care in Kinshasa

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The vast African capital city of Kinshasa offers a disconcerting picture of medical pluralism. In 2000, Kinshasa counted 8 million inhabitants with a median age of 18 (see Devisch 2017b: 5). Care seekers circulate between three different health care systems: 1) the biomedical health care establishment and pharmacies; 2) initiated cult healers working in line with the classical Bantu-African medical traditions, along with self-promoted folk healers and herbalists, and 3) neopentecostal spiritualist or faith healers, next to those of the independent charismatic healing communes of the sacred spirit. These three systems operate according to different transactional practices and are embedded within different understandings of the human body and the origin of illness. Until the early 1980s, the state funded the public — biomedical, preventive and curative — health care. Since then, this preventive and curative health care has been supported by the European Union, as well as by multilateral Belgian, Dutch and German governmental funding, or christian churches and/or NGO financing from the north. To date, cooperation between the various fields of health care is found lacking<sup>11</sup>.

Prior to the early 1970s, Kinshasa's biomedical health care service was widely recognised to be one of the best in Africa south of the Sahara. Over the last decade, the sanitary infrastructure next to the biomedical preventive and community health care services in Kinshasa, and the large hinterland, have severely declined due to the total collapse of state institutions and civil services. In the 1990s, a small number of well-staffed and well-stocked private clinics continued to serve the well-to-do minority and expatriate personnel

in the downtown and affluent residential areas. In contrast, the squatter zones and shanty towns, comprising more than half of Kinois people, have been completely neglected while the older suburban townships have only a minimum of good primary care centres and a few efficient polyclinics. Numerous forms of folk healing, however, are available throughout the city both from initiated and self-promoted healers (Bibeau *et al.* 1979, Corin 1979; this volume chapter 8). Charismatic faith healing is offered by numerous neopentecostal church communities and hundreds of independent charismatic communes of the sacred spirit (Devisch 1996, Lapika 1984, Le Roy 1994a).

The relationship between the three health care systems is complex and poorly understood, as are the factors that determine what, precisely, triggers health seekers to switch from one health care system to another. Aside from a medical anthropological study carried out in 1976 by Gilles Bibeau and his team (Bibeau *et al.* 1979), a considerable gap hampers our knowledge concerning the daily health behaviour and health seeking practices in the capital. The knowledge and sociocultural dynamics which inform therapy choice decisions may depend, in part, on the particular etiology of an illness offered by family elders or wise resource persons in one's neighbourhood or support networks. The social stigmatisation of particular health problems or injuries and the care seeker's expectations or economic and family situation may also influence therapy choice.

This chapter describes a multi disciplinary<sup>12</sup> action-research project directed at the plural health seeking practices in two poverty-stricken suburbs of Kinshasa. Beginning in December 1994, the research intervention pertains to the situation in the country before the May 1997 takeover of state power by the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo (AFDL). But that new government also appears to have little impact on the urban public health policy or upon the civil services.

On the research level, the project sought to gain a better understanding of the specific character of cult healing practices in relation to the prevalent conceptions of illnesses (in particular, those of 'closure' versus 'effusion'). An attempt was also made to answer the following questions: 1) Does urbanisation promote secularisation

— that is, an inherent shift in the explanation of misfortune, accidents, sickness and illness? Classical medical traditions of Bantu-Africa consider good and ill health in relation to ethical, mythical, invisible (ancestors, spirits, deities, extrahuman sanctions, witchcraft and sorcery) and social dimensions (seniority, group solidarity and sanctions). The question is whether urbanisation fosters among people a more organic and secularised image of the body and more cognitive and subject-related dimensions of experience (fear, fatigue, stress, risk behaviour, malnutrition, infection). 2) When and why do Kinois people resort to cult rather than folk healing? If Kinshasa would have a sufficient and financially accessible biomedical health care infrastructure, would the population still consult the cult/folk healer? 3) Is biomedicine capable of replacing the African medical traditions completely? In which instances and under which circumstances are the herbalist practices effective? Which ones appear harmful or even dangerous and in which cases?

Addressing such questions enabled us to develop an action-intervention approach aimed at improving the quality of overall health service through increased coordination of the various systems. We hypothesised that the more any communitarian health programme entailed a plurality of resort, and the more its accessibility and curative value were openly assessed by people at the neighbourhood level, the more motivated health seekers would be to make improved use of a combination of preventive and curative health services. A key objective was to identify the community networks or core groups of delegates of such networks (such as local healers, women's action groups and community councils of elders) to take active part in a reflection on the focus and concern of the action-research.

Specifically, in the action phase of the project, we sought to mobilise communities at the neighbourhood or residence network level, for the purposes of setting up community support networks. Such networks, or lay therapy management groups, were seen to reflect the current process of a villagisation of the town, as the people in the shanty towns, from 1993 on, have coined it. This process was a largely imaginary portrayal of possible reliance on the local solidarity networks and health practices evocative of village



life. In collaboration with the research team, two committees or core groups of delegates from community networks took the lead in defining and negotiating practical forms of exchange and coordination between the three health care systems. Health seekers and lay therapy management groups also jointly developed specific health seeking strategies on the basis of local, culture-informed attitudes, beliefs and explanatory models concerning health and illness. Finally, when biomedical doctors and community health planners within the Ministry of Health joined the project, the representative committees worked to define ways of optimising the community resources available so as to develop lasting health improvements.

## The action-research

Two shanty towns, considered representative of the poverty-stricken extension of Kinshasa's suburbs, were selected for the action-research: an older quarter, Ndjili XII, and a newer neighbourhood, Mbanza Lemba. The several hundred thousand residents of both shanty towns are culturally closely related, the majority originating from the adjacent regions of southwestern Bandundu and Lower Congo. Immigrants and their descendants from these two provinces, at that time, constituted more than one third of the city's inhabitants. The peoples of rural Lower Congo province are well documented in anthropological studies regarding the Koongophone society, many of whom inhabit Congo-Brazzaville or the DR Congo (Bockie 1993, Buakasa 1973, Hagenbucher-Sacripanti 1989, Jacobson-Widding 1979, Janzen 1978, 1982, 1992, MacGaffey 1986, Mahaniah 1982, Van Wing 1959).

## *Research setting*

Mbanza Lemba, a village-like slum quarter with crowded households, is located on the fringes of the city and occupies the northern hillsides of the University of Kinshasa campus. This squatter zone developed rapidly over the 1980s in the absence of any formal urban planning. Its inhabitants, thus, enjoy very few of the public services and infrastructural amenities available in the older suburbs and the

downtown city. Education levels are very low. Less than 5 per cent of Mbanza Lemba's inhabitants earn regular wages.

Ndjili suburb was built in the 1950s as a modern township; its old and impoverished Quartier XII in the vicinity of the international airport is the focus of this study. It represented an attempt at what the colonial authority defined as a "harmonious association" between members of the upcoming generation of white-collar workers and urban middle-class families, both European and Congolese. It aimed at housing the new Congolese individuals to the European standards of rationality, work, basic comfort, family, marriage, hygiene and health care.

Compared with Kinshasa as a whole, Ndjili XII shows high indices of educational qualification. An apparent increase in single female inhabitants in recent years, however, reflects both men's loss of status and their reluctance to engage in symmetrical marriage relations. As in many other parts of Kinshasa, most parents in this suburb are no longer able to provide the levels of education and health care they themselves enjoyed in their youth for their children. This deterioration reinforces their awareness of their being destitute. They are increasingly confronted by their exclusion from the social privileges and material comforts enjoyed by the leisured class living in the downtown areas and propagated by modernisation discourses, transnational television programmes and social media.

### *Research techniques*

A combination of qualitative research techniques, including participant observation, case studies, structured and semi-structured interviews and focus groups were employed. We also made use of quantitative research techniques such as random sample studies with questionnaires and sociological surveys. The initial stage of the exploratory investigation involved the selection of key and lay informants. Unstructured individual and focus group interviews were conducted with members of the local community in search of health care. It was demanded to set up these interviews among primary health care professionals and cult or faith healers regarding the research objectives and methods. All the biomedical health care facilities in the target communities were identified and visited.

Discussions concerned: 1) local health needs and the available care facilities; 2) care seeking and treatment practices regarding a number of common bodily and psychosocial complaints and culture-bound illnesses; 3) existing networks and family dynamics that direct community members to various health care resources; 4) explanatory models, curative practices and group psychodynamic processes with regard to various types of illness and care facilities; and 5) changes and variations in health seekers' management of plural resort to healers or healing communes of the sacred spirit, side to side to biomedical care.

In addition, a culturally and locally adapted survey questionnaire was prepared and carried out by RIAGG. Inventory (BSI) and the Help-seeking Behaviour and Explanatory Questionnaire (HBEQ)<sup>13</sup>. The latter is specifically designed for biomedical and psychiatric health care research in the economically developing world. Drawing on the information obtained through the in-depth and focus group interviews, a series of questions were added to further investigate family narratives and dynamics around the experience of illness. The questionnaire was translated into the Kinois vernacular Lingala language and a series of preliminary interviews was carried out to test and improve its linguistic, conceptual and sociological relevance.

Part 1 of the survey questionnaire enables the interviewer to explore and clarify, in an open-ended way, how the family has dealt with the present or most recent illness of one of its members. Eliciting information about previous or parallel treatments allows for a longitudinal and case-study perspective on the illness. Part 2 investigates types of somatisation and different bodily and subjective expressions of an illness, while Part 3 explores the extent to which the family context influences the health seeker's (self-)understanding at the onset of the illness.

The survey questionnaire was administered in the form of semi-structured interviews. These were conducted with a random sample of 65 families or households (each counting an average of eight persons) from among the 1,182 registered dwellings in Ndjili, next to the 60 out of the 2,374 households in Mbanza Lemba. Two years later, in 1997, 120 of the 125 families were revisited with a view to obtaining additional information on family composition and social dynamics, the health seekers' ethnocultural background, and the

perceived relationship, particularly of mutual care, between the Kinois household and their extended family in the rural hinterland. The follow-up interviews assisted us in developing a longitudinal perspective of families' help seeking strategies. Half the families, originally contacted in 1995, were experiencing cases of chronic or lasting illness. The return visit in 1997 permitted us to inquire as to how the problem was now. Firstly, what steps the family had undertaken in seeking treatment and new etiological explanations, and secondly, whether the care seeker had experienced a relapse or come down with another illness.

Finally, sociological, anthropological and biomedical-psychiatric enquiries were carried out in the Mbanza Lemba and Ndjili XII neighbourhoods, from a multidisciplinary perspective by CERDAS, ARC and RIAGG respectively, with care seekers and their families, as well as with biomedical personnel, next to cult or folk healers, and also faith healers. A series of more specific questions, regarding the therapeutic landscape, was put to three samples of 50 care seekers drawn from each of the biomedical, cult and faith healing spheres. These questions were to provide further information on the classification of symptoms, idioms of distress, explanatory models, and on people's culture-sensitive diagnostic and etiological discourse and on their perceptions of the three care systems. Similar questions were addressed to 50 cult healers and 35 faith healers.

Some 70 case histories were compiled regarding the care seekers accessing the cult or faith healing spheres from the survey questionnaire, the 1997 follow-up visits and the series of questions related to the plural curative landscape. A further 90 case histories for patients at the polyclinic of the Neuro-Psycho-Pathology University Hospital of Kinshasa. Particular attention was paid to the mental health dimension of the illnesses under study and their relationship to psychiatric categories of psychosomatic disorder, anxiety, depression, psychotic states and epilepsy. In the majority of cases, clinical interviews with care seekers residing with healers took place during their treatment, something that enabled us also to investigate diagnostic procedures, individual and group processes, along with the relationship at play between the healer, care seeker and family.

Congolese and Flamandophone-Belgian sociologists, anthropologists and medical-psychiatric researchers involved in the project participated in both its investigative phase and the subsequent action-research. The sociologists assembled the survey data and the psychiatrists prepared and applied the survey questionnaire. Congolese social scientists began with a broad remit, spending the first few months establishing their role as participant-observers and becoming part of the local scene. While they gradually narrowed and sharpened their focus of investigation, a great deal of time and energy was spent establishing mutual trust and respect. Without this trust building, people's habitual suspicion towards members of public institutions, including the university, may have undermined data collection. In addition, as new insights came to light, the anthropologists assisted in continually adapting the research methodology and the curative landscape questionnaire to the content and the culturally geared specificity. Intensive joint seminar meetings, held when several co-investigators were in Kinshasa, helped to interrelate the various data collection events in a stepwise fashion, including 1) selection of key informants; 2) identification of a limited number of common psychosocial health problems in relation to material life conditions in the respective communities; 3) the setting up of a culturally and locally adapted methodology consisting of questionnaires, interviews and rating instruments; 4) investigation of symptoms, expressions of distress, family psychodynamics and explanatory models used alongside with etiological and curative rationales; 5) tentative definition of a new set of integrated organisational interventions in the available care facilities; and 6) a critical adaptation of the original psychosocial intervention programme.

A subsidiary component of the research involved an investigation of the impact on health care due to the overwhelming Ebola epidemic in Kikwit, the town in southwestern Congo where the outbreak occurred (De Boeck 1998, 1999). The study found that folk understandings of the disease, which several dozens of people fatally contracted in hospital, led to widespread distrust of public hospitals and biomedical treatment. This brought about the massive abandonment of the formal biomedical institutions in favour of folk and faith healing.

## *Findings*

At the time of the investigation, we identified, in Ndjili XII, six cult healers handling thirty resident care seekers (staying in the healer's compound for at least several days per week, over several weeks) next to ten faith healers who, along with six assistants, cared for a total of forty-eight care seekers. In the Mbanza Lemba quarter we enumerated seven cult healers treating twenty-three resident care seekers in the healer's enclosure, patients on visit alongside with six faith healers, aided by four assistants. All of the cult and faith healers were over thirty years old. Among the cult healers, of whom ten were men, eight were fifty years or older. More than half of the faith healers were women; their average age was found to be somewhat lower.

The best-known cult and faith healers appeared to be of the same ethnocultural origin as the overall population in the respective suburbs; the composition of the clientele served by these healers revealed the same tendency. Approximately eighteen faith healers and assistants came from the Lower Congo, compared with two from the Bandundu province, two from northern Kivu and two from northern Angola. Half had begun secondary education but none had earned final diplomas. Apart from the two healers who were housewives, another two who were fully employed, alongside the five who declared themselves to be occasionally employed while the remainder considered faith healing to be their principal activity.

With respect to health seekers, sixty of the ninety care seekers resorting to faith healing were less than thirty-four years old (two-thirds of this group were twenty-five and older); twenty-nine of these care seekers making recourse to faith healing had begun secondary school but only seven per cent completed this level of education. Eighteen of the fifty-three cult healing clients were in their thirties, while twenty-five were older than forty-five. (Strikingly, a great number of these clients complained of rectal piles and/or sexual deficiency.) On the whole, more than half of those addressing cult healing were men, the majority of whom were in their forties or older; one fifth of this category declared themselves to be employed while one third stated they found only casual paid work.

Some of those seeking cult healing believed that sorcery accounted for their symptoms such as extreme anaemia, breast tumour, hernia or chronic venereal disease. In comparison, the majority of the culture-specific complaints submitted to faith healing were attributed to sorcery, a fear of evil spirits, conjugal conflict, miscarriage, and also harmful substances (“that sorcerers have thrown into their body”). Incurable wounds, irritability or reproductive deficiency showed some culture-specific imaginary. The latter is most often informing symptoms of impotence, cysts on the ovaries, excessive menstrual flow or acute rectal piles; the collective imaginary envisages the latter as an ominous and polluting substitute for menstrual discharge.

Cult healing was the preferred recourse for states of depression and anxiety, epileptic and convulsive conditions and a number of common culture-specific idioms of distress labelled as illnesses of “effusion or openness” versus those “of disabling contraction or closure” (see chapter 8). The illnesses of effusion or excessive openness that were most frequently encountered, were first submitted to biomedical diagnosis and treatment and only later to either cult/folk healing or faith healing practices. These culturally defined illnesses may include complaints such as (1) weak fontanel or severe headaches at the spot of the fontanel, which care seekers and healers define as “if the head were splitting” (*-yata* in Koongo and Yaka) and (2) skin rashes caused by sorcery (called *mpese*). Still other illnesses of openness entail a form of humoral imbalance, such as: (3) states of excessive heat or fire, connoting fever or itching; (4) chronic diarrhoea; (5) various culture-specifically defined gynecological or *khita* ailments, including excessive menstrual flow, miscarriage and acute rectal piles, all supposed consequences of sexual misdemeanours; (6) various mental disturbances are defined as excessive openness or heat, such as that of an adult patient with an impatient heart that is no longer able to keep cool and easily bursts out in fits of rage. Similar excessive heat may characterise the relations of the afflicted person in the family or wider group and qualify general irascibility, frenzy, wild cursing, obscene speech, sexual harassment, physical violence or other forms of a lasting inability to get along with others.



In these cases, cult healing consists of expelling the evil and cooling the afflicted person down, in line with the humoral rationale, next to refashioning her bodily boundedness and modes of transaction with others and the world. The herbal therapy with cold potions, enemas and ointments seeks to “produce some shade or coolness for the body”. The precise recipe is specific to each illness modality, calling for strict space-time regulations of the cure. For their part, the group treatment in the healing communes of the sacred spirit offers additional support, containment and meaning.

Among the afflictions of disabling contraction, closure, fencing off, or withdrawal (*yibiinda*, *-biindama*) in a bodily and sensorial state of coldness, the complaints most frequently addressed to faith healers include: (7) *lukika*, “a gnawing pain in the blood vessels of the head” and in particular the temples, and (8) *kibeka* or “burst of the spleen,” a name for severe and chronic cramps, infant convulsions and epileptic-like fits, especially manifested among people in bereavement. The spleen is popularly seen to be the seat of bewildering forces causing some to become morose and impassive, or making them impetuous or irritable. It is feared that a child suffering *kibeka* may later experience fertility problems because the spleen, like the liver, is considered the seat of the humoral balance in the person.

Still other ailments of closure involve (9) a “cooling down of the blood”, or backache that confines a person to the house or to sitting or lying down the whole day; or (10) breathing difficulties, rheumatism, pains in the joints, or even frigidity or erection problems. In these cases the victim’s body and life-flow are said to be turned inward “like a fermenting cassava paste bound in leaves”. Children (11) who fail to crawl or stand upright at the appropriate age are assumed to suffer closure, as are those who experience (12) various gynecological ailments (amenorrhoea, frigidity, barrenness) and impotence, or (13) anaemia and chronic constipation. Besides, there are (14) various interrelated mental expressions of closure, such as an individual who closes up in deafness or blindness, withdraws from social contact, turns inward in a state of helplessness, torpor or weary resignation; or no longer responds when spoken to. The sufferer appears to be afflicted by apathy, extreme timidity, sorrow, grief or prolonged anger, or refuses to speak or to share her income; the afflicted person is stiffened by despair, apathy and melancholy.



Health seeking strategies may originate with the individual health seeker as well as with her lay therapy management group. When first confronted with an ailment, many a sufferer begins by practising some form of self-medication through using herbs from the garden or obtained from a herbalist or a pharmaceutical shop. After this initial attempt at self-treatment, the large majority of those who participated in the household survey, in particular those with a school education and a christian spirit, went on to consult a primary health care centre in the neighbourhood or a private clinic. Advice by relevant others was influential in this choice. The household survey data indicated that the type of symptom or complaint is not predictive of the decision to seek out biomedical treatment over cult or faith healing, except with acute and life-threatening symptoms necessitating hospitalisation. Health seekers may use both biomedical and culture-specific terms (such as *lukika*) to name an affliction. The use of a culture-specific illness term does not imply that health seekers will rely on a fully traditional etiology and cult healing.

Unsuccessful treatment was interpreted in almost half of the cases as resulting from incompetent care, prompting health seekers to turn to another biomedical practitioner. The longer the illness resists a biomedical cure, the more readily health seekers and their advisors come to suspect sorcery, evil spirits or a family conflict as having hampered the biomedical intervention. Like the minority of cases in the household survey, for whom biomedical care was not the starting point in the health seeking pathway, many health care seekers, disillusioned by biomedical therapy, joined a neopentecostal church or a charismatic healing commune of the sacred spirit in search of exorcism and emotional support.

Since cult healing fosters the involvement of the care seeker's family and recognises the importance of the care seeker's life-world, only advice by a family member or a reliable person within the support network can authorise a decision to seek out a rather holistic form of cult healing. Indeed, the life-world is the group's local horizon or environment which orients daily life. It is an ever-shifting situational horizon of beliefs, meaning and shared embodied dispositions or habitus. Most schooled urban health seekers feel reluctant to consult a folk healer-herbalist for fear of malpractice,

uncontrolled medicinal doses or high costs. The most frequently cited reasons for seeking cult or folk healing were: 1) suspicion or worry that the affliction's underlying cause may be witchcraft and sorcery, ancestral wrath and/or a family conflict; 2) the presence of particular symptoms such as skin disease, deformity, epilepsy, infertility, dementing illness, dysphoria and other affective illnesses, all of which threaten social functioning; 3) the occasional referral of the patient, by a physician or nurse, to a healer because the type of symptom involving anxiety or violent behaviour requires close kin group support and culture-specific ritual treatment integrating identity discourse and family history.

With respect to both cult and faith healing, 83 per cent of the health seekers expressed their satisfaction with the treatment, perceiving either some improvement or full recovery. Only 3 per cent unambiguously expressed dissatisfaction. At the time of the investigation, 14 per cent were still recovering and preferred not to influence the cure by publicly expressing any evaluation of its effectiveness. Clients highly valued the healer's ability to inspire confidence, easy access to her, and dialogue with cult or folk healers. Numerous health seekers and their family members stated that they would more readily and frequently consult cult or folk healers if the effectiveness of their practices were guaranteed by some formal control system.

To recapitulate, it appears that curative pathways are shaped mainly by care seekers and their families in connection with the neighbourhood support network and in interaction with the access to care providers. Most health seeking choices and pathways are idiosyncratic, fragmentary and reflect short-term care goals. The information that care seekers have on their predicament, regarding types and cost of efficacious treatment in particular, orients the choice of treatment. Doctors, paramedical personnel and healers seem, by and large, to be unfamiliar with the individual care seekers' actual health seeking strategies. Moreover, care providers within a given health care system know little about the other systems. Although they may acknowledge receiving health seekers who also consult a parallel health system, they make no effort to cooperate with these providers of parallel help. The issue of previous treatment or referral to other care givers is rarely discussed openly in the

curative encounter. The only exception to this finding is that cult and faith healers may at times send a client to a local primary health care centre for diagnosis or specialised biomedical treatment. Above all, in the collective representations, good health is an interbodily condition and, thus, is not first and foremost a matter of the individual's mastery or the doctor's medical expertise. Consequently, Kinois people are concerned with preventing or healing the illness within their vital social network and interbodily field.

### *From data to interpretation*

Given the widespread practice of parallel consultation, we postulated that, in judiciously combining the various health care opportunities and their healing resources, care seekers aimed to handle the conflicting plurality of interbodily and intersubjective mental landscapes. They thereby would seek to overcome their anxiety and vulnerability, next to the worries and disorders that accompany the fragmented urban ecology they inhabit. We have not been able to establish a causal link between the urban ecology, the dominant pattern of morbidity and care seeking, and the apparent lost sense of belonging and place felt by part of the population. But, it strikes us that, for their part, healers and healing communes of the sacred spirit do acknowledge specific forms and ways in which urban conditions have an impact on people's wellness or illness. They refer to a particular range of symptoms brought about by, or exacerbated by, a rapid and massive migration in the 1970s and 1980s transition to Kinshasa. It is a range easily associated with skin rashes, convulsive states, various gynecological ailments, substance abuse, aimless wandering.

Plural health resorts or therapy choices fit with the multiplicity of identity models and bodily and social landscapes in the city. Compared to the rural environment, the urban ecology entails, especially for the immigrant from the hinterland, a bewildering variety of bodily expressions and culturally geared scenarios and logics, along with educational differences and many unfamiliar socio- and psychodynamics. The transition to such different contexts and perspectives, may have a profound impact on the bodily awareness, individual psyche and the family group (Le Roy 1994a). The impact

differs depending on the particular dynamics determining relations between the family and the health seeker, and their coping and reciprocally supportive capacities. The resulting changes in the organisation of family life and of gender relations are a source of plural identification predicaments and vulnerabilities. Each curative setting provides partial and transitory solutions to the health seeker. Each contains and reflects parts of the social and individual processes of fragmentation and reconstruction.

Our investigation revealed a high and increasing rate of dissatisfaction with biomedicine, in contrast to correspondingly high levels of satisfaction with so-called informal health services, in particular by cult or folk healers. The sociological survey showed that most health seekers feel comfortable with the parallel consultation. These health seekers do not find the forms of care incompatible; on the contrary, they see them as complementary and offering mutual enforcement.

It appears that, in moving from one health care system to another, health seekers submit their various experiences of illness to several tests; apart from expecting recovery of their physical health, they also seek to neutralise the evil which causes the illness or misfortune in view of facilitating healing and removing the social stigma associated with the ailment. However, only cult, folk and faith healing respond to specific culture-determined and predominantly relational etiologies of illness. Within the context of the classical Bantu-African arts of medicine practised in western Congo, healing means making a person whole and often entails a kind of homeopathic self-healing. In other words, cult healing aids both the health seeker and support group to re-experience and embody again in local culture-specific sensory and emotional ways one's predispositions (*habitus*, Bourdieu 1980) and symbolic landscapes of health experience.

As with kinship relations, healing practices are largely governed by the logic of the gift and of openness or flow which set the scene for a co-affecting healing relationship, interbodiliness and intersubjectivity embedded in the local collective imaginary and culture-specific symbolic structures. When misfortune and sorcery entail closure or blockage of flow, in contrast gift exchange and adequate ritual action vitalise social relations whilst making them

visible and personalised. The underlying metaphoric processes of healing are those of tying or intertwining and of knotting or weaving the threads of life (Bekaert 2000, De Boeck 1991, Devisch 1993a: 23 sq., 255 sq., Devisch & Brodeur 1999).

Good and ill health derive from life-bearing and life-harming forces at work in the interbodily and social domain as well in the life-world. Thus, in the perspective of the sociocultures in western Congo, to be in good health depends on the right relations between the individual, the in-group and the life-world. Good health results from the vital integration of the constituents (such as the human, everyday things, fauna and flora), habitual rules and interworld interactions in the local universe of the living. The rules may entail the routine ones next to those of descent, filiation and hierarchy, along with the common space-time coordinates. The local universe of the living also comprises the relations to cult and ancestral spirits, next to the culture-specific view on humoral logic, dual forces of good or ill fate, regeneration and misfortune. All this determines the well-being of both the individual, her family and residential group. In contrast, symptoms and illness are markers of sociomoral lesions or disruptions both within the sufferer and in the physical, social, moral and cosmological realms of the life-world. Cult healing interventions, thus, aim at reassuring the health seeker's being-in-the-world through the ritual re-elaboration of a new integrative order in which the physical and social bodies are once again attuned to one another and brought into line with the space-time and cosmological orders.

We argue, therefore, that successful health care must involve different avenues of healing in a manner that restores the health seeker's interweave and health. Consequently, neither the prophetic or folk forms of healing, nor the biomedical sector are generally capable of independently supplying a satisfactory and encompassing answer to disease, sickness and/or illness.

## From research to action

Towards the second half of the research period, we designed specific intervention steps. The action or intervention phase of the project aimed at defining, setting up and implementing health services that

would meet the most critical health needs of the communities concerned. The following principles served as guidelines: 1) resources available in the neighbourhoods were to be employed; 2) only a bare minimum of financial support could be made available for the purpose of organising the intervention component; 3) the aim was to interconnect selected health care providers from the three different health systems; 4) the final responsibility for networking and acting in conjunction would fall to a core committee of community representatives, to be formed in the process, and 5) committee members and researchers were seen as cooperators in the selection, intervention and decision-making.

Given the current increasing reliance on local solidarity networks, — a development which appeared in resonance with the villagisation of town —, we postulated that the most realistic way of working towards some form of practical coordination of services between the various health care fields was to start at the neighbourhood or residence network level. Meetings were held in the community with the then constituted community council of the most capable resource persons — particularly well-informed and well-known matrons, elders and healers — to assess the focus and concerns of the action-research, next to the concerns of the community support networks and their influence on illness careers and health seeking behaviour. The delegates then formed committees, in both Mbanza Lemba and Ndjili XII, who worked side by side with the researchers. The initial plan foresaw that the researchers and respective committees would organise bi-monthly meetings with as many healers as possible in order to determine the local offer of healing specialisations to the clients' demands. It was then the task of the committees to provide health seekers with advice concerning the appropriate biomedical aid, healers and treatments available. We meanwhile intended to mobilise the dynamics of local networks, but avoided offering any training to the committee members with respect to counselling the care seekers.

Throughout the process, contacts were maintained with the Ministry of Health. Several meetings of community councils — which evolved into committees of community representatives — took place in the presence of public health policy makers, biomedical inspection authorities responsible for primary health care in Kinshasa

and researchers from the university departments of public health, mental health and sociology-anthropology. The biomedical inspection authorities showed a keen interest in the project for several reasons. In their duties they had often been confronted with contradictory reports from both health seekers and physicians about classical Bantu-African medical treatment or healing. The latter were indeed puzzled by the recent and growing underutilisation of public health care facilities, despite their low cost and easy access.

As a matter of fact, the biomedical inspection authorities found themselves in the unfamiliar and unprecedented situation of being invited by folk healers (some unschooled) and community representatives to discuss matters of local health policies. This unusual but symmetrical rapport in the community meetings, which ignored the usual hierarchy within the public health organisation, paved the way for a dialogical understanding of a number of salient public health issues. The physicians' presence in the community meetings gave a biomedical turn to the discourse, for example, by raising the issue of scientifically demonstrated curative effectiveness. Usually, health seekers do not assess folk or faith healers in these terms since their legitimacy derives from their initiation and embodied interweave with the expectations and rationale of cult healing, their clients' life-world, or with the characteristics of charismatic faith healing.

Another primary objective of the action-research was to inspire the biomedical and psychiatric health service providers. It was also to sharpen our sensitivity to the plural etiological repertoire of folk and cult healers, as well as to their socio-behavioural rationale in health seeking. How much do relations of trust and day-to-day local solidarity provide the health seekers with a source of support in the family and neighbourhood? We sought to develop local culture-specific communicational and observational skills. In view both of sustaining the biomedical services' curative impact and of helping powerless health seekers, these had to be understood in their terms. At our research contacts, we mobilised the committee members to practise culture-sensitive skills of informing, dialoguing and decision-making. We suggested to avoid simulating or miming the positivist mind set of the physicians but endorse their fellow people's multifarious views, epistemology and etiology.



Using methods similar to those recommended by David Bell and Lincoln Chen (1994), the action-research worked towards improving the quality of biomedical care and the plural health resource allocation in Kinshasa. We, therefore, aimed for a more comprehensive recognition of the range of health problems particular to the poverty-stricken suburbs and shanty towns, along with the culture-specific forms of expressing distress and bodily discomfort. This required a reciprocity between care giver and health seeker of a type that, in a context of great social disparity, should provide for greater equity, among other values. This was to be achieved by differentially attending to the health risks and cultural rationale characteristic of the target zones. More concretely, the project attempted to help the biomedical preventive and curative care institutions to develop more appropriate responses to the individual health seeker's lived experience and local culture-genuine perspectives. It also aimed at sustaining the importance at the community level of the support network — or, more precisely, the health seeker's lay therapy management group and its advice in the plural health care resort.

From the outset of the project's action component, very different styles of therapy management were adopted by the target groups. In fact, these styles appeared to differ from one another so greatly that the very initiative got called into question. The Mbanza Lemba committee chose to select only cult or folk healers of one given ethnocultural origin. The healers put themselves forward as professional community workers, all the while perceiving the project to be a source of income and local power. Above all, they saw the project as a kind of formal legitimisation of the freelance health centre they intended to set up. In this particular case, it was clear that the initiative was an attempt to revive an earlier, but unsuccessful, money-generating enterprise led by a local nurse and a midwife. We opted, however, to take the side of the committee and follow the self-promoting experience on its own merit, meanwhile comparing its group dynamics with that of the committee coordinating the intervention programme at Ndjili. The committee there, composed largely of healers and representatives of local community networks, were more oriented towards informing, counselling and advising health seekers (Le Roy & N'situ 1998).



Granting power and institutional prestige to the support network proved, in effect, to be a sufficient compensation for the healers and committee members involved.

Further development of the programme, and in particular of efforts to empower the committee and local healers, has been hampered by the overall deterioration of the Kinois civil services and the sociopolitical upheaval and looting in the early 1990s. Consequently, we abandoned the discourse of empowerment and community action and redirected our attention on the following issues.

### *Quality of care*

In the committees, we invited the cult and folk healers in the presence of colleagues and clients to specify their competence and the means by which they would seek to assure and assess trustworthy and efficacious treatment. They agreed on a simpler means of evaluating their claims, namely a committee member interviewing some care seekers. This procedure sorted out less experienced healers and helped the more experienced ones to go on focusing their practice on illnesses they knew well. The resulting selection and specialisations of the healers clarified and strengthened their position in the community. The committees felt reassured that they could promote the specialisation of these healers within the local community in general and provide appropriate advice to those seeking help. The emphasis on, and recognition of, the healers' specialisations signalled two developments; on the one hand, some healers returned to the more classic situation addressing only those illnesses for which they had been initiated and, on the other hand, other collaborating healers felt gradually assertive to turn their art into a full-time profession. Healers initiated into the same cult and, thus, treating the same illnesses came to a point where they were willing to exchange some of their skills and herbal knowledge. By comparing their practices and learning from each other, they gained greater confidence in their own skills.

### *Organisation of the healers*

In Mbanza Lemba the committee opted to bring the collaborating healers together in an ad hoc health centre. Upon arrival, the client would be seen by a healer responsible for dispatching health seekers to the appropriate healer and/or curative setting. Although this process allowed for simplified administration and control over the quality of service provision next to increased hygiene, it prevented the healer's practice of some very significant ritual procedures and the usual exchange of services and gifts between healer and client. In Ndjili, lay persons, healers and community elders comprising the committee limited their role to one of offering advice to health seekers. Moreover, the committee initiated forms of collaboration between clients and care providers and between the care providers themselves. This dynamic did not interfere either with the curative relation and procedures or the form of payment. It allowed for some minimal control over the quality of services provided. This type of organisational structure enabled health seekers to obtain personal and other relevant information regarding healers while leaving treatment decisions entirely up to the clients and their lay therapy management groups. Our regular and structured supervision of the committees' activities proved important for their survival. The researchers gradually took on the role of facilitators in helping to solve problems while encouraging the group to find its own solutions and sustainable forms of therapy management.

### *Benefits for the community*

Health seekers commented on how the committees' advice shortened their search for effective care. During the two years of the experiment, no case of intoxication or major mistake in the treatment offered by the healers has been reported. The healers themselves initiated modes of reciprocal referral by forwarding some care seekers, during intake, to a colleague more specialised in the problem at hand. Key observers in the communities have emphasised how the committees helped to mobilise reliable supportive networks. Complementary to the tasks performed in the health committee, initiatives were taken to enhance financial and

moral support for families confronted with major accidents and losses. Possibilities were envisaged of setting up cultural and other activities to improve the quality of life in the neighbourhood.

### *Collaboration with biomedical care*

Although the project did not encounter institutional resistance from the biomedical establishment, ignorance and suspicion regarding cult or folk therapies still typified the attitude of most representatives of the biomedical services. From the outset, the project teams established good working relationships with the public health officers responsible for Ndjili and Mbanza Lemba. Furthermore, attempts were made to collaborate in some manner with the private polyclinics in the respective neighbourhoods. These contacts set the scene for developing, in the longer term, an institutionalised mode of referral and, hence, collaboration between biomedical practitioners, healers and care seekers.

Additionally, initial steps have been taken to remedy the need for a shift in approach and attitude on the part of the biomedical establishment, along with implementing plans for an Institute for Medical Anthropology at the University of Kinshasa. Considering that virtually every physician and nurse is university-trained, interdisciplinary training during the biomedical curriculum with regard to the cultural rationale underlying people's actual health seeking behaviour was deemed to be a priority. Yet, phytotherapy research on medicinal herbs at the University of Kinshasa's Faculty of Pharmacy, to determine their organic or chemical curative properties, has increased the subordination of cult or folk healing practices by reducing the plural value of their treatments to that of an evidence-based singular vegetable cure called phytotherapy.

### *Cooperation with faith healers*

Faith healers in neopentecostal church communities and healing communes of the sacred spirit have, to this date, not been included in the committees' actions. Faith healers openly accused cult or folk healers of relying on the forces of (evil) spirits and sataani or satan; they also viewed faith healing as a mode of proselytism. This

conflict represented a very significant practical setback for the project. Whereas cult or folk healers and most clients highly prize some recourse to medication, most healing communes of the sacred spirit practised only a form of purification through aspersion and ingestion of holy water or laying on hands, next to family council, collective prayer, song and other faith rousing actions. Although the local committees were initially reluctant to collaborate with faith healers in any way, a dialogue has been initiated to foster trust among several faith healers.

With the establishment of a basic level of communication between cult or folk healers and formal biomedical health services, it is quite likely that further coordination may develop under its own steam. New insights and strategies, and in particular new learning and communicational skills, have emerged from the ongoing action-research. These should gradually be shared to devise new forms of interaction or collaboration between health providers and government officers, between action-research and policy making, and between multilateral funding organisations and their Congolese counterparts. It remains unlikely, however, that the neopentecostal church communities and healing communes of the sacred spirit would quickly move beyond the present level of understanding and informal collaboration that was reached between the researchers and the individual leaders of these healing communities. An exception may lie in those instances in which a small minority of church leaders acknowledged working with transferring devices and cultural inducers of healing (see chapter 8).

## Discussion

Having taken the challenge of helping to coordinate competing health systems as its point of departure, the project encountered several stumbling blocks in reaching its action-research aims. Academic standards of evidence-based knowledge and professional privileges, esoteric views and prejudices entailing diverse underpinning ideologies or worldviews, were found to stand in the way of mutual understanding, recognition and cooperation between cult or folk healing, faith healing and biomedicine. These elements also determined the relations between researchers and participants

in the action-research. From the standpoint of the sociology of knowledge one may quickly perceive in the competing health systems a struggle between, on the one hand, a universalising, positivist and Western-derived modern knowledge system and, on the other hand, local culture-bound knowledge practices and pluralistic attitudes on the other. In sum, different historical and sociocultural contexts have led not only to rivalling care systems but also to competing health discourses. To better grasp this fundamental difficulty in the project's implementation, it seems necessary to describe in greater detail how a dominant mind set in urban Congo, affecting both the researchers and the care providers, is dominated by rationalist modern discourses, largely imitated by state-funded formal education and mass media.

### *Contemporary Congo's shattered mirrors*

From the late colonial period (the Congo attained political independence in 1960) into the president Mobutu era, which lasted until 1997, the models which public health officials offered as mirrors to the towns-people for evaluating their health were founded on optimistic developmental theories inspired by Western evolutionary visions. These regarded legal-rational state authority and good governance, next to the political economy of modern health care for the new nation, to be a self-evident priority. Through these mirrors, the urban Congolese in the intervening decades first assimilated the new ideals and expectations of health and health care, but later the shanty town dwellers partially rejected them as unattainable and illusionary. We maintain that the widespread luddite uprising in the early 1990s have scattered people's mistaken hopes associated with the state institutions and Western enterprises (Devisch 1996, 1998, this volume chapter 4).

Beginning in the 1950s, Western-derived modernisation discourse characterised the village as a negative space. It was to be converted or abandoned; its paganism, polygyny, healing practices, witchcraft and sorcery next to the oppressive conservatism of the elderly were to be eradicated. Development rhetoric focused on conditions of inadequate food, unclean water, poor hygiene and inferior shelter, which left villagers defenceless vis-à-vis natural disaster, ecological

perils and infectious disease. Mortality, fertility and vaccination statistics were nearly always the first items mentioned in colonial administrative reports as if hygienic, obstetric and biomedical action were opening up anachronistic barriers to rational modernity's imperium of progress. In this modern vision of reality, the world of the village was reduced to a realm of untamed and unsafe "nature". Life in the bush, as colonial discourse defined it, was considered to display a rudimentary social or cultural existence, isolated from the civilising function of the school, written word, hospital, administrative centre, capitalist enterprise, market or church. Since the late 1960s, under president Mobutu, a Eurocentric rhetoric of modernisation has been integrated into the party-state's nationalist cause and presented under the guise of a People's movement of the revolution.

### *The lay therapy management group*

In the 1990s, middle-aged Congolese people in the suburban towns and the shanty towns have begun to acknowledge their becoming foreigners to their original culture, family network, mode of life, education and communalism. Matricentred households and female-centred networks operating at the core of the economically destitute society in town and slum areas sustained the process that Kinois people have called villagisation of town. Since 1993, neighbourhood, religious and residential associations have engaged in basic communal support activities such as improving neighbourhood security or providing basic amenities such as tap water, appropriate sanitation and electricity. Their leaders, including clever matrons, insightful elders and charismatic leaders in healing communes of the sacred spirit were increasingly inspiring the revaluation of their residence connections or networks of communal belonging and support. Economically destitute, the populace mobilised its social capital in view of tempering the power of the civil services and politics, next to surreptitiously inventing grassroots democracy and civic culture. These civic networks began to counter the tendency of the masses to submit passively to the bureaucratic state and its "politics of the belly" and succeeded in gradually arousing sentiments of communal empowerment. This new communal dynamic, which to a large extent

is the outcome of women's daily struggle to assure the nutrition, health and education of their children, involves no less than a rehabilitation of one's place of belonging in the urban fabric.

A new sense of solidarity and communitarian ethical duty is, thus, mobilised at the neighbourhood and township level. Although the villagisation of the town does not actually entail a physical return to rural village life, urbanites' growing sense of belonging in their residence networks, it draws on the collective and largely unconscious predispositions or *habitus* which somehow echo the sociologic of the village family structure and its communitarian economy of gift-giving and exchange. When faced with misfortune and bereavement, Kinois of the towns and slum areas tend to reinforce the ethics and communal practices of matri-centred solidarity among kinsfolk in line with seniority and descent rules. They, thereby, tie in with dispositions at the core of age-old etiologies, communal and ritual enactments of life changes. In Kinshasa, the major healing and transition rites are performed in the language and style of the socioculture of origin and are, thus, adapted to the kinship allegiances and life-world or cosmology of the given group. Initiates and care seekers however, can easily cross cultural boundaries because the affliction and healing cults possess a common African cultural substratum, especially with regard to treatment strategies, metaphoric processes related to the human body and other subverbal symbols and imaginary at play in the healing process, such as dances, mimes, body decorations, ritual objects, massage, fumigation, medicinal substances and, above all, trance-possession and witchcraft.

From the mid-1990s, Kinois are convinced that the mid-1990s crisis would last for a long time. They do no longer put any faith in the state's capacity to develop a new era of prosperity and greater justice. They are more than ever aware that, in all matters of survival, health, security of the family or school education, they can count only on themselves and the solidarity of their residence network and between brothers and sisters in charismatic communes or neopentecostal churches. People join the moral revaluation of common issues at the household and neighbourhood level. This revaluation happens in communal prayer and faith in the economy of divine grace and spiritual knowledge offered by the neopentecostal churches and healing communes of the sacred spirit. Members see

the spiritual economy as a source of their social respectability which exceeds ascribed status by birth or professional achievement. For this reason, critics state that, in the long term, community centres for primary health care should tie in with this religiously revitalised social capital and new moral fabric, and become less dependent on governmental agendas and external funding agencies.

Let me put the matter in terms coined by Veena Das even though she writes in relation to the plight of the victims of the chemical poisoning at Bhopal-India. In turning to healing communes of the sacred spirit, healers and local health centres, Kinshasa seem to be “discard[ing] paternalistic notions by which health is handed down to the poor through a paternalistic and bureaucratically defined rationality” (Das 1993: 163-164). In the 1990s, Memisa, the international NGO coordinating health care action throughout Kinshasa, becomes alarmed by the decrease in use of biomedical and state- or NGO-sponsored health initiatives. Dispensaries and maternities in the townships witness a significant decline in consultations while the overall health situation in the urban areas has deteriorated significantly due to epidemics and malnutrition. The financial factor does not explain people’s current withdrawal from, or dissatisfaction with, biomedical help since usually only token payments are required for treatment at most clinics. Instead, many patients complain of the low sociomoral satisfaction gained from biomedical consultation and treatment. An externally sponsored tuberculosis vaccination programme, carried out in early 1996 and intended to reach the entire populace of the capital experiences a turnout of only 70 per cent in some zones. Parents and neighbourhood elders explained that they have deliberately boycotted the campaign in an attempt “to defame the state which deliberately sought to infect their children”. Widespread rumours have led to an attitude of deep suspicion toward paramedical personnel because many have turned their services into private businesses. Meanwhile it is rumoured that most biomedical staff only treat patients after they have received something in the way of personal payment, called “beans for the children”. These rumours increasingly associate clinics and primary care centres with the discredited kleptocratic state establishment, which people now wish to avoid altogether.



Under the present circumstances, for their minor ailments health seekers increasingly access more familiar, ethnocultural networks of health care in their own neighbourhood. Here, they find an expanding informal sector of small and non-subsidised, often religiously inspired, health centres run by paramedics or even quacks of some sort. Clients acknowledge that the service offered by these persons or centres may be of low quality, yet they find it largely reassuring and somehow positive insofar as it helps them to look after themselves.

Pharmaceutical shops, often kept by untrained personnel, can be found in every street and self-medication (particularly with the so-called “ampicillin, cibalgine or indocid”) for minor ailments is widespread. People often claim that, in view of the high rates of inflation, “buying a pill from time to time at a pharmaceutical shop or even from a street vendor remains a cheap substitute for the more costly daily bread”.

At first glance, Kinshasa health seeking practices and attitudes towards biomedical practice appear to entail a series of contradictions. They may be understood, however, as strategies for coming to terms with unsettling and conflicting social, cultural and economic realities. They are shaped by the current villagisation of towns and the growing affirmation in the shanty towns of ethnocultural origin and identity based in the common-language-bearing group. Neighbourhood networks seem to domesticate culturally alien institutions, such as biomedical views on health, disease and cure. These ongoing processes remobilise the kin or local solidarity relations which underpin people’s health seeking behaviour and cult or faith healing practices. In the coming decades, neither the state nor NGOs will have the material resources or moral capital to coordinate primary health care at the community level all over Kinshasa and the other cities. We speculate that people’s growing resourcefulness and self-reliance with respect to self-help and self-medication will draw increasingly upon folk, cult or faith healing rather than on biomedicine.

The general state of dysphoria, the struggle for survival and the declining educational and health care opportunities in the 1990s have had other indirect influences on the action-research programme. On the one hand, collaborators themselves often felt distressed by material, funeral or health problems. As researchers in the field,

they met with doctors or healers and their patients in the thick of economic and institutional hardships and, like them, suffered the same vagaries of life in the postcolony. For their part, volunteer informants showed little motivation to carry out interviews or were tempted to turn them into opportunities for personal gain. Since October 1996, the severe political unrest in Kinshasa has slowed or hampered our research in the field and disrupted the programme of seminar meetings scheduled with the delegates of the committees of community representatives, the public health planners and biomedical personnel. On the other hand, Kinois colleagues and principal collaborators have confirmed time and again how much their partnership with Euro-American researchers, even if short-term, provided them with essential and critical support. It enabled them to foster an attitude of self-criticism in their work with health seekers who, in their contact with representatives of the biomedical or university institutions, habitually glossed over or suppressed the tradition-bound cultural rationale and imaginary in their experience of illness and coping with the sheer brutality of the survival struggle.

The researchers were convinced that the project's involvement with local urban networks of lay therapy management was indeed significant, all the more since the action-research was taking local health needs, strategies and social distress next to the rampant anomie as its point of departure. Moreover, the project aimed to strengthen the communities' available resources, in terms of persons, relationships, responsibilities or goods, while fostering people's culture-specific agency and views — all elements which otherwise tend to be ignored in governmental community health programmes. In sum, the culture-specific character of people's agencies and views in health seeking has confronted the researchers with their own culture-specific mind set and, thus, laid bare an epistemological paradox that the action-research has not fully been able to solve. This is what we will now examine.

### *The mind set of the researchers*

The vehemence and persistence with which many healers proclaim that their healing works solely on the basis of the herbal-medicinal properties of the plants they use, provided an initial clue to a key

epistemological difficulty encountered by the project team. Similar affirmations are even more common among the faith healers. While only a few faith healers use plants, they all attribute their healing powers to the holy or sacred spirit. To the casual researcher, it might then appear, on the basis of the testimony of the faith healers themselves, that their cures have nothing to do with ancestors, the spirit world, the conventional symbolism, the modes of group life or ritual procedure.

Echoing the testimonies of many of her colleagues, prophetess Ngadi, a faith healer in Ndjili-Kinshasa — speaking in the Kinois vernacular Lingala — informed us:

Tata azalaki kosala na makambo yo kala ya bakoko. Ngai nazali kosalela na tino ya biblia, ya priere. Tobongola makambo ya bakoko tokoma na biblia, na losambo. Ngai nayebi Nzambe nasalisaka naboyi nzete na kombo ya Nzambe. Bukoko ya kala tobwaka. / My father worked according to the traditions of the entitled elders. I am working through the bible and through prayer. We changed [kobongola: transform, modify but also disfigure] these traditions and we arrived at the bible and at prayer. I know God and work with Him, and I refuse 'plants [nzete, that is, healing with plants in the way the elders did] in the name of God. We have thrown away the old ways of the elders.

This type of response poses both methodological and theoretical problems even for the dedicated and forewarned researcher. The anthropologist familiar with African medicine can safely anticipate that the vegetal substances for a particular treatment will be spoken of as revealed in dreams to the cult or faith healer. Healers often report that the plants and preparation were suggested in dream by the sacred spirit or the cult spirit. When a healer denies that such suggestion is the case, the researcher is hardly in a position to contradict the informant or demonstrate an inconsistency. The observer-researcher is in no position to contest the explanation of the healers themselves when they deny that their capacity to heal has anything to do with non-empirical, non-organic forces or properties.

We have undoubtedly encountered here a limitation of the social sciences, as of psychiatric and group psychocurative approaches in dealing with culture-specific health perceptions, behaviours and reflective cognitive representations. Looking at the phenomenon more closely, we discovered two levels at which scientific investigation encounters resistance. The first is a sociological phenomenon, one that could have been anticipated in the context of the present project. In the target neighbourhoods, approximately fifty cult and faith healers each were identified. In the process of organising community committees, nearly half of the cult or folk healers expressed an interest in possibly joining or cooperating with a local association of healers, but many of these eventually dropped out of the process. At this time, after approximately two years of implementation, only five or six cult or folk healers in each of the neighbourhoods continued regularly or actively to participate in cooperative efforts. While one can understand that many factors might diminish a healer's enthusiasm for going public with her vocation, including the unwillingness to risk disclosure or competition, we understand this phenomenon in fact to represent a form of self-censure. As also implied by other studies (Bekaert 2000, De Boeck 1991, Devisch 1993a, this volume chapters 5 & 8, Devisch & Brodeur 1999, Lapika 1984, Van Wolputte 1997), the healers tend first to mimic a quasi-medical and christian discourse. In our presence, they all affirmed that they work strictly with medicinal plants, while at the same time some attributed their healing capacities to God or the holy/sacred spirit. A number of healers may even pray together with the client at the opening of their formal meetings.

One might surmise that this form of discourse and interaction does not reflect their actual practice and, indeed, in most cases it does not. Does the researcher then assume that the healers are inconsistent or dishonest? And here we reach another, more subtle, limitation of social science and psychiatric research — what we refer to as due to a matter of competing discourses. Verbally at least, these cult or folk healers would seem to reduce their cure to vegetable and organic principles, while they themselves are fond of referring to the active component (*le principe actif*) in the plant substance, just as the faith healers relegate any curative effectiveness

to the work of the holy or sacred spirit. We should also acknowledge that, on their side, most health seekers find little satisfaction in the modalities of care that do not take account of an essentially interpersonal ontology and etiology.

It is worthwhile here to look again at how issues of cultural etiologies and therapies, on the one hand, and local culture-specific epistemological principles, on the other, relate. In this context, the anthropologist should not one-sidedly apply scientific criteria originating from a written culture and modern secularised rationality with a dominantly visual representational logic proper to a literate culture. The research on cult or folk healers is evaluating their fundamentally oral and even seldom worded, embodied, interbodily and interworldly gaining of curative know-how and healing in the cults and folk practices of cure. Each cult plays on the affects, emotions and desire, and engages the totality of sensorial corporeality, cosmology or life-world and relevant kinship relations in the process of healing. In the initiatory seclusion, the care seeker's symbolic death and rebirth takes place within a group and interworld drama and on the basis of complex imaginary and symbolic processes. Each cult offers its own chain of collective imaginary and symbolic registers in order to remodel the specific syndrome into a vital consonance between body, in-group and life-world. A sphere of initiatory secrecy and sacralisation underpins the healing relationship between healer and care seeker, health seeker or neophyte. Of course, the ways in which such multilayered and predominantly non-verbal semiotic drama leads to physical, affective and cognitive changes, which not only heal but also grant a new identity to the care seeker, escape a more experimental or evidence-based biomedical understanding. By definition, folk/cult healing cannot be evaluated by means of criteria commonly used for objective fact- or evidence-based positivist scientific knowledge and related curative interventions, or applied by governments as technical and uniform standards for biomedical and curative professionalism. The healers' curative success with the care seeker equally functions as a test of their authenticity, in line with the perspective of the relevant ontology proper to the Bantu-African civilisational traditions of medicine.

There remains a question, to which we alluded previously, regarding the logical consistency of an haphazard appeal to presumably contradictory suppositions, such as regarding vegetable remedies, ancestral help and sorcery or illumination from the holy/sacred spirit. Indeed, the use of local vernacular language is telling; informants may hasten to speak Kinois Lingala or French to the researcher or in a community meeting, but during the serious business of healing, the only effective speech, whether spoken or paradigmatic, is the healer's mother tongue and initiatory vocabulary. The urban healer has been forced to carry her skills beyond ethnocultural boundaries and is, thus, necessarily faced with a problem of translation, at least where legitimization of the practice is at stake. To a certain extent, recourse to an otherwise foreign discourse is only a vehicle meant to add authority to one's professional reputation. But that is not all. Healers grasp very well the effectiveness of modern drugs and surgery, just as they recognise the value of medicinal plants. Yet this acknowledgement in no way diminishes their proper knowledge and ability to handle other forms of 'power' and 'forces'. In their acceptance of epistemological categories and logic that are not bound to the exclusive distinction between the material and the immaterial or the visible and invisible, they are indeed pluralistic and intellectually honest. We can only raise the question as to whether the appeal — at different times and in different contexts — to a culturally geared plurality of equally valid discourses actually constitutes self-contradiction (see also Devisch 2017b: chapter 6). What does it mean when one discourse (modern, objective, drawing on the authority of science and the biomedical order) claims to be exclusive while the other (experiential, relational, drawing on the authority of local traditions) does not?

The healers' adoption or miming of a scientific discourse appears as a strategy in the effort to organise and improve the encompassing quality of their services and, thus, to legitimate their practices from a plurality of perspectives and horizons. In this way, the healers can only be said to inventively respond to the aims and objectives of the researchers who have sought their collaboration. The phenomenon of externally initiated social projects, partly unconsciously, unprecedented expectations, strategies and particular

behaviours among the target group is well documented. Our project was no exception. In this sense, requiring that healers practise in a building belonging to the primary health care centre (something that some healers themselves decided upon, ostensibly to improve hygiene, presumably because of the added status) raises fundamental questions with regard to the self-critical integrity of cult healing in town. We have not yet been able to adequately assess the consequences of this development. Again, it is important here to recall the impact on urban Congolese society of the rationalising and modernising project that has been felt and absorbed at least in the social imaginary, to varying degrees, by all levels and classes of the population.

### *Product of Western-derived science*

If the researcher does not possess a thorough grasp of the healer's mother tongue and her intercorporeal dynamics, it is all but impossible to carry on a serious dialogue on curative and healing practice with her, much less to explore the culture-bound etiologies underlying the practice at hand. It is one thing if researchers simply have not had the opportunity to develop the necessary linguistic skills to deal with a particular informant and need resort to translation. It is another when systematically, in the course of interviews, questionnaires and organisational meetings, the default language is never a mother tongue but the lingua franca (*i.e.* Kinois Lingala or Ikeleve) or French as the language of formal and Western-derived schooling. The biasing and narrowing effect of translation is well known. Nonetheless, we do not intend to imply that the culture-specific aspects of etiology and healing are exclusively verbalised or verbally communicated. But, we rather would argue that the non-verbal and untellable — affect-laden, gestural, sensorial, interbodily and co-affecting, next to interworld — aspects, which may be even more culturally determined, are in fact predominant. This alone would explain the marked capacity of cult and faith healers to work in a context of many cultures, given that we are dealing with Bantuphone populations who share many cultural characteristics, such as orality.

Strikingly, we observe that the recourse to a non-ethnocultural language (French, Lingala or Ikeleve) is often either the unconscious choice of the local researcher who no longer masters the healer's or health seeker's mother tongue. Or it may be the conscious choice of the researcher who feels the necessity of communicating a certain status, education and distancing from what the (post-) colonial discourse commonly designated as "indigenous", meaning backward, ignorant and typical of village life. The informant or counterpart is equally willing to attempt at least to speak in "modern" language in order to affirm her own modernity.

The researcher, a product of secular Western science, is often reluctant to appeal to christianity — as some cult, folk or faith healers apparently do — to communicate her status as a member of university which she associates with secular science. Rather, for the sake of objective research, she may adopt a neutral stance while participating even with a receptive mind in a healing service for which, according to the criteria imposed on participants by the faith healers themselves, one must "have faith," or "be pure". Given christianity's omnipresence in the capital and the western Congo not the least because of its auspicious evocation, it is no surprise that anyone can easily resort to christian discourse without necessarily being a practising believer or church member. The problem resides more in the fact that christianity has been at the forefront of the civilising mission, particularly where local religious beliefs and practices were concerned, for they were considered, *a priori*, pagan or pertaining to magic and fetishism — depending on whether the dominant discourse is religious or scientific. Even the "modern educated" Congolese is anxious to avoid too close an association with those local cultural spheres, which strike one as backward and ignorant, for fear that her close attention or mere contiguity will make her appear equally backward and ignorant.

It is not that the researcher has abandoned the right to plural discourse — except to the extent that her education and urban life have caused her to silence or even to forget her culture of origin — but that she is all too often anxious to impose that discourse. She may do it to confirm her modern status, power and education, at least in contexts where this behaviour is socially indicated. This means that the researcher is often unmotivated to re-value a local



knowledge or practice which she has forsaken. Without passing judgement on the researcher's personal motivations and less conscious intentions — indeed, a current Western problem or concern —, it seems that the impact of the colonial civilising mission is such that dealing seriously with indigenous culture requires not only significant effort, self-critique and more study, but also a break with prejudicial attitudes prevalent in academia.

## Conclusion

The way in which healers are capable of critically dealing with the dictates imposed by city life, biomedicine and the market economy is of vital importance for their continued practice. The vitality of their arts also depends upon their capacity to creatively transform and metabolise these influences, or on the way in which they succeed in voicing the aspirations of the people amid the current institutional crisis in the Congo. At the same time, it is one of the key problems in our applied research. Our contribution lies in the borderlinking between the world of healers and formal public health care institutions. Our aim was also to acquire and reflectively clarify critical insight, knowledge and reflexivity. Among other things, this means that researchers must constantly be aware of the sociological and cultural factors impacting on their epistemological concern in order to minimise the limitations and maximise the potentialities of the social sciences, psychiatry and group psychotherapy in plural health care.

# Interdisciplinary thesaurus

## Content

Affect

Affliction and healing cults (*phoongu*)

Borderlinking

Cognitive competences (-*zaaya*, -*yaaba*, *ngiindu*, -*yiindula*; -*mona mu mbuundu*; -*kana*, *lukanu*, -*soola*)

Ethic of desire

Extimacy

Ettinger

Forces (interworldly: *kikesa*, *ngaandzi*)

Imaginary

*Jouissance*

Kristeva

Lacan

Lalangué

Local universe of the living, life-world, (*n-totu*)

Matrix

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'Real'

Resonance (-*kabwasana*, -*kambulula*, -*niingisana*, -*zoondzana*)

*Signifiance*

Sinthome

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Symbolic

'Thing', *das Ding*

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Unspeakable

**Affect:** An affect is the body's ability to affect and to be affected. The affection, as the effect of affecting someone, is manifested in the interactional eruption of a modification in the facial muscles and colour, or in posture, viscera, heartbeat, respiration frequently accompanied by unintended vocalisations. The affection may influence the affected person's dreams, fantasy and imageries. Indeed, the affect is a non-conscious experience of bodily-sensuous intensity, prior to verbal consciousness, and over which the individual has very little control. Think of agitation, anger, anxiety, aversion, bitterness, disgust, fury, utter hatred, horror, lust, rage, rancour, revulsion. It is a moment of some unformed and unstructured potential, intensity and resonance; it makes feelings feel. In other words, the body (*Leib*) has a grammar of its own which can barely be captured in words because it "doesn't just absorb pulses or discrete stimulations; it enfolds contexts." (Massumi 2002: 30). That is to say that we are not self-contained in terms of our energies: at this level, there is no secure distinction between the individual and her environment. The affected person resonates with some kinds of music, a bodily-sensual experience, or a visual display and other sensory affection.

Over the years, reading Henri Bergson, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, or Jacques Lacan, Brian Massumi and Baruch Spinoza offered me helpful tracks to somewhat clarify the sublingual work of affect.

Let us now situate the affect and its ambivalence in a local common-language-bearing people's experiences and feel-thinking moulded by their local universe of the living and moulded by their local culture. Affect is a prepersonal and sublingual intensity of resonance with fellow humans and other beings, along with the local context and world. In particular, it implies the bodily-sensuous and emotional state with that of another. The bodily-sensuous transaction and resonance is of the human condition but its expressive modality is to some degree culture-specific. Another property is that it escapes self-controllable confinement, such as in its vitality or potential for contagious interaction. Actually, habitual things and shared forms of order 'live' in and through that which escapes them. The vitality of people underscores the autonomy of affect as it unleashes the potential of flexibility, co-involvement and vital interbodiliness in and through closely interacting bodies. But affects may also appear as bivalent: their unleashing potential is most manifest in one's angry heart, confusion, horror, angst, anger, cruelty, sadness and repulsion, but likewise in attraction and jouissance, arousal and trance-like states, shared enthusiasm, motivation and the sense of aliveness, purpose and changeability, termed freedom. This co-

involvement may develop in a sensuous interbodily nearness of family members, and is intensified by the sharing of both ardour and the acute awareness of one's vulnerability, doomed fate and anxiety.

It has been argued that we cannot directly experience, think or put into words and reflectively share the utter sensuousness and compelling force of our affects which appear entangled in themselves. We can only refer to these experiences in terms of the affection, such as groundless, unspeakable and unreasonable fear, feeling apart or being decentred. However, a reflective person can only speak approximately in terms of the interaction of the affects, senses, emotions or imagination; that is, allusively put into words what really moves or blocks her. This is why the anthropologist may wish to engage in participant observation as an attempt to share the hosts' intense moments replete with affect, emotion, sensation, fear or sorrow. Moreover, their intention is to catch the expression of all this in their poetic or ironic words, chants, images or ritual enactments. The anthropologist, furthermore, may seek out how to understand the way in which people corporeally-sensually identify with fellow beings and the local universe of the living. For instance, how does a hunter capture the animal by assuming and embodying his prey's viewpoint, senses and sensibilities.

*See also:* ETHIC OF DESIRE, FORCES, JOUISSANCE, UNSPEAKABLE

**Borderlinking:** One of the most fascinating breakthroughs of Bracha Ettinger's phenomenological and matrixial perspective relates to her rethinking of a number of predominant conceptual schemes and paradigmatic sets which thrive in modern Western thought. These schemes and sets are thought to exist along the lines of the habitual binary oppositions, such as culture and nature, physical and social, body and mind, percept and concept, affect and emotion, compelling necessity and inventiveness. Ettinger's borderlinking point of view has helped me to develop an acute awareness of people's manifold sensing out of the beneficial or noxious effects of the interspecies interaction between human, animal, plant, artefact, ecological and meteorological agencies. Yakaphone people's manifold reciprocity of perspectives helped me to clarify the ways in which the participants, in healing rituals and family councils, develop a well-tempered mediation in the borderzone. Elders, diviners and healers readily take on the point of view of the beings and agencies with which they are concerned. In other words, an interspecies

co-affection and exchange of being, power and agency is at stake. People's concern, which inspires this interconnectivity, very much revolves around reproduction through birth-giving and the arts of cultivation, husbandry, cooking, rain-making, as well through the recycling of lunar months and seasons. For example, this borderlinking marks an unreflected complicity and transference (a notion used here in the psychoanalytic sense) among mothers in the slums who invest a lot of daily effort to feed their small children. A similar exchange of perspective and complicity seems to be at play among participants in a palaver seeking to settle a conflict, alike among initiates in an affliction and healing cult or mourners at a bereavement. Meanwhile, members of the local society or cult groups join the rhythmically modulating interweave between the powers of life-giving and mutual enforcement.

*See also:* ETTINGER, MATRIX, PERSPECTIVISM, THREE BODIES

**Cognitive competences:** The Yaka discourse about the experiential, including the sacred, differentiates between two competing but divergent manners of thinking and practical dispositions or cognitive competences. There is, firstly, the notion of direct knowledge and reasoning power (*-zaaya, -yaaba*) unfolding with prudence and sagacity. I render this as *erudite knowledge, discernment and perspicacity*. The person's reliable prudential reason or bodily-based type of knowledge is mediated by signifiers codified in one's language and culture, and vested in the local people's habitus and interbodiliness. Prudential reason enables the person to choose, while holding the affects and imaginative comprehension in check, namely through the articulation of principles and consequences, feasibility and forwardness, and through drawing on more or less evident contextual signs, observations and distinctions. The reasonable individual, thereby, articulates portentous, striking and conscious representations of things and situations while also assessing the appropriate means for attaining instrumental goals. These representations are made to check the limits of feasibility and the effects of probing. People's understanding (*-dibaandza*) of the perceptible limit (*ndilu*) is neither privative nor dispersive; the limit does not overshadow the work of reason but provides it with a horizon (also known as *ndilu*) that summons for some arbitration or a concern with order and equality (*-kyaatika*, literally, to classify, to rank), fairness or righteousness (*-siingika*, literally, to align).

Secondly, and by contrast, there is the *intuitive and imaginative comprehension* (*ngiindu, -yiindula*) of the nature of acts, beings and things. Such comprehension perceives the motive, mobile and objective of the act,

event or course of things. Moreover, the comprehension captures, somewhat confusedly, the weight of the affects and the bodily conditions of attraction or repulsion that predispose the given individual to an-depth perception due to empathy or familiarity with the fellow person or situation. It may include the sort of affects and bodily conditions that the individual experiences captivately and cautiously in the face of spirits and interworld 'forces'. This imaginative comprehension draws its most vivid inspiration from intuitive and oniric power (*ngiindu, ndosi*), acute flair (*fimbu*), and even prescient intuitions in the way of diurnal or nocturnal dreaming (*-lota, ndosi*) or divinatory sagacity (*ngoombu*) to read the client's predicament. The sagacious person — healer, diviner, family head or a parent — continues to draw on intuitive content that inspires the plans (*-kana, lukanu, -soola*) of the given individual. This occurs through inward questioning, discernment and interpretation, all of which stem from a pondering reflection on oneself and "one's inner apprehension associated with the heart" (*-mona mu mbuundu*) as a source of "inspiration for one's plans" (*-kana, lukanu, -soola*). This perspicacious reflexivity also draws on one's empathic feel-thinking and 'fleshy' (*la chair, sensu* Merleau-Ponty 1964) interbodily and communicational co-implication.

An insightful popular etymology of the French notion of *connaissance* interpreted as "to be born with" (*co-naissance*), renders this intuitive, empathic and fleshy comprehension. Yakaphone reflective discourse would define this imaginative understanding as an (inter)corporeal, (inter)subjective and interworldly or 'cosm-et(h)ic' (cf. Ettinger) process, which is evocative of these views. The notion of cosm-et(h)ic seeks to render how deeply the person's sense of the social ethic (concerned with the law of reciprocity) and the aesthetical sense of integrity and wholeness contribute to the interweaving of the local interbodily, interpersonal and interworldly fabric.

Comprehension, thus, is the capacity to sense the multilevelled co-implication that encompasses and achieves a well-balanced conjoining of the beautiful, the blissful and the ethical. In other words, becoming a wise person of moral weight in Yakaphone society consists of the — interbodily, intersubjective and interworld — styling of one's own and others' desire, longing, emotions, striving, decency, endurance and 'co-naissance' that one should share at home or with one's house-mates, close kin and local society. The individual may, thereby, touch upon her affects and a load of culture-specific and burgeoning subconscious signifiers. According to common parlance, imaginative comprehension dominates the sphere of cults, ritual expressions and beliefs, including the quest of origins, final intent or destination.

Perspicacious reflexivity certainly concerns a form of perceptual jittering within the borderspace in which members of a local culture connect with their most significant totemic animals, plants and things. The enriching of a kind of comprehension which is not accumulative, but which depends upon, or is the result of, an attitude or disposition.

*See also:* PERSPECTIVISM, REFLEXIVITY, THREE BODIES

**Ethic of desire:** Councils of elders and the divinatory oracle basically address the desire which is at play among closely interacting persons. They are not primarily preoccupied with discussing an order of facts. Their primary concern is to mobilise a sensitiveness and consensual comprehension of the problem at hand among the participants or consultants and their extended family. They, thereby, assume and speak to the existence of an undergirding ethic of desire — a notion inspired by Lacan (1959-60). Desire is, by definition, at play between closely interacting persons in search of either guaranteeing or undermining a basic and vital symmetrical reciprocity. This desire either sustains or undermines the common law of exchange within the family of the distrusted or accused. It is largely in cases of existential crisis that a family council or the divinatory art is brought to bear. Think of unsettling cases of chronic illness, the death-threats, misfortune, infertility or repeated illicit intrusion in the sexual intimacy of the couple. Councils of consulted elders convening for family matters, including divinatory oracles, moreover address cases of theft and insoluble conflict. They also turn to life-threatening violence and fatal witchcraft in the family, or desperate shortage of resources, next to any major risky initiative in the group such as a family member's planning of a long journey or emigration. It is neither a jurisdiction, nor is it an arbitration; instead, the council of elders, like the oracle, seeks to restore the intersubjective desire and hope for enjoyable cohabitation.

*See also:* AFFECT, LACAN

**Extimacy:** For Lacan, psychic life does not respond to a bipartition of inside-outside. Extimacy nestles, as a shadowy side or unconscious alien dimension, at the very intimate core of oneself. The extimate may unseat my innermost as an intimate exteriority (Corin 2007). In its otherness, this intrusive force is both intimately excessive and threatening to the core of my identity whilst also decentring it and at times provoking

sheer uncertainty and insecurity. The extimate both composes and escapes the signifiers codified in my native language and culture. It makes me follow the impulses of the unfathomable desire and the upsurges of both anxiety or lust for life. It connects me most intimately to some shadowy, non-representable and undefinable forces, beings and things in the visible and invisible or this-worldly and other-worldly realm. Moreover, this extimacy confronts the individual with what may cause the creation of a hole in one's memory of some inexpressible aspect in the intergenerational memory traces of trauma.

*See also:* OTHER, REFLEXIVITY, UNSPEAKABLE

**Ettinger:** Bracha Ettinger's subtle relational, feminist, matrixial theory, intersected with artwork and clinical practices, is indebted to Freud; it is also very innovative and complementary to the object-relations theory (regarding the primal interbodily attachment to the — maternal — object) of Melanie Klein, Wilfrid Bion and Donald Winnicott. Moreover, it draws upon the psychoanalytic and phenomenological theories of Piera Aulagnier, Martin Buber, Pierre Fédida, Jacques Lacan, Emmanuel Levinas, Francesco Varela, regarding subtle forms of compassionate, life-bearing and life-enhancing relatedness. Bracha Ettinger endeavoured into an attentive reading and critique of some of Lacan's later teachings from the 1970s. Her writing and theory also draw on her extended examination of creative borderlinking in her artistic painting and clinical psychoanalytic practice.

The clinical, artistic and theoretical work of Bracha Ettinger is at its base anamnesis (that is, memory and oblivion), moved by, and working through, the unthinkable but pressing traumatic legacy; think of the *shoah*'s murderous, abominable and catastrophic debasing of the modern West's illusion regarding its humanness and sense of the good, the true and the beautiful. Ettinger's matrixial artwork, which is focus-less and non-optical or beyond (re)presentation, however "folds into the visible via color and the almost-touch" (Pollock 2006: 6). Her combination of flux-like and hieroglyph-like colour-line painting with its wearily focusing and transforming glance, seeks to reconnect with her parental generation's unthinkable fate of the holocaust (Ettinger 2000, Van Loo 2009). While reliving folds of transsubjective reverberation with object-particles that wit(h)ness to both her parental generation's life-world and their deadly fate, she processually seeks to (ethically and aesthetically) re-figure corporeality and meaning-bearing text. She indeed embarks on



rethinking the theory of subjectivisation and meaning-making in the aftermath of Auschwitz's horrendous dehumanisation of the body. Its catastrophic horror-making of the human body vilified the latter into a "corpo-'real'" as sheer *jouissance* (*sensu* Lacan). This is a paradoxical or discomfiting enjoyment and exquisite pain of something or someone, beyond language and at play vis-à-vis the Big Other, in the mirror of which the nazi imagined their violent dualist worldordering. Departing radically away from the nazi crematoria's unimaginably perverse collapse of any meaning, Ettinger's artwork, as Pollock (2006: 11) aptly states, "opens up a space for and a method to move toward a future that does not involve forgetting because it cannot imagine cutting, splitting, caesura". Without denial, her art presences the ethical space as a rebirth or matrixial encounter between mother and foetus, and thus an ecstasy of the future.

Ettinger's theorising (Ettinger 2006a, b, c, d, 2007) on the shared borderspace, transferential borderlinking, signifiante and meaning-making (in part reviewed by Pollock 2006, 2007: 38-48, and Vandenbroeck 2000: 237-275) proved, for me, particularly heuristic in thinking-through the sensitiveness or even fascination peculiar to my clinging to local people's sense of life's beauty and creativity, but also of its tragedies as alleviated in — interbodily, intersubjective and interworld — communal encounter, next to ritual healing and rites of passage.

*See also:* BORDERLINKING, LACAN, MATRIX

**'Forces'** (interworldly 'forces'): The unconscious layers of agency, in particular of forces, hint at a non-volitional dimension in the person and her life-world. Generally, for Bantuphone people, the collective imaginary of forces comprises the ancestors, the cult spirits and the ambivalent, untamed or frenzied spirits: these are capable of bewitching and overturning one's sense of a person or even one's life. People's reference to bewitching or sorcerous forces cries out, to the anthropologist especially, for an engaging context-sensitive and culture-appropriate effort at comprehension in the terms of people and from their perspectives. The Yaka notions of forces (*kikesa*) and daring (*ngaandzi*) are evocative of the sheer affect and passion which stir attraction or repulsion, horror or cruelty in and between closely interacting bodies in the visible and invisible worlds. The social imaginary associates these forces with a waning and shadowy consciousness in the grip of untameable sources and experiences of desire, worry and

sadness. These forces break through, in particular, during sleep or dream, or in anger and anxiety, like also in utter enthusiasm or euphoria, sexual arousal and trance.

*See also:* AFFECT, EXTIMACY, SPIRITS

**Imaginary:** In classical lacanian usage (1949, 1975), the personal imaginary is the largely fantasised and barely conscious mode by which the person relates to her body and interacts with her parents and any others who may be important to her. Prior to the mirror phase, the imaginary misrecognises its nature, believing in its transparency, and is thus also the place of necessary illusion. “The mother as other”, from representing utter gratification to the nursing infant, gradually becomes that “other thing, (m/other)”, that is, the maternal womb and breast to experience distance from, to keep hidden. Freud indicated the way in which the infant, at the point at which its subjectivity emerges, asks the other, *Che vuoi?* (“What do you want?”), in an attempt to find out what oneself wants. This awakening, in the mirror reflecting consciousness, requires a symbolic translation. But the imaginary enigmatic other also offers itself as a transferential space, silently carving out a separation between me/the other. Simultaneously, though, this space is being hollowed out by an opaque and elusive lack, a shadowy side or a death drive that haunts the dependent individual at that watershed point at which the ego (*le moi*) is both made and broken (Corin 2007: 300).

In this way the subject-in-the-making is able to relate her mix of desire and longings, needs and fantasies to the discourse of the ‘Big Other’. Meanwhile, the subject may come to envision her existential conditions, along with the thoughts and feelings of others. Viewed from another angle, the imaginary may express the infant’s images in the mirror. It is a transferential space where the unspoken fantasies and images of identification, consciousness and ego formation play themselves out. The imaginary feeds beliefs, illusions and assumptions next to the traumas that remain largely uninterpretable. According to Lacan, the register of the imaginary is the sphere of appearances and illusions of who and what the person imagines to be.

In Lacan’s later works (1962-63: 517, 1975-76: 19), the personal imaginary entails a semiotic load which, among others things, hints at that dimension of the unconscious or rather the unspeakable and impossible that shows up in dreamwork in the form of quasi-images, carrying affects and perceptions beneath worded meaning. In this regard,

the later Lacan grants a certain primacy to bodily awareness over the symbolic. The personal imaginary bears witness to the singularity of the person in the mix of a prelingual and presignifying awareness, which gropes for signification or signifying beyond the grip of the symbolic structuring. The imaginary, for the later Lacan, is the subject's mode of largely unconscious or untellable fantasies regarding her body. It is in part transmitted through histories of trauma and loss. For the later Lacan, the imaginary may mistake the 'real' for the symbolic and the other way around, such as in sorts of obsessional-neurotic and paranoid-psychotic symptoms. The imaginary mulls over sublingual passions and the fascinating enigmas of uncanniness in the family novel, significant others and the local universe of the living. The person, thereby, comes to be interconnected to her unconscious or untellable fantasies and desire with shadowy, untamed or passionate forces as well.

At the group level, these forces and enigmas are implicitly evoked in the collective imaginary; and its motions and forces are particularly stirred up by affliction, initiatory seclusion and mourning. Moreover, the imaginary is haunted by beliefs of invisible and untamed forces, unthought sources of worry and sadness, or also dreams, anger or anxiety, along with curses and witchcraft. In other words, these fantasies and enigmas ply the collective imaginary with unanswerable questions or dark holes and blanks, and the unthought-in-thought.

As a matter of fact, my participatory research has put me into contact and provided me with lived experiences which resist adequate categorisation, such as with trance-possession and witchcraft, charisma and artistic creativity such as in humour and parody, dream and fascination, ambivalence, confusion and disorientation, and awareness of the ominous and uncanny. Such lived and highly embodied experiences appeared to be composed with an order that the later Lacan has labelled as the 'real' (Lacan 1975).

Indeed, the collective and largely non conscious imaginary appears akin to the notion of the social imaginary which refers, according to Cornelius Castoriadis (1975: 190 sq.), to significations shared by a group for whom these are loaded with more pregnant social significance than one's ambient empirical reality.

*See also:* LACAN

**Jouissance:** The notion of *jouissance* coined by the later Lacan, and improperly rendered by the English term of enjoyment, clearly differs from the interrelated Freudian concepts of *Wunsch*, *Wunscherfüllung*,

*Genuss*, *Befriedigung*, which designate longing, wish-fulfilment, pleasure and satisfaction respectively. These notions are also close to Freud's sense of the libido and vital erotic. Freud and Lacan define the human being, in particular the male, as being unconsciously moved by an unceasing flux of vigour and a never fulfilled longing or *jouissance*, aspiring to an unattainable and ambivalent fullness.

According to the later Lacan (1956-57, 1975), the male is tempted to heighten his *jouissance*, even to a discomforting peak, as others might aim at self-afflicted pain or lasting damage, alcohol abuse and addiction, or manifold sexual acts. This so-called *jouissance* seeks to avoid castration or lack in the face of the maternal 'object' (Lacan 1956-57) and the social order of law. Phallic *jouissance* is both beneath and beyond what words, representations or images can possibly convey; it is subject to flaw and castration which thereby becomes marked by lack. The person in the utter *jouissance* is dislodged or emptied out to the point of dissipation in the 'object'. Such horror-*jouissance* is sucked from the 'real' and the 'thing' whence the '*objet a[utre]*' turns *jouissance* into a hole or void, instead of the longed for fullness. It is a void which nonetheless does not cease to fascinate even up to the point of one's self-destruction.

Not much can be said about the specific *jouissance* attributed to the woman and female orgasm, because it defies localisation and thus representation. Femininity is related to the unlimited; it is not definable by the phallic signifier. In the words of Malvine Zalcberg (2010: 215), "The body of the woman requires veils and shadows."

*See also:* ETHIC OF DESIRE, IMAGINARY, LACAN, SINTHOME

**Lacan:** Lacanian scholars generally distinguish three periods in Jacques Lacan's psychiatric and psychoanalytic teachings and writings (1901-1981). Most have been published posthumously, thanks to his son-in-law, Jacques-Alain Miller.

According to a preliminary overview, the evolving approach and themes, which Lacan successively elaborated at the various periods of his lecturing, echo both his growing insights into the course of a psychoanalytic cure. The analyst's attentiveness and functions which she impersonates, namely of the subject supposed to know and as a being of desire (namely, to unveil the power of the signifier and the blinding force of the ambivalent desire), act as the transference's driving force. This attentiveness and double function incite the analysand to put into

startling words what she can hardly say and to unravel the entangled knots of signifiers that dispossess or alienate her most intimately by some alterity or extimacy. In so doing, the analyst is thought to know the concealed or unconscious meaning of the analysand's confused and tentative words and to occupy the position of the other inducing the question: "what do you want from me?" Not straightforwardly addressing the symptom, the analyst appears as the strange figure who helps the analysand to decrypt or to lay bare her unknowable. The analysand is led to act as a soundscape in which her equivocal words astound and surprise her. That is to say that the task of the analyst is one of inciting the analysand to lay bare what she desires and to dismantle her defence against the 'real' by acquitting it of any meaning. It is in this transferential space that the subject may elaborate the separation (me/the other) and let her singular fantasy or desire emerge.

Moreover, looking at the analytical process from a broader perspective, both the analyst's attentiveness and the analysand's desire resonate with the ongoing sociocultural and politico-economic change in their milieus, along with the transformation of the collective imaginary. Furthermore, a number of generations may naturally give in to the Big Other, the established ethical law, the shared symbolic systems and articulation of meaning. A new generation, at least in some critical artistic and other creative sociocultural milieus, may be driven to demythologise the inherited signifying and normalising contrivances. Their sensitivity may give primacy to singular creativity and promulgate the speaking body and desiring subject, enticed to scrutinise the surprising or unprecedented signifier, the unthought-in-thought and the undefinable void, attired by the 'real'.

Let me now consider the three periods of Lacan's lecturing. In his first period, the so-called "early Lacan" while completing his medical and psychiatric training, clinical experience amidst delirious patients composed his doctorat d'état of 1932, entitled *De la psychose paranoïaque dans ses rapports avec la personnalité*. In the interbellum, next to drawing on his didactic psychoanalysis, the early Lacan enriched his insights regarding the imaginary register (that in particular ignores the decentring of the person) from his close contact with surrealism and dadaism as an alternative route to psychoanalysis and clinical practice. He closely followed André Breton's foundation of the surrealist literary and artistic movement in Paris. Breton, familiar with Freud's Interpretation of dreams, and a friend of Lacan, developed a technique of spontaneous writing which was seen as being closer to the determining course and propensity of things in one's universe of the living than the apparent

banality of everyday reality. Lacan became a friend of André Breton and Salvador Dali, and for a short time the private physician to Picasso. He attended Alexandre Kojève's seminars on Hegel's *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (1807) and the first public readings of James Joyce's modernist *Ulysses* (1918-1920; 1922<sup>2</sup>). He would later concentrate on the work of Heidegger, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, and so many others.

A transition to the "middle or classical Lacan" starts with his teachings and seminars in the 1940-1950s, collected in the *Ecrits* (1966). These bear witness to his incipient reorientation and originality. He breaks with the popularised idea that the unconscious is merely governed by, and consists of, instinctual or repressed desire. This reorientation was influenced by Lacan's keen interest in the upcoming linguistic structuralism of Ferdinand de Saussure and successors such as Roman Jakobson and Claude Levi-Strauss. These structuralists consider language as a system that does not stop — at the levels of phonemes, morphemes and signification — to articulate difference between signifier and signified. This occurs with respect to the idea of being under the banner of "the unconscious being structured like a language" and which is governed by the order of the signifier. Taken in by this insight, Lacan returns to Freud's revolutionary approach to psychical subjectivity. In 1953, his founding manifesto, referred to as the Discourse of Rome (entitled "Fonction et champ de la parole et du langage en psychoanalyse" (*Ecrits* 1966: 237-322) led him to a core thesis that "man speaks [...] but it is because the symbol has made him man" (*Ecrits* 1966: 65-66). This led him away from the hegemonising and medicalised analytic training and from the Anglo-American ego psychology. In 1953, he started his annual seminars, which he carried on, uninterrupted for twenty-seven years, while putting psychoanalysis, and his emphasis on the subject's formation from a symbolic or language base, into dialogue with almost every discipline at the University.

In line with Saussurean structural linguistics, the classical Lacan in his early teaching — on the role of the symbolic function considers separation, difference and deferral, that is, the differential element or signifier not yet linked to a signified, as the very condition of meaning production, along with the internalisation of the gendered order of language and the individuation or subject formation. The latter occurs with the construction in language of one's self-image, but by losing oneself in it, like an object. This verbal meaning production maintains the signifier's capacity to meaningfully bring about the self-evident contact of (patriarchal) truth with itself.

In the late 1960s, the “later Lacan” scrutinises the registers of the ‘real’, the imaginary, otherness, drives, *jouissance* and ‘*objet petit a*’ as dimensions of psychical subjectivity. These registers increasingly bear witness to phenomena escaping, thwarting and resisting the primacy given by many analysts to the signifying powers of the structural, sociolinguistic symbolic order. This acknowledgement of the work of the structure-less ‘real’ leads Lacan away from the structural analysis of language or field of speech and from the focus on the signifier, as a condition for meaning production, such as in the cure. Topological figures or mathemes, rather than linguistic processes, help Lacan to recast the imagery of psychoanalysis as a “depth” psychology, and the unconscious as an ensemble of repressions, twists and turns. This topological assessment begins in his *Séminaire livre X: l’angoisse* (1962–63), and evolves into his further formalisation programme encompassed by the notion of sinthome as discussed in his *Séminaire Livre XX: ... encore* (1975). He sees RSI (the ‘real’, the symbolic and the imaginary) evolving in a reciprocal interrelation and mutual equivalence. Expressed topologically in formal logic, RSI are intertwined in one another as an interdependence of circular movements, each at its own pace, and together forming a Borromean knot that functions as a sinthome. None of these three registers can fully and adequately be pinned down to the coordinates of the so-called accessible, familiar reality.

From the 1970s onwards, the later Lacan’s seminars and conferences develop a posthumanist view on the human subject. The later Lacan subordinates his earlier phallogocentric concern with the oedipal dynamic and paternal metaphor (namely, the father figure as the foundation of the symbolic order or ultimate signifier without signified) to his scrutiny of the ‘real’ and *jouissance* or enjoyment (Devisch 2009). The unthinkable ‘real’ of the, at one time, ardent and anxious *jouissance* withdraws from the grip of the signifier’s reduction to the habitual process of meaning production. The enclosed ring of the imaginary consists of imagoes, the specular image of the body and the structure of desire which is impossible to domesticate. In his *Séminaire X*, Lacan unpacks the myth of subject formation and the focus on the paternal metaphor in favour of the topology regarding the equivalence of RSI while reinterpreting the signifying chain of the Name(s)-of-the-Father. Lacan pinpoints a dialectical, libidinal and even melancholic gnawing rest that is unconscious and untranslatable. The ‘object little a’ is this unspeakable and fuzzy rest-object out of reach to the signifier, symbolisation and wording, and so remains out of the realm of the Big Other. “Le ‘a’ est ce qui reste d’irréductible dans l’opération totale d’avènement du sujet au lieu

de l'Autre, et c'est de là qu'il va prendre sa fonction" (Lacan 1962-1963: 189). The 'object little a' is not an oedipal object, but functions as object-cause of desire though never fully satisfied. It is ever not that what we seek, *ce n'est pas ça*; it is extimate in me, unreachable, setting my desire in motion at the cross point intersection in me of the lust for life and death drive, attractive and toxic jouissance, turbulency and painfully paralysing apathy.

*See also:* COGNITIVE COMPETENCES, ETHIC OF DESIRE, ETTINGER, EXTIMACY, FORCES, IMAGINARY, JOUISSANCE, LALANGUE, OTHER, 'REAL', SINTHOME, 'THING', UNSPEAKABLE

**Lalangue:** In Lacanian terminology the term *lalangue* refers to some upsurge of bodily sensations and emotions — anxiety, disgust or shame, for example —, or indiscernible signifiers caught in a play of toxic jouissance expressed in expletives or discharges devoid of any possible worded meaning; these signifiers then function as a will to enjoy (*vouloir-jouir*) rather than as a will to express (*vouloir-dire*). This latter so-called instinctual component is lawless, escapes language and representation next to any act of symbolisation and anything significant. It manifests itself as as pure imperative, in the raw and impulsive gnawing of bodily jouissance that no longer believes in the Name-of-the-Father, or in factual and doxic knowledge or myth. This toxic jouissance of the 'real', beyond any wording and the domain of transference, awakens the vacuum (*vacuole*) raised to the dignity of 'the thing'.

*See also:* 'REAL', SINTHOME

**Local universe of the living** (life-world): The life-world is the common-language-bearing group's significant local environment which orients daily life and is also labelled here as the cosmocentric body (*n-totu*). It is an ever-shifting, situational horizon of interbodily, intersubjective and interworld experience sensed out along the inhabitants' shared and habitually embodied dispositions and modes of perception and comprehension. This experience is partly decoded along the fault lines of the group's local language and explicit culture. More concretely, the individual's rhythm, activities, reproduction, sensation and perception, next to her thoughts, expression and religious experience, develop in resonance with the local kin group and local universe of the living.



In Yakaphone society, the experience of one's life-world is not spelled out along some ontological nature-culture divide, but instead appears as a continuum; there is a constant reaching out of or an exchange of perspectives between aspects of nature and culture, in line with the relational positional contexts of the persons concerned. Senses, emotions and bodily-felt experience, next to the variety of life-forms are considered to be basically relational and in concordance; that is, as attuning to one another. The resonance and concordance evoke the idea of an energetic tensegrity; that is, a three-dimensional structure whose cohesion results from forces of compression and tension in some equilibrium. Space and time, which articulate a major dimension of the experience of the world, are not neutral and uniform categories but culture-specific and situational ones. They should be assessed in relation to the changing interactions, moods and humoral constituents and other forces determining the experience.

*See also:* FORCES

**Matrix:** According to Bracha Ettinger, this notion of matrix refers to the subconscious mother-infant contact zone and resonance between the pregnant woman and the foetus in the later stage of pregnancy. More precisely, the contact develops between the mother and the uterine mucous membrane that contains the foetus. The membrane allows nourishment from the maternal blood along with waste elimination.

The matrix opens out into a new way of thinking the incipient pre-subjective transference through contact and holding. In the later stages of pregnancy, and during early breastfeeding, the uterine environment and, later, the mother-suckling contact zone libidinously invests the sensitive and responsive foetus or baby. For her part, the mother invests the foetus libidinously as a sensitive and responsive copresence in the contact space. Through the matrixial contact, the foetus or the newborn becomes aware, prior to phantasm, of a distinction between itself and the maternal body-psyche. This matrixial view runs contrary to Freud's concept of the infant-mother relation as one of fusion, non-differentiation and thus of non-relation. Ettinger further theorises the matrixial as incipiently developing a transferential borderspace with the alterity outside and inside oneself.

Examining, via her innovative feminine clinical psychoanalytic work, the non-unifiable primary pre-natal impressions of infantile and maternal experience as co-constituting partial subjects, Ettinger hypothesises the

matrixial borderspace as a fundamental event of “severalising” in the humanising becoming. In her view, the matrix is a subsymbolic, (pre)psycho-corporeal and archaic “stratum of subjectivization that, nonetheless, has the effect of altering or expanding the Symbolic itself” (Pollock 2006: 6). It is grounded in the prenatal borderlinking relation between the becoming-mother and the becoming-child (not yet born). As an original signifier (beyond the hold of dominant representations), and beneath or apart from the classical Lacan’s structuralist and logocentric focus on the ‘phallic’ (namely, on what is being articulated in language and the logic of substitution of the one and its other), the matrixial borderspace concerns the primal agency (between thought, fantasy and its corpo-‘real’) in the *infans*, even not yet born, who records the originary and most intimate imprints from the m/other. Ettinger’s work of art (2000) registers this originary and co-originating matrixial space (without rejection or fusion) of the emergent ‘I’ and ‘non-I’. Her art places gestation, birthing, apparition on the threshold or shared borderspace of intersubjectivity as a meaningful encounter. The intersubjectivity is being woven into the texture of vibrating threads and serves as the foundation of social and self-understanding.

Ettinger’s theorising regarding the matrix has proven to be very useful in my effort to properly understand Yakaphones’ deep sense of attunement to, and empathic osmosis with, the vital but often unnoticed or non-perceptible invisible processes of borderlinking with the other person, object or means.

*See also:* BORDERLINKING, ETTINGER

**Memory traces:** A person’s extimacy is easily haunted by unsettling or traumatic experiences and intergenerational memory images and traces that are hard to disclose — but easily rekindled. Such experiences or memories likely come up in dreams; spirit possession may bring out a curse’s violent words. Once the divinatory oracle has identified the traumatic memory traces or images, the diviner’s associated dreams can guide her to gropingly explore and enunciate, by way of mere evocative signifiers, the shadowy dimension in the client, the consultants and others concerned. The shadowy dimension offers itself, in the person’s dreams or heightened experience, as something extimate to oneself, inasmuch as it may help the person to grasp some toxic desire beyond reason and to vaguely express it. It concerns one’s desire after it has been shared with a complicit other, or evocative of a non-conscious

trauma that may still trouble the person and some family members. At the same time, that shadow may either disclose or conceal the holes in the person's and family's tacit awareness of their respective intersubjective, intergenerational memory traces and interworld weave.

*See also:* EXTIMACY

**Other** (the Big Other, adverse other and cultural other): The Big Other — *sensu* Lacan — is not primarily a person but rather a position, object or resource of transferential space in sorts of dialogical intersubjectivity related to some experience beyond wording and any signifiers. This position or function stirs some enduring dissatisfaction and unconceivable but engulfing hole in one's desire. As a matter of fact, subjects may feel themselves split between an indiscernible mix of non-discursive or un-definable but at times excessive drives, affects, dissatisfaction and other incongruities. The symbolic order fails to compose itself from among these incongruities. But the imaginary that allows for much more ambivalence, in-betweenness, discordance, divergence and polyvalent agency may partially connect with a form of Big Other, such as through art, poetry, ritual, sorcery, humour.

In their collective imaginary, Yakaphone people hinge on the axiom that the adverse, chaotic, unmanageable or awkward aspects of existence may unexpectedly offer positive and creative possibilities to the person's experience and being-in-the-world. In particular, the hole in the social imaginary, in which moral debts or violence from the past lie dormant, can at times insidiously haunt the collective fantasies and individual dreams. Healing, in as much as it aims both at destruction of the evil and regeneration of the afflicted, brings tracks of family contentions and confusion, or incursions of bewitchment and the ominous to the surface; but it also opens up and stirs creative and life-generative energy.

As anthropologist, our welcoming disposition vis-à-vis the culturally different other increases along with some lucid insight into the unthought extimacy or alienating otherness within ourselves. This is an exceedingly important point, when in an intercultural context one is led to acknowledge that, for example, Yakaphone and my Flamandophone people of origin are worlds apart of cultural alterity. However, I have not stopped interrogating myself and my culture of origin while also acting as a borderlinker who resonates with sensitivity to my hosts' mode of living and self-representation, and to my own.

*See also:* EXTIMACY, LACAN

**Perspectivism:** Yakaphone people's genuine and at times incisive or perplexing thoughtfulness incited me to eagerly adopt my hosts' perspectives on, and presuppositions about, a great variety of surrounding objects, beings, species, agencies and fellow persons in their local universe of the living. That capacity of the researcher to decentralise and neutralise the person, and share or adopt the perspective of the other (person, agency, species), helped me to comprehend the interlocutors from their own perspective. It made me aware of how much any perception — by my hosts and myself — can imaginatively be diffracted into a rhizomatic plurality of presuppositions, cognitive competences and viewpoints. Such predisposition at receptive comprehension can even take a “view from everywhere”, as Merleau-Ponty (1945) defines it.

Furthermore, individual development, kin relations and societal organisation, next to any transforming intervention in the local universe of the living, are inseparable from people's perspectivism on daily life, and the lived sociocultural and ecological reality. The latter moreover entails the affects, capacities and dispositions of the local group members, animal species, along with other beings, practical activities and useful things involved.

By way of example, Yakaphone people see the human person very much as both an actor who desires and a steady scene of exchange, namely of resonant interbodily, intersubjective and of interworld transactions at play. The point here is that the person is corpo-, socio- and cosmo-centrally formed in the differing contextual practices of exchange, interconnection and interanimation. At the level of the person's body, interconnection is meant primarily to develop at the level of the sensual skin and orifices with their sensory capacities, next to the body's cavities and vital organs (the hollow bones, the heart and liver in the “body's furnace” in particular). According to the collective imaginary and symbolic thought, the genitor's semen shapes the bones of the skull and spinal cord of the foetus, where the genitor's semen is stocked prior to its transfusion to shape the bony parts of the foetus. The womb and stomach in the belly or “body's cooking place” is a borderspace between inner and outer. The articulations of the limbs constitute heavily laden junctures or borderspaces which occur alongside the development of the sensory capacities and bodily exchanges with others in the visible and invisible worlds. Thus, sensory capacities, orifices, cavities and articulations of the body are crucial junctures for most significant borderlinking interventions in the person's physical body, the body-

self, the in-group and life-world. I have in mind interventions to both unblock, revitalise and reconnect, among others, by way of massage, vegetal ointments, tonifiers, infusions or enemas.

Communal life in the homestead inserts itself smoothly as an integrative force in the larger environment and among its life-forms. It is along this track that the human body receives the greatest attention in, what I would call, the perspectivism of Yakaphone people. To contend, in line with Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (2004: 475-476) that each body with its innate nature appears as a singular assemblage of affects, capacities, agency, and ways of being and interconnection, makes up the very base of perspectivism. At the same time, the innate nature (*yibutukulu*) of the body predisposes itself to interspecies changeability. Indeed, the individual is susceptible to developing a bewitching fear of seeing the animal in the human, or oneself in the animal that one faces by chance in dreams or at the family meal. In Kwaango land, this multinaturalism — an expression borrowed from Viveiros de Castro, 2004 — is the opposite of the modern divides, such as nature/culture, animal/spiritual, reason/imagination or visible/invisible. Congruently, in Yakaphone people's perspective, the "village space" (*bata*) literally means a space "cut out" (*-bata*) of the more encompassing "forest realm" (*n-situ*). In other words, in people's imaginary, society is an integral part of the larger environment or, translated into modern terms, culture is a part of nature.

By way of example, in Yakaphone people's view, the male or female elder should strike an even balance between an "intuitive feel-thinking or *connaissance*" (*-zaaya*) and a more "reflective and, thus, responsive thinking" (*-baandza, -yiindulula*) that draws on "insight and comprehension from the heart" (*-mona mu mbuundu*) (see also thesaurus, *sub* cognitive competences). People associate the maternal with primordial human "nature", a notion not to be taken in the modernist sense of instinct or carnality. Human nature concerns the cyclical life-spring next to processes of transformation, transfer or exchange. This "exchange model of action supposes that the subject's 'other' is another subject", namely a mode of subjectification and not an object (Viveiros de Castro 2004: 477).

*See also:* COGNITIVE COMPETENCES, THREE BODIES

**'Real'** The unthinkable 'real' is intrinsically elusive, escaping any characterisation through our fantasies, knowledge, symbolic-imaginary perspective or linguistic structures. People may face the unthinkable

'real' or void, for example when horrified by their children's incurable infections and excessive fever, or by an ominous loss or death in the family. The most shocking exposure of co-residents to a chaos-causing transgression (*mbeembi*) cannot be fully rendered in words either; think of adultery or incest in the conjugal bed, or insolent exposure in the social space of one's buttocks or genitals, hence excreting or putting one's excrement or menses in the doorway. It amounts to an indefinite experience of irreducible otherness, at times amalgamating the ineffable sublime and the abyss of disquieting strangeness (*Unheimlichkeit*). The strangeness bears on the void that fascinates, notably *das Ding* or 'the thing', and object 'a', which hinder the subject from being at one with herself or with her words (Lacan 1962-1963: 449-495). The strangeness is uncontrollable or frustratingly indiscernible. This amounts to a subversive otherness and split in the person that may dislocate meaning and abandon the body-self to an unspeakable or unreasonable and toxic jouissance. Such split may occur in the experience of anxiety, anger, bewitchment, disillusionment or despair. It may also qualify the experience of the mother (m/other), as the archaic 'real' other, when becoming the unattainable sovereign good and vanishing point of all desire: '*das Ding, la chose*'. The estranging experience of nearly fading away may discharge itself through a sarcastic and roaring laugh, or some bitter irony, like also through incisive poetry and intense musicality.

The impulsive or so-called instinctual dimension of the object 'a' or aspiring hole in the individual's desire or that of her intimate group sets the forces of toxic jouissance in motion. It is refractory to the symbolic and impossible to represent via signifier-like representations. The object 'a' eludes understanding and wording, as well as the paternal law and symbolisation; it subverts reality or language from within. That void in me or extimate is something mysteriously intangible and unreachable that pushes my desire beyond the tipping point between life and fading away (*dés-istence*), attraction and toxic jouissance. The extimate may mirror melancholy and despair or unbearable anxiety and death wish, without any possibility of internalisation.

*See also:* COGNITIVE COMPETENCES, EXTIMATE, IMAGINARY, LALANGUE, SYMBOLIC

**Signifiante:** Concerns the emergence and inchoative production of some subsymbolic sense, which still lies beyond signification or the act of signifying through tentative wording or representation. It concerns the

largely subconscious and pre-signifying forms of giving attention to strings of sounds and melodies, presentiments and conjectures, feelings and agencies. The notion extends into the lived experience of the subject-in-process who is mulling over the surprising and even disruptive potential of the subsymbolic semiotic which resists the categorical terms of any doxa. This attention hints at culture-specific interpretational webs of quasi-signifiers that feed human consciousness. The signifiers or categorisations may trigger probing forms of transference and resonance among those touched, given that they are also evocative of values which are tacitly embedded in people's interweave with their socioculture, history and local universe of the living. These intersubjective and culture-specific tracks and strings of emerging signifiante and carefulness for engaging with responsibility in compelling concerns may be particularly evoked by song, dance and trance. These tracks and strings may also be inspired by cults and their sculptures, mythical language and the estranging or releasing conduct of healer-priests. Signifiante, thereby, seeks to articulate aspects of the unfathomable resonance and borderlinking in-between people and their life-world, the thisworldly and otherworldly as well as between their past, present and future.

*See also:* ETTINGER, LACAN

**Sinthome:** The 'real' always leaves a remainder which cannot be verbalised, namely the object 'a'. Similarly, the later Lacan's focus is on language and the signifier's indeterminate attachment to, and substitution by *jouissance*. In other words, his focus is on the *sinthome* (Lacan 1975-76): this neologism evokes a Borromean knot intertwining the 'real', the symbolic and the imaginary in one another as an interdependence of circular movements, each at its own pace. The *sinthome* depicts the open-ended enactment of subsymbolic and largely imaginary signifiante. The latter is not a call to the Big Other or to the m/other, as it is easily guided or even perversely oriented by pure *jouissance* addressed to no one. The *sinthome* supports a structural or operational relationship with a person's kin and life-world, triggered by a '*vacuole*' or empty core or hole exterior to language. Religious and political leaders, institutions, artists and literature (think of James Joyce) develop *sinthomes* in the form of an extimacy they may come to embody of elusive and distorted motifs, puzzles and enigmas. The *sinthome* may effectively foster the attention of the human being whilst triggering unconscious emerging *jouissance* of an ambivalent or versatile orientation and toxic nature.

*See also:* LACAN, 'THING', 'REAL'

**Spirits:** Note that the christian and renaissance imaginary concept of spirits is prejudicially mistaken in the West's upcoming enlightenment views and civilising pretence. The concept was equated to the Occident's subdued imaginary regarding the irrational popular beliefs in ghosts, revenants, shades, phantoms and other aspects of non-christian belief-systems. That imaginary concept is inappropriate for dealing with Bantu-African notions relating to interworld interdependence.

Bantu-African notions refer to the ever-present interaction between the visible and invisible realms, and the living and deceased family members. Indeed, the otherworldly or invisible realm provides the living with major sources of being-with and being-for others, namely of becoming through relating. Firstly, to Bantuphone people, spirits refer to forebears — in particular, masculine ones belonging to the patriline — who after two to three generations become named ancestors (singular *m-fu*, *khulu*, *khita*). Their continuing memory acts in a most vivid manner and personalised mode, generally spanning three to five generations. This memory defines the structural positions of forebears and the descendants in the lineage and local group. Ancestral spirits are most explicitly called upon by entitled family elders for the reproduction of the lineage and the maintenance of vigour, balance, sagacity and concord in the family and local community. This stirring up of ancestral care proceeds hand-in-hand with the elders' responsibility in the kin group to fence off witchcraft and parry the invisible fates of suffering, conflict and horror. Secondly, cult spirits (*phoongu*) are formally celebrated in affliction and healing cults (also labelled as *phoongu*), such as divination, 'gyn-eco-logical' healing. Cult spirits are harnessed by the initiators and initiates in the cults, as these are intended to fence off and heal, but also to sneakily afflict a family member. Thirdly, people fear the bewitchment by frenzy spirits or untamed 'forces'.

*See also:* AFFLICTION AND HEALING CULTS, FORCES

**Symbolic:** The symbolic order is the primary place for subject formation. For the classical Lacan, the symbolic is based essentially on the order of discourse that comprises the exchange of words, goods or persons, and the register of institutions, laws, norms, rituals, rules, traditions, all intertwined with language and the medium of speech and of speaking subjects. The symbolic dimension of language is carried by signifiers. According to the structural perspective, which Levi-Strauss develops in line with the linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, signifiers are expressed in



contrasting pairs by virtue of their articulation on the basis of binary difference. Such a perspective inspires the approach of the ego (*le moi*) as constituted in a dialogue, if not dual manner in the order of an exchange or a symbolic discourse thanks to the interacting other. It is in this line of thought that Lacan in his classical period considers the unconscious as the discourse of the Big Other. 'The latter is not primarily a person but a position, namely the one representing the established 'norm-ality' for the subject. This is conveyed by one's vernacular language and the local culture, like also by the conventions at work in social interaction amongst co-residents, professional and family networks. The more this normality and its conventions instruct language representations of space-time and habitual relations, the more they come to rely upon the shared symbolic order. In his *Séminaire XVII* (1959-60), Lacan forges his theory of the four discourses (those of the master, university, hysteric and analyst), variously configuring the various effects of discourse-based relations between speaking subjects.

*See also:* OTHER, IMAGINARY, 'REAL'

**'Thing':** According to Lacan, 'the thing' (*la chose* or *das Ding*) is what emerges as a void or hole in the structure of the symbolic or Name-of-the-Father. In this line of thinking, the ambivalent sacred may, in its outward effect, progressively suck the shakeable subject into the grey area of 'the thing'. The latter ends up presenting itself as some unknown, wicked or unthinkable horror, that is, as a deceptive or even engulfing vacuity. It is here that desire, toxic jouissance and the death drive nest, as they may strike the anxious and vulnerable individual with malefic witchcraft. In this condition, she may get stuck in considering herself as waste and prey, and end up giving way to an engulfing or panic-stricken anxiety. Her affects may become baffled by evil, wickedness or cruelty appearing as negative fate or doom.

*See also:* JOUISSANCE, LACAN, 'REAL', SINTHOME

**Three bodies** (three fields perspective): The multi-focused perspective of the three-fields or three bodies unravels major transvaluations of, or the resonance between, the symbolic and imaginary space-time patterning along its transposition and transvaluation from the bodily and social onto the cosmic and vice versa. The masculine and the feminine body provide each a different repertoire of images and symbolic thought for ordering and interconnectivity. In other words, this constellation of images and

symbolic patterns has the potential to both signify and shape the mutual belonging of body, meaning and being in an interweave between (i) the affects, emotions, senses and body-self (the physical body investing the idiosyncratic identity), (ii) society (the sociopolitical body: *tsi*, literally, people and their territory), and (iii) the life-world or local universe of the living (*n-tolu*), particularly its space-time dimensions. Bodily feel-thinking and the body's connective processes wield affects, senses and emotions, as well as limits and orifices of the body, together with its growth, sexuation and reproduction. They offer natural symbols, crafting, figuring and moulding, largely beyond words, the relationships between nature, individuality, society and culture. In a homestead or a family, these relationships orient the social and political control of people's motivations, autonomy, hierarchy, normality, rivalry or love. They also mould and direct the local culture-specific modalities and valuation of virtue, moral sensitivity, distinction, good fellowship, like also of hygiene and etiquette, disability, deviance or otherness, and the like.

Let me develop the unthought structuring function of the body (*chair*, *Leib*, body-self) in the three-fields perspective further. Bodily cavities with their vital organs and articulations offer borderlinking functions. Think of the hollow bones, together with the heart, liver and gallbladder, along with the womb which constitute the "body's furnace or cooking place". Speaking more generally, orifices, cavities and articulations of the body are crucial junctures for most significant curative borderlinking interventions — via massage, ointments, tonifiers, infusions, enemas — in the person's physical body, the in-group and life-world. These interventions take place, preferably, at the doors and borders of the home and homestead, and also at the crosspoints, transitional zones or limits in the neighbourhood and at critical moments in the life-world.

See also: PERSPECTIVISM

**Unspeakable:** Freud felt it necessary to question the forces that, unknown to us, shape our lives. He was referring to their effect by way of physical symptoms, slips of the tongue, blunders, self-deceptive choices of partner or job, irascible decisions, unspeakable traumas, haunting dreams and thoughts. He contended that the unknown or *das Unbekannte*, including the unreasonable bodily-sensuous repression of drives may erupt from the unconscious, that is, a structure-less and repressed ground. This manifestation escapes exhaustive understanding. In terms of Freud's imagery, each dreamwork is like a navel linking up with its

unnameable, inscrutable, unspeakable mycelium. This mushroom-like fungus develops a rampant mass of fine branching and threadlike hyphae that may pierce across tree roots, germinating in ever wider and somewhat deeper soil layers. Such a mass is susceptible to tilling trees or roads. Levi-Strauss, struck in his own way by some apparently unreasonable social practices, coined the absence or withdrawal from any structure in a context of social meaning production with the term “empty or floating signifier”. He hereby referred to Amerindian and Papua-New Guinean ritualised practices of potlatch, or to the spirit of *hau* and *mana* animating the steady reciprocal circulation and gift-giving of precious rare goods.

Critically revisiting Freud’s writings, the later Lacan concentrated on uncovering the logical structure of the analysand’s free associative speaking for herself. Over twenty years of clinical work led him to acknowledge that language can also say something other than what it says directly. Moreover, he noticed the important unspeakable and inconceivable bodily-sensuous remainder or rest in the flow of thought expressed on the couch. This unspeakable rest or remnant appears operative in its effects, such as the analysand’s intersubjective transference when a subjective identification takes place expressing her resistance through the repressed. It may also appear in her unaware repetitions which are, however, slightly different in their various guises.

To summarise our question about the unspeakable, it can be narrowed down to (i) a bodily-sensuous dimension, (ii) the transference relation in the clinical analytical or other close intersubjective settings, and also to (iii) the anthropological encounter during which we focus on the social unspeakable pertaining to the register of the ‘real’, such as regarding an intergenerational family secret or the prospect of one’s doom. Before embarking on these three dimensions, let me concentrate on the later Lacan’s distinction drawn between the unspeakable in the ‘repressed’ unconscious and the ‘real’ unconscious. Lacan, hereby, re-asserts Freud’s distinction between the repressed unconscious and the unconscious which is not repressed but has always been below consciousness and the speakable.

On the one hand, the *unconscious as repressed* arises in its determination by language that filters the accretion of repressed affects and hardly nameable and hence unspeakable or concealed allusive representations. The affects involved are (narcissistically, ethically, spiritually) too painful, shameful, embarrassing, or are sources of too great disillusionment or anxiety to recollect, represent and speak out.

On the other hand, there is the *unconscious as a veil or shadow in the transference* at play between family members or close persons, or in the healing and analytic relation. It may manifest itself in its indeterminacy or shadow at the edge of words. This veil or shadow subtracts itself from the commonly shared factual knowledge, as something not yet understood, or unlinked to shared consensual knowledge, possibly crisscrossed by repressed and incomprehensible signifiers. The unconscious in the transference can present itself as a rebellious source of an unpredictable or hardly traceable malice, or of cunning and even downright shrewd malice among intimates.

The 'real' unconscious also refers to the unspeakable shadow side and implosion of expectations which slumber dormant in the family narratives and memory. In my focal society of origin and my generation, the unspeakable and unreasonable psychical shadow side and implosions of expectations were subjugated to the socially dominant christian impetus toward self-negation, (self-)sacrifice and guilt. This shadow side may, in keeping with the modern christian rationale, surreptitiously find expression in the melancholic lamentation and bewildering upsurges of addiction to ever more toil, expletives, swear words and anger. The upsurge highlights family habits, values, affects, signifiers, apparently disconnected from the conventional signifying chains. At play on the fringes of the order of *das Ding* is the *intelligence douloureuse* that finds itself unable to choose between some *fatum*-oriented risky initiatives and a christian-tinged social ethic of modesty and restraint. An unspeakable shadow side imposes itself as a hole, such as an unspeakable secret, trauma, doom, fate of destiny or even a death-drive transmitted from grand-parental generations. Suicide in the afflicted family is still today repressed in utter silence and concealed from both graceless gossip and the malicious mercilessness of divine justice.

More concretely, as a child I was particularly sensitive to the estranging effect on myself and family members present when, on some visits, speech switched from Flemish to French, or from plain speech to a more allusive and halting or hesitant one. I noticed, the sharp hitches and impasses in speech and the effects of ambivalent jouissance in the concealing or repressing of any further clarification. Expletives, swearwords or coarse words sustained these effects, such as "oh yes, things are like this; I can't understand it further, we'll see; what was it again?; if it pleases God; damnation!".

*See also:* EXTIMACY, FORCES, RESONANCE, JOUISSANCE, LACAN, MEMORY TRACES, OTHER, THREE BODIES, 'THING', 'REAL', REFLEXIVITY, UNSPEAKABLE



## Notes

1. Sensitive to today's multicentric world, and its mosaic of cultures articulated in their local languages (see chapter 2), I attempt to avoid the patriarchal and colonial discourse that constitutes the collective Euro- American imperial imaginary. Bias is particularly evident in the discourse of science, recent high modernity and modern christianity all of which bear the hallmarks of the West, and which further fuel the clash of relations between related monotheistic religions, as well as in international politics and today's absolutely baffling strategies of collective retaliation. Where feasible, I avoid privileging the male gender, as well as the use of the uppercase first letters in many words, given that they punctuate these Eurocentric prejudices.
2. Here, it is important to mention the competent and diligent help of Ulenguluka Kasaamba, my collaborator, a Taanda group inborn. We collaboratively prepared the various meetings, the approach to follow and the counter questions to be expected. He was also a valuable support in the conceptual and semantic analysis of key phrases in any ritual or specialised field for which he consulted the elders of his surroundings, including his father, the customary judge and expert from the local society and culture.
3. I was forced to put a halt to my field-research in 2003 when my usual sitting and walking became impossible due to multiple sclerosis and the unbearable pain it causes.
4. Terms in Yaka are rendered in italics when they are first used. Incidentally, the prefix *ku-*, *wu-* of the infinitives have been replaced by a hyphen; those given in Ngala language or Lingala are preceded by *li*.
5. Jean-Marc Ela was born in 1936 in Ebolowa in south Cameroon. He entered voluntary exile in Quebec in 1995, and passed away in Vancouver in 2008.
6. It is from the perspective of the mutational processes of the 1990s that I look back at former periods, sharing the regrets or negative feelings of the Kinois themselves who feel themselves to have been cheated by the predatory state in recent decades. I, personally, have become increasingly sensitive to Kinois people's destitute condition, in particular to Yakaphone people who are exposed to the hardships

and misery of their shanty towns, feeling exasperated by the runaway inflation and disintegrating public services and institutions. In late September 1991, I was shaken by the popular uprisings in Kinshasa and in January through February 1993, I witnessed the widespread and violent looting by army divisions, throngs of youth and proletarian people from the suburbs and shanty towns.

7. *Qui fait mousser la vie*, literally, “What gives life its froth”, or *Tonton skol eliki kaka, bisengo yo mokili*, “Skol beer, my elder companion, which is the pleasure of life itself”.
8. My analysis of the Yakaphones’ sensorium seeks to capture the subtlety of affect related and sensory notions, such as of the habitus (Bourdieu 1980), ‘flesh’ (Merleau-Ponty 1964) and *Sinn(e)* (Strauss 1989, 1935<sup>1</sup>). These notions have influenced my understanding of the role that sensory experience plays in shaping a particular culture, (inter)corporeality and (inter)subjectivity. I owe a great deal to insights drawn from authors such as Sara Ahmed & Jackie Stacey (2001), Didier Anzieu (1985), Kathryn Geurts (2002), Michael Taussig (1993) and Gail Weiss (1999), regarding the multiple registers of sensation and interbodiliness moulded by the culture in the common day experience.
9. My co-author, Mbonyinkebe Sebahire, participated in the survey of healers conducted from 1976 to 1978 by the Institute of Scientific Research (Bibeau *et al.* 1979, Bibeau 1984). He later continued his research among Yakaphone healers in Kinshasa as part of his doctoral research under a *Missio* grant. He was a member of the Steering Committee of the Centre for the Study of African Religions in Kinshasa. In the 1980s-1990s, he lectured in social anthropology at the University of Kinshasa and then became professor at the University of Kigali in Rwanda. The authors are grateful to professors Pieter Gustaaf Janssens and Gilles Bibeau for their helpful comments.
10. Ademuwagun 1979, Akerele 1990, Alexander 1985; Alihonou, Inoussa, Res, Sagbohan & Varkevisser 1993; Anderson 1991, Anyiam 1987, Augé & Herzlich 1984, Bannerman *et al.* 1983, Attias-Donut & Rosenmayr 1994, Bado 1996, Bantje 1988, Bekaert 2000, Benoist 1996; Bibeau 1978, 1979, 1981 a, b, c, 1982, 1983, 1984; Bibeau *et al.* 1979; Brink 1982, Brunet-Jailly 1993, 1994, Buckley 1985, Buschkens 1990; Chabot, Harnmeijer & Streefland 1995; Chavunduka 1995, Coppo & Keita 1990, Corin & Bibeau 1980, Corin & Murphy 1979, Criel *et al.* 1998, De Boeck 1991, 1994, Demoulin & Kaddar 1993, de Rosny 1985; Devisch 1993, 2009, 2012 a, b, c; Devisch & Brodeur 1999;

- Dodge 1990, Dozon 1987, Fassin D. 1992, 1994, 1996; Fassin D. & Fassin E. 1988 a, b, Fassin & Jaffre 1990; Feachem & Jamison 1991, Feierman E. 1981; Feierman S. 1981, 1985, Feierman S. & Janzen 1992, Field 1960, Fontaine 1995; Fosu 1981,1989, Frankenberg & Leeson 1996, 1977, Gelfand 1985, Good 1987, Green 1988, Headrick 1994, Heggenhougen & Gilson 1997, Hours 1986; Howson, Hotra, Harrison & Lewis 1996; Imperato 1977, Ingstad & Reynolds Whyte 1995; Janssens, Kivits & Vuylsteke 1997; Janzen 1978, 1982, 1987, 1992, Janzen & Prins 1979, Jules-Rosette 1981, Kirmani 1980, 1981, 1983; Kloos 1987, Lado 1992, Lambo 1963, Lapika 1984, Lasker 1981, Last & Chavunduka 1986, Mahango 1986, Mahaniah 1982, M'bokolo 1984, Mbonyinkebe 1989, Mullings 1984, Nyanwaya 1987, Pearce 1982, Peltzer & Ebigbo 1989, Pillsbury 1982, Reis 1996, Reynolds 1996, Sandiford, Kanga & Ahmed 1994; Schurmans 1994, Sofuluwe & Bennett 1985; Turshen 1991, Twumasi 1988; Van der Geest & Reynolds-Whyte 1988, van Binsbergen 1981, Van Wing 1959, Van Wolputte 1997, Varkevisser, Alihonou & Inoussa 1993; Vaughan 1991; Ventevogel 1996, WHO 1976, 1978, 1990, 1993; Yoder 1981.
11. *Ministère de justice, Codes et lois du Congo belge*, Vol. III: Matière sociale et économique. Section Art de guérir, Article 15, p. 616 (*Ministry of Justice, Codes and Laws of the Belgian Congo*, Vol. III: Social and Economic Matters, Art of Healing Section, Article 15, p. 616). This section of the colonial code includes the ordinances 41/81 & 71/81 19/3/52, published by the Governor-General in December 2, 1958. Gilles Bibeau (1982, 1984) has outlined a more recent evolution of this ordinance.
  12. CERDAS, the Interregional Centre for Training, Research and Documentation in the Social Sciences at the University of Kinshasa (director prof. Lapika Dimonfu) coordinated the sociological investigation regarding the care seekers' recourse to the various health care centres. Mr Kiyulu N'yanga Nzo, Mr Mulopo Kisweko and the late dr. Matula Atul Entur were responsible for carrying out the study. Prof. Lapika coordinated the action-research in Mbanza Lemba. Psychiatrist and psychotherapist dr Jaak Le Roy, of the Academic Regional Institute for Community Health Care (RIAGG) in Maastricht, and psychiatrist dr A. Nsitu, of the Neuro-Psycho-Pathology University Hospital of Kinshasa (CNPP), focused their research on the therapeutic and healing work, including the explanatory models used by care providers, care seekers and families in their various health care systems. They also investigated the interconnections between these systems. Dr Le Roy was involved in the definition of the research procedures and



responsible for the medical-psychiatric and psychodynamic part of the overall action-research design and its implementation in Ndjili XII. He acknowledges the advice of prof. Joop de Jong, of the Transcultural Psycho-Social Organisation — TPO at the Free University Amsterdam. The Africa Research Centre (later renamed as Institute for Anthropological Research in Africa) at the University of Leuven, CERDAS at the University of Kinshasa and RIAGG Maastricht were the three institutional partners in this joint research project. A dialogue has been set up between those involved in the ongoing action-research and two professionals of the Ministry of Health in Kinshasa: dr Bimamisana MD, director of the Mount Amba Health Centre at the University of Kinshasa, and dr Masaki, MD and General Health Inspector for Kinshasa.

13. Both the BSE and HBEQ have been used in mental health research programmes, such as in Kinshasa, by the Institute for Psycho-Socio-Ecological Research, IPSER, directed by prof. M. de Vries, University of Maastricht and prof. J. de Jong, TPO and the Free University Amsterdam. The questionnaire and database, which aim for a strong statistical and qualitative analysis, are the work of dr J. Le Roy. Inspiration stems from J. de Jong (1994) and his Collaborative TPO-WHO Programme for the Identification, Management and Prevention of Psycho-Social and Mental Health Problems of Refugees and Victims of Organised Violence within Primary Care. Data retrieval was carried out with the help of dr I. Komproe, TPO.

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