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CHAPTER 9

Contested authorities and the politics of perception: deconstructing the study of religion in Africa

Rijk van Dijk and Peter Pels

Recent critiques of anthropological texts have led to a wide acknowledgement of the power relations expressed and produced by their rhetoric. The fieldwork encounters on which many of these texts are based are unevenly and unequally translated into them, and the texts themselves remain largely beyond the control or influence of the anthropologist's interlocutors. At the same time, the authority of these texts relies heavily upon the ability to represent the voice of the 'other' people encountered during research. Ethnography, therefore, has always depended on polyphony, but has also, paradoxically, denied this polyphony by subsuming it under a dominant authorial voice. This chapter suggests that this paradox is not just a textual phenomenon, but emerges from more general, and to a large extent irresolvable, contradictions between intellectual authorities that confront each other in the practice of research.

Inspired by literary criticism, a number of scholars have argued that this paradox may be resolved by experimenting with 'dialogical' or 'polyphonic' texts in a search for compositions that are more true to the fieldwork situation (Clifford 1986a; Marcus and Fischer 1986; Tedlock 1987).¹ Their efforts have produced many interesting insights into the construction and deconstruction of ethnographic authority, but the question remains as to whether the authority of the ethnographer is not too entrenched to allow for a successful use of these strategies. Others have argued that experiments with 'dialogue' can never completely dislodge the power of authors to edit out voices at will (Pool 1991b). The dilemma of critical approaches to anthropological texts is that, while literary criticism can identify relations of power that constitute texts, textual experiments cannot change these relationships (Fabian 1991: 193-4). Ethnographic dialogue is always contextualised by a dialectics of power relationships that conditions and inhibits it (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992: 11; Schrijvers 1991). As Arjun Appadurai recently put it, theories of the

intertextual have to be complemented with theories of the intercontextual (Appadurai 1995).

One step towards formulating questions about the interaction of contexts is, we feel, a 'democratising' of the capacity to deconstruct authoritative statements in the study of religion. Classical anthropology of religion was, to a large extent, premised on denying the authority of the religious authorities under study, if not during fieldwork, then at least in ethnography (Evans-Pritchard 1962) – a form of 'deconstruction' in its own right (cf. van Binsbergen 1991: 337). By outlining the (often deemed faulty) processes of reasoning, or the social conditions that lay behind religious expressions, anthropologists have usually argued that these expressions have to be judged on their political and social, rather than their literal, content and claims to knowledge. 'Deconstructionism', in contrast, took the anthropological subject for its object, and analysed the ways in which its claims towards ethnographic authority were themselves part of strategies of cultural imperialism. This endeavour drew regularly upon religious metaphors to attain its critical ends (ethnography as 'allegory' or 'occult document': Clifford 1986b; Tyler 1986).

Both these positions, however, remain based on textual strategies that define a subjective locus relatively isolated from the 'contact zone' (cf. Pratt 1992) in which knowledge about the others' religion was produced. Our intention is to bring out a number of contexts in which the religious or magical 'object' itself becomes a 'subject': that, in other words, a deconstruction of the anthropological subject by its object is a perfectly common occurrence, especially during fieldwork (but also, and increasingly, in wider contexts). We maintain that it is necessary to democratise deconstruction in this way, if not to unsettle anthropological claims to authority, then at least to restore agency to those whom these claims commonly reduce to 'objectivity' (or a 'voice'). We think such a step is necessary for the reorientation of research into religion in a postcolonial world.

To anticipate the direction into which our conclusions will go: we feel it is not only necessary to engage critically with the ability to construct an 'other' textually – as implied in the concept of *ethnography* – but also to rethink the extent to which the practice of fieldwork is based on an interaction between contexts standing in a relationship of inequality. As the following case studies will show, the distinctions between textual authority and oral communication, between objective observation and (inter)subjective production of knowledge, and between 'science' and 'religion', are not just suppositions of anthropological theory, but also political *tactics* actively deployed and resisted, by both ethnographer and the people he or she confronts.² In other words, they are not merely elements of the texts anthropologists produce, but also of the (political) contexts in which they and their interlocutors need to move.

By bringing the active challenge to ethnographic authority by people written about to the fore, we hope to raise some doubts about the matter-of-factness with which ethnographers maintain their identity as scholarly writers who do their research in some 'field' far away from 'home'. By this, we do not merely want to draw attention to the intellectual distancing that goes on when an ethnographer deploys the knowledge gained 'out there' in the home context; we also want to suggest that, in a world where an Indian writer residing in Britain can expect an armed Iranian on his doorstep any minute, 'fieldwork' is coming closer to 'homework' than we usually think.³

We suggest that the study of religion in Africa is particularly suitable for a discussion of such developments. As many anthropologists have observed, the anthropological study of religion tends to reflect, more than any other anthropological topic, the preconceptions of the Western observer. This is probably the reason why so little has been written (except autobiographically) about fieldwork on religion, because in it, the 'veil of objectivity' (Jules-Rosette 1978) is so easily torn away (see van Binsbergen 1991: 340; Douglas 1982; Olivier de Sardan 1992: 9; Stoller 1989b: 39). Since the first descriptions of 'fetishism' on the West African coast in the sixteenth century (see Pietz 1985; 1987; 1988), Europeans have been fascinated by the magic which they attributed to African thought and which seemed so different from their conceptions of 'rational' value, to the extent that some twentieth-century debates about rationality exclusively focused on African magic and religion (Evans-Pritchard 1976; Hollis and Lukes 1982; Wilson 1970). Given this tension within the Western tradition between scientism and occultism (about which more below), the study of religion in Africa can be expected to provide particularly poignant examples of the kind of cultural politics we want to discuss in this chapter.

We propose to do so by presenting two cases in which the tactical behaviour of both the anthropologists and their interlocutors challenges the hegemony of their attitudes towards each other's production of (scientific, religious and magical) knowledge. We first discuss an element of anthropological fieldwork which, although it has always exerted a powerful influence on the anthropological imagination, has in practice been rare: the *initiation* of the researcher into secrets held by local religious leaders. Here, ethnographers (act as if they) accept the hegemony of the 'other' cultural practice while being initiated. The result is that the assumed hegemony of the anthropologists' world-view and their assumptions about 'objective reality' undergo a severe trial from which they emerge changed.

This role of initiation has what one might call a 'subdominant' history in anthropological thought. Even within academic anthropology itself, the assumed objectivity of anthropological knowledge was slightly subverted by the corridor-talk conception of fieldwork as a form of initiation, a subjective transformation supposed to make one into a real anthropologist.⁴

Being initiated as a member of a local cult was, since the inception of intensive fieldwork, part of the methodological arsenal of anthropology (cf. Spencer and Gillen 1899). In the postcolonial era, and especially since the resurgence of 'occult' inspiration marked by Carlos Castaneda's *The Teachings of Don Juan* (1968), the possibility that initiation by non-Western religious authorities would subvert or deconstruct the hegemony of Western assumptions about knowledge (and, consequently, about power) has become debated more and more (see van Binsbergen 1991; Stoller and Olkes 1987; Turner et al. 1992).⁵

Of course, anthropological researchers have always, to some extent, put their everyday conception of the world at risk during fieldwork (as the endless considerations of 'culture shock' show). But situations in which researchers subject themselves more or less willingly to a formal initiation, from which it is hard to withdraw at will and at short notice, seem to be rare. In our second case, we give an example of a confrontation between ethnographer and interlocutors that is far more prevalent, yet even less studied by anthropologists. It shows how van Dijk was obliged to go through a penitential exercise after having produced a text in a popular magazine which insufficiently recognised the inspirational authority of religious leaders in the field. In this case, the existence of the text was, for the Born-Again religious leaders which it discussed, evidence of the lack of allowance that the ethnographer gave to their religious authority in the co-production of knowledge. Thus, the Born-Again preachers challenged van Dijk's unconscious assumptions about his authority to write, and as a consequence initiated an ideological struggle about the proper sources of knowledge. The conflict between authority based on observation (van Dijk's) and authority based on inspiration (the preachers') articulated a difference that, left unchallenged, would threaten the integrity of the niche in Malawian society that the preachers had created for themselves. As it was, both parties had to engage in a *bricolage* of tactical steps to restore their former positions, in which both the project of the ethnographer and that of the preachers could be safeguarded from the threat posed by their differing approaches to authoritative knowledge.

The politics of perception

A discussion of such topics can hardly avoid asking what is more in heaven and earth than that which is 'dreamt of in our philosophy'. The authority of different possible perceptions of the world is, in these situations of an anthropologist's initiation into and confrontation with 'other' religious realities, contested in ways which are, for both sides, uncomfortable. Anthropologists commonly react to these situations in two ways: either they declare specific scientific assumptions about how reality is to be perceived to be the most valid; or they declare the 'other'

assumptions about authoritative knowledge to be part of a 'discourse' or a 'definition of the situation' that needs to be understood in its own right, to assess how this specific context is constituted. The first reaction posits the sovereignty of a scientific subject, the second the right of that subject to define its object, and both, therefore, maintain or resurrect a hierarchy of perception, a hierarchy that the deconstructions of ethnographic authority during fieldwork, to which we referred above, have challenged in the first place. To the extent that distinctions between the 'natural' and the 'supernatural', between 'scientific' and 'religious', or between 'real' and 'occult', constitute the authority of the ethnographer, we have to acknowledge that they are *themselves* part of a politics of perception that informs the power relationships between anthropologists and interlocutors, and the contexts in which they live.

By insisting on an account of this politics of perception, we want to draw attention to the fact that judgements of admissible evidence about the constitution of the world – and, by default, of the otherworldly – rely on hierarchies of perceptual faculties that can no longer be regarded as self-evident. As recent studies in the 'anthropology of the senses' show, neither the number nor the ranking of the senses in Western epistemologies is 'natural': they vary both historically and culturally (Classen 1993; Howes 1991). More important, perhaps, is the observation that this is not merely a question of different cultural or historical classifications of the senses, but of the material relationship between the human organism and its environment. Studies in the physiology of perception stress the difficulty of disentangling different senses from each other within the work of perception (Classen 1993: 5). Even more, it has become clear that new technologies of perception – writing, linear perspective, printing, photography, film – have created new sensory possibilities and new sensory regimes.⁶ By stressing the *politics* of perception, we want to emphasize that these bodily, technological and cultural repertoires of perception make up a *contested* terrain, and that the extent to which one privileges a 'natural' over a 'supernatural', or a 'scientific' over a 'religious' conception of the world is the outcome of a struggle over how to perceive, rather than the reflection of a given 'objectivity'.⁷

The existence of such struggles is demonstrated by the fact that anthropologists' involvement with occult knowledge⁸ generally provoked a rethinking of the limits and possibilities of human perception. When North Asian and American shamanism captured the imaginations of travellers and philosophers in the eighteenth century, scholars such as Diderot, Herder and Goethe speculated on the relationships between the hypersensitivity of the shaman and that of the poetical and musical genius (Flaherty 1992). In the nineteenth century, Alfred Russel Wallace's conversion to spiritualism changed his theories about human evolution and led him to postulate a 'higher sense than vision' to account for the way

in which spiritualistic mediums could contact the other world (Wallace 1896), and involved him in a discussion with Edward Tylor that may have led Tylor to 'see' for himself what evidence could be mustered for the existence of spiritualistic phenomena (Pels 1994; Stocking 1971). As we shall see below, present-day anthropologists who were initiated into occult secrets display a similar desire to redefine hierarchies of perception (see, in particular, Stoller 1989b).

The critique of Western hierarchies of perception and their influence on the constitution of the objects of anthropology has focused predominantly on the critique of 'visualism', or the way in which the hegemony of the eye in Western epistemologies has determined what can, and cannot, be admitted as 'fact' (Fabian 1983; Tyler 1984). Often, such critiques themselves have to fall back on Western classifications of the senses, positing the oral/aural (Fabian 1983), the olfactory (Stoller 1989b) or the tactile (Pels 1993: 1-20) against the hegemony of vision. We ourselves, in our interpretation of the two cases that are the subject of this chapter, have not been able to escape such ethnocentrism, particularly where we rely on metaphors of tactility or the sense of touch. This should not obscure the fact that sensory regimes and their tactical confrontations are more complex than that: if vision can be realised through different physiological, technological and cultural media,⁹ it is also possible to distinguish different perceptual possibilities within the realm of the oral/aural (between, for instance, interrogation and dialogue) or within that of tactility (for instance, the difference between the exchange of blows and of caresses). Moreover, because a sensory regime is itself based on a combination and hierarchy of senses, the analysis of the interaction between them remains a crucial part of any study of the politics of perception.

In the cases studied, the politics of perception of the ethnographer are usually informed by a fairly stable combination of 'visualist' politics – one-sided 'observation' combined with representation in writing (for a critique, see Fabian 1983: ch. 4) – and a form of the control of the oral/aural through interrogation (for a critique, see Rosaldo 1989). Deconstructions of this sensory regime by religious authorities during fieldwork employ other forms of perception, that often invert the Western hegemony of vision and interrogation by forcing the researcher to 'listen' passively or 'feel' instead of to 'supervise', 'question' and 'observe'. For Western scientists the most elusive challenge to their sensory regime is that which puts forward definitions of reality based on an 'inner' vision or 'inspiration'. As indicated above, we do not pretend to provide answers to metaphysical questions about the validity of such perceptions. However, we feel that a study of the politics of perception in the practice of studying religion in Africa can restore initiative and agency to those who are usually simply objects of study. In a postcolonial world, where it is becoming increasingly

obvious that religion is going to continue playing a major role in modern politics (cf. Geschiere n.d.; van der Veer 1994), such a democratising of deconstruction promises to be a further step in the disengagement of scientific politics from Western 'scientistic' prejudice.

Sorcerer's apprentice: objectivity, occultism and liminal politics

The mainstream attitude of anthropologists towards occult knowledge is perhaps best represented by the work of Edward Evans-Pritchard who, convinced that Zande witchcraft was based on faulty premises, deconstructed its belief system by analysing its 'closed' reasoning and the social mechanisms that supported it. His account of research into 'witchdoctor' practices shows how the identity of the classical anthropologist relied on a specific politics and hierarchy of the perception. Evans-Pritchard, afraid that participation – his becoming a witchdoctor himself – would change the phenomena to be 'observed', reduce his ability to observe critically while participating, and lower his esteem among Azande (as Zande nobles would not become witchdoctors), decided to send his assistant as a proxy (Evans-Pritchard 1976: 67-8). By having two witchdoctors – who both knew their pupil would tell everything he learned to the anthropologist – compete for the tuition of his assistant, he created a rivalry which guaranteed that few secrets would be withheld (*ibid.*: 69). Moreover, by forcing one of the witchdoctors to effect a cure on someone in his house, he managed to detect fraud in the 'extraction' of witch-substance from a patient, and led the healer to confess it in private (*ibid.*: 102-4). Not only does Evans-Pritchard display his extraordinary talent for power-play during fieldwork in this passage, he also shows that this power was directed, in the first place, at the *visible* manifestations of witchdoctors' powers (the extraction of evil substance) and, in the second place, at breaking the conditions of secrecy under which oral communications were ordinarily transferred, thereby imposing his own control. His research was a politics of controlled supervision, or 'observation'. The objective anthropologist, a powerful *voyeur*, produced a denial of equality in fieldwork practice even before this was turned, in his textual production, into a 'denial of co-evalness' (cf. Fabian 1983).

The publication of Carlos Castaneda's *The Teachings of Don Juan* (1968) produced an, in his own case short-lived, occult revival in anthropology. The dismissal of Castaneda from the anthropological canon, after the suspicions that his Don Juan was a hoax became too prominent to ignore, tends to cover up the momentary significance of his work. Not only was Castaneda's an outstanding 'ethnographic experiment' with dialogue more than ten years before this became fashionable, its fraudulence discloses an important argument about ethnographic authority: that the authenticity of a fieldwork account is something which is very difficult to check, and that

anthropologists are trusted and judged on the basis of the *words about* their experiences, and not their experiences themselves.

Recently, a number of interesting contributions to the literature on this topic have been published, dealing mostly with Africa (van Binsbergen 1991; Favret-Saada 1980; Fidaali 1987; Gibbal 1994; Olivier de Sardan 1988; 1989; 1992; Stoller 1989a; 1989b; Stoller and Olkes 1987; Turner et al. 1992). Paul Stoller has given an account of how, over a long period of fieldwork in the Songhay region of Niger, he became apprenticed to a number of different local sorcerers and healers (Stoller and Olkes 1987). Stoller presents himself as an anthropologist relying on a self-image of 'objectivity' that is increasingly subverted by his experiences as a sorcerer's apprentice. Early in the book, he describes his dilemma by referring to Evans-Pritchard and Castaneda, the alternatives being to refuse to become involved, or to become involved but not believed by one's colleagues. However, the 'real reason' why he hesitated is his fear of the physical and psychological danger that might be involved, and how becoming an apprentice would change him as a person. He anticipated the lure of occult knowledge and the possibility of becoming 'a more powerful person' (Stoller and Olkes 1987: 25-7), but, pondering the 'Evans-Pritchard question' at a later stage, Stoller writes: 'Although no red-blooded modern anthropologist would send a proxy, the question still stood: When does the anthropologist say: "Enough, I cannot become more subjectively involved?"' (ibid.: 38).

'Objectivity', for Stoller, seems to mean that the researcher *is not being changed* by his research experiences, and impossible though this is, it is precisely the kind of immunity against the experience of another reality that Stoller identifies with Evans-Pritchard's power-play.¹⁰ When Stoller's first teacher, the *sorko* Djibo, tells him just to listen and memorise, Stoller wants to tell him that, as an anthropologist, he is supposed to ask questions and direct informants (Stoller and Olkes 1987: 31) just as Evans-Pritchard manipulated his. Yet Stoller does not conceptualise his activity as political: his role-switching from anthropologist to sorcerer's apprentice is described only in terms of 'ethical' contradictions (ibid.: 111, 180; see below, note 14 in particular, for the topic of covering 'ethnic' with 'ethic', or cultural politics with the cloak of professionalism).

The 'veil of objectivity' (cf. Jules-Rosette 1978) of Stoller is eventually ripped off by his perception of a physical change: at one point he finds himself partly paralysed at night, and panics at the thought that a nearby sorceress is testing him. By reciting a charm of defence against bewitchment, the paralysis disappears. 'Before my paralysis, I *knew* there were scientific explanations of Songhay sorcery. After Wanzerbe [the place where the paralysis occurred] my unwavering faith in science vanished' (Stoller and Olkes 1987: 153) and with it, his 'unwavering faith' in anthropological objectivity.

Here, it should be noted that such extraordinary physical perceptions are also the basis of the change of mind that other anthropological apprentices to occult teachers undergo: Jean-Marie Gibbal describes his sensation of a strange, invisible presence during and after attending a possession ceremony, and how he was 'overtaken by waves, vibrations, and shaking that had me participating physically in a rite whose meaning partially escaped me' (Gibbal 1994: 81). Gibbal also refers to Fidaali's (1987) conclusion that the practices of the healer to whom Fidaali was apprenticed relied on 'an archaic, coalescent perception of the world that is anterior to language. This perception is made possible by mobilizing all the senses and working at a level of attention sensitive to the body's internal messages' (Gibbal 1994: 158).

Lastly, Wim van Binsbergen, although he hardly devotes attention to the perceptual process in his account, relates how an illness – difficult to explain, and not cured, by Western medicine – drove him to join a healing lodge that did, indeed, cure him. Again, a perception of inner, physical change preceded a transformation of reality.

This challenge to Western sensory regimes led Stoller and Gibbal to question the hierarchy and politics of perception. Stoller devoted a whole book to it (1989b) which Gibbal cites approvingly. This rethinking of human sensitivity also led them to question the ways in which it is represented in writing and to discuss the possibilities of 'evoking' something that is hard to make present by ink on paper only (Gibbal 1994: 150; Stoller 1989b: 153).¹¹ One of the textual strategies they both employ is to incorporate the 'observer' and his doubts into their accounts of fieldwork, and such personal narrative is also the option that others with similar problems of representation chose (although they are less optimistic about the results: van Binsbergen 1991; Jules-Rosette 1976).

Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan has criticised both Stoller and Gibbal for incorporating, through their first-person narrative, an ethnocentric 'occult exoticism' into Songhay magic and religion. He argues that in their attempt to explain Songhay magic and religion to a Western audience, they take 'fashionable' European occultism as their model rather than Christian or everyday magical routines (Olivier de Sardan 1992: 14).¹² And indeed, contrary to Stoller's idea that European – and, by implication, anthropological – metaphysics is characterised by an 'escape from the senses' (Stoller 1989b: 153), we have indicated that (hyper-)sensitivity, poetic expression and occultism have been debated conjointly in Europe since at least the Enlightenment, despite the temporary hegemony of specific perceptual regimes. This lends considerable weight to Olivier de Sardan's contention that this rhetoric of the experiencing 'I' tends to downplay the banality and matter-of-factness of Songhay magic and religion in favour of a rarefied idea of the occult.

Indeed, Stoller's textual solution to the questions of representation

raised by his experiences is, as we have already indicated, not a solution to his dilemma. Stoller is not aware of the fact that the incorporation of the researcher and of individual 'voices' into an ethnographic text was a (subdominant) strategy of ethnographers even before the advent of professional anthropology.¹³ Thus, his claim to present a more profound 'respect' for indigenous knowledge (again, a rhetoric as old as cultural relativism itself) through texts that give an 'authentic' voice to it (Stoller 1989b: 27, 153) is, like other so-called 'postmodernist' initiatives, not much more than a new professionalism in anthropology, now perhaps more influenced by aesthetic than by natural science models (cf. Pels and Nencel 1991).¹⁴ His text hides, therefore, a profound *complicity* of ethnographic and magical authority that has been, we submit, present in anthropology since its inception: both the shaman and his apprentice are experts in cultural knowledge who set themselves apart from a lay public. Indeed, Stoller claims authority on the basis of a knowledge of 'the Songhay world' that, to use his own words, 'few Songhay know directly' (Stoller and Olkes 1987: 227-8).

It would be too simple to leave the discussion at this level of ethnographic, that is, textual, strategies. At that level, Olivier de Sardan's accusation against Stoller can be turned back upon himself by the argument that his endorsement of the 'banal', everyday, reality of Songhay magic and religion shows a European, mainly Marxist, preoccupation with the 'masses' as they are classified from a conceptual framework just as authoritarian.¹⁵ Noting a (largely textual) complicity between ethnographic and magical authority should not obscure the profound contradictions and tactical *bricolage* of the 'contact zone' in which this authority is built up.

Wim van Binsbergen's account of becoming a *sangoma* can remind us of this. He acknowledges that, gratifying though the combination of the authority of an anthropologist with that of a *sangoma* may seem to be, it does not resolve the contradiction between their respective contexts, even if this means relinquishing ethnographic authority at home:¹⁶ 'I refuse to deconstruct my knowledge of sangomahood if, in the process, that means that I am professionally compelled to kill its powerful images on the operation table of intellectual vivisection. At the same time, it would be a waste not to ultimately subject this knowledge to the kind of systematic academic commentary I and especially many of my colleagues have shown ourselves capable of' (van Binsbergen 1991: 337).

Another transformation of these contradictions is the way in which van Binsbergen's newly acquired authority, though it may set him off from a 'lay audience' in Botswana, could also be (and was) perceived as an act of 'humility' by them: his initiation, in particular, could be seen as a subversion of the rejection of *sangoma* practices that they have learned to expect from White and Christian culture (ibid.: 337-9). Initiation, is, as many scholars now agree, based on putting one's body at the disposal of the initiators

(cf. Comaroff 1985; Jackson 1983), and therefore a form of communication (of, among other things, humility) that can better be described in terms of the sense of touch rather than that of vision (Pels 1993: 1-18).

Perhaps the most telling example of the way in which the contradictions between sensory regimes, despite the willingness of the ethnographer to relinquish his own, remain the condition of such liminal situations, is Stoller's account of the search for a sick man's 'double' by *sorko* Djibo in order to cure him. When Djibo has released the 'double' from a pile of husks, he turns to Stoller:

'Did you hear it?'

'Hear what?' I asked dumbfounded.

'Did you feel it?'

'Feel what?' I wondered.

'Did you see it?'

'What are you talking about?' I demanded.

Sorko Djibo shook his head in disbelief. He was disappointed that I had not sensed in one way or another the man's double as he, Djibo, had liberated it. He said to me: 'You look but you do not see. You touch, but you do not feel. You listen, but you do not hear. Without sight or touch,' he continued, 'one can learn a great deal. But you must learn how to *hear* or you will learn little about our ways.' (Stoller 1989b: 115, emphasis in original).

Stoller takes this remarkable dialogue as an argument for the recognition of the cultural importance of sound, probably because of Djibo's emphasis on hearing. But he does not note that Djibo launches an *out-and-out* attack on Stoller's *complete* routine of perception. Stoller's 'non-seeing' and 'non-touching' will not prevent him from learning, Djibo says. But 'non-hearing', in particular, will prevent Stoller from learning about Songhay ways. Not only does Djibo say that Stoller cannot perceive as a Songhay *sorko* should, he also inverts the hierarchy of perception common to the West, by putting the aural sense first. We already noted that Stoller was not supposed to pose questions, nor was he allowed to write down the magical formulas he had to learn before he had committed them to memory completely. This shows to what extent Djibo's politics of perception redefined the relationship between anthropologist and informant even before Stoller's perception of reality itself had changed, and how powerless Stoller's textual strategy of incorporating his personal sense-perception in his account is in bridging the gap with Djibo's paradigm.

Stoller also does not show how his perception of his own, North American, world has changed under the influence of his apprenticeship in Songhay.¹⁷ Perhaps this is another way in which these political contradictions, this time in the guise of 'home' versus 'field', are maintained. Murray Last pointed out to van Binsbergen that the true test of his sangomahood would be to continue practising as one, and, up to now,

van Binsbergen maintains a group of clients in Francistown – which implies that many of the contradictions he notes in his account are also maintained.¹⁸ The continuing existence of an irresolvable contest of authorities, however, does not imply that these contradictions, themselves, remain stationary. Van Binsbergen's performance of a sacrifice to his wife's ancestors in Belgium (van Binsbergen 1991: 319) is only one way in which, for a sorcerer's apprentice, 'fieldwork' can become 'homework', and the immunising of the anthropologist against his 'field' that Evans-Pritchard demonstrates becomes harder and harder to maintain.

So, if contradictions between sensory regimes turn out to condition a practice in which anthropologists more or less willingly undergo the influence of the other's mode of perceiving because of the continuity between ethnographic and magical authority, they can be expected to appear more forcefully in situations where such a partial community of interest does not prevail, and that, in the study of religion in Africa, is probably more often than not the case. We turn now to an examination of one of these more prevalent situations.

The deconstructed ethnographer, or perception, penance and intellectual survival

The following case from van Dijk's fieldwork in Blantyre, Malawi, shows a conflict between researcher's and researched's strategies of perception and representation. The ethnographer's textual representations were confronted with the oral performances of young to very young preachers (some only nine years of age) that showed divine inspiration. These performances provided a channel for dissent from the oppression of the Banda regime, and the gerontocratic structure of Malawian society in general, by stressing inspiration as the real source of power and authority. Inspiration combined with oral performance, both forms of authority that could neither be institutionalised nor laid down in tangible texts, were key strategies used to steer free of any sort of political involvement with this establishment. Van Dijk's entry into, and attempts to record, the field of activities of the young preachers brought him into direct conflict with these strategies. The young preachers distrusted van Dijk's perception through observation, of distanced seeing and hearing, and stressed a tactile experience – of being 'touched' by the Holy Spirit – that should be communicated orally and in public to show what such experiences really mean.

Since the early 1970s, Malawi's urban centres have seen the rise of a number of Christian fundamentalist groups and organisations led by young itinerant preachers, varying in age between nine and thirty (see van Dijk 1992; 1993; forthcoming). These preachers aim at a purification of social life and their work can be interpreted as a modern transformation of earlier puritan movements in Malawi. Puritanism, present in Malawi since

the early 1930s in the form of various anti-witchcraft movements, provided the means and the basis for the younger generation to challenge the authority of elders both in political and religious terms (the so-called *Mchape* movements, see Richards 1935; Ranger 1972; Fields 1985). In modern urban conditions the younger generation again presented a puritan ideology to assert themselves against the gerontocratic mode of political and religious control, still paramount in Malawian society in the 1970s, 1980s and early part of the 1990s. By a Christian fundamentalist ideology of high morality, sin and redemption, and obedience to leadership, the preachers were able to deprive the coercive Malawian regime of the opportunity to define this movement as subversive and as a threat to the nation's 'peace, calm, law and order'. The young preachers obtained room for manoeuvre, a safe niche in the heavily supervised and controlled life of Malawian society, which they used to set up organisations, large revival meetings, 'crusades' and even meetings of a more secretive nature that were and still are held at night in the townships or on top of certain hills.

Within this niche the preacher-leaders, rather than relying on notions of formal membership, have promoted an ideology of 'Born-Again' identity to mark off their group from the outside world. While a system of supervision in the full sense of the word (with records, fees and exclusive membership of one denomination as against another) is absent, the young preachers know for certain who belongs to the core-group that 'prays' with them and who usually does not, and they keep in contact with one another on a regular basis. In this way it doesn't really matter whether a person is 'praying' with this preacher or that as long as the person remains within the Born-Again circle.

In the city of Blantyre, where van Dijk concentrated his research, this circle consisted of a broad network of a variety of Born-Again preachers and their adherents. They conducted a range of weekly if not daily revival, prayer and healing meetings, that maintained its contours by the identity of being 'Born-Again'. A Born-Again is allowed and even stimulated to maintain his or her membership of other Christian denominations as long as he or she is prepared to display commitment to the rather strict Born-Again ideology. This ideology includes a range of restrictions on personal conduct and morality, but above all propounds the view that a continuous channel or, perhaps better, a lifeline, to the power of the *Mzimu Woyera*, the 'White' or Holy Spirit, should be maintained. Ecstatic frenzies, speaking in tongues, visions, the ability to heal by prayer and laying-on of hands are direct and tangible signs of the flux and momentum of this empowering channel. Any transgression of the many do's and don'ts directly affects the power flowing through this channel and may therefore jeopardise the spiritual wall that the Born-Agains have erected to ward off evil spiritual forces from outside their circle.

The spiritual circle is thus embodied by the Born-Agains themselves

and the network of organisations and activities which they have been able to set up. Unlike other puritan movements, the circle does not exist in the materialised form of a closed community or compound. The Born-Agains do not need such physical boundaries, and the spiritual ones which define their circle serve a clear purpose in an urban setting, with its mobility and continuously changing sets of social relationships. Every 'true' Born-Again is the carrier of this spiritual circle of defence, irrespective of the social networks in which an individual may be engaged. A real breach of the circle occurs when the channel of inspirational power from the heavenly forces is either not maintained, or denied and exchanged for a different, sometimes contesting line of power. Therefore, the Born-Agains, leaders and followers alike, repudiate involvement in the Malawian political system as well as involvement in the authority structure of other important social or religious organisations. Likewise, the power and authority that can be derived from what they call, in derogatory terms, 'book-knowledge' is abhorred, and the authority of mainstream church leaders, pastors, priests and bishops is questioned on the grounds that it is not based on the power of inspiration. It was such a challenge to inspirational authority that occasioned a breach of confidence between the ethnographer and some of the young preacher-leaders in Blantyre.

After almost a year of intensive contact with a number of young preachers and their followers in Blantyre, van Dijk published a short article in one of Malawi's most widely read monthlies, *Moni* (April 1989). The article was written from the point of view of a distanced observer who has had some experiences that might be sufficiently interesting to the general public to be published. The article opened by introducing the author and his academic interest in the subject matter and set out to describe the activities of the young preachers in Blantyre. One of the paragraphs that displays the author's stance as an observer ran as follows: 'With the "infilling" of the Holy Spirit, as many youngsters have been explaining, one suddenly feels as having stepped into the world of light. Every meeting, therefore, is filled with ecstatic prayers, shouting and speaking in tongues to create the exact state of mind wherein the baptism by the Holy Spirit can take place.'

Here the use of inverted commas for 'infilling' indicated how the possession by the Holy Spirit was perceived by some of the interlocutors, while the word 'ecstatic' underscored the distancing attitude of the author towards these forms of experience. The magazine came out and was sold on the streets of Blantyre on a Saturday morning, and on the afternoon of the very same day a message reached van Dijk that his presence was requested at a special meeting with a group of preachers, first thing Monday morning. The topic of discussion would be his text.

That particular Monday morning, in one of the townships of Blantyre, van Dijk met with a group of apparently hostile preachers who positioned

themselves in a semi-circle facing the other end of the small room where van Dijk had to sit. On a small table in the middle of the room the magazine was turned open on the page that showed van Dijk's article. One by one, the preachers expressed their utmost concern with the contents of the article. Van Dijk was confronted with questions about the way in which he depicted the Born-Agains: 'Why do you use the word "ecstatic" when God blesses us with his Holy Spirit descending upon us all?'; 'Why do you say we, preachers, speak against the authority of the elders, while in fact we are preaching against sin?'

Above all, one specific criticism appeared again and again: 'You have stayed with us, you have eaten with us, you have participated in our meetings and now you have written about us. Have you been intending to be rude? Are you a spy of the Pope?' After some discussion and clarification it was decided that at the revival meeting of the coming Saturday van Dijk would publicly denounce the Pope and the allegation of being a spy for the Holy See. Furthermore, the preachers strongly demanded that he would also, and above all, acknowledge the power of inspiration by the Holy Spirit in his work, and that this inspiration was a necessary part of his scientific interest.

The next Saturday, during a large revival meeting held in one of Blantyre's conference centres, van Dijk was called to the pulpit to declare the sincerity of his intention not to offend the Born-Agains of Blantyre and to acknowledge the points on which the preachers had insisted on the preceding Monday. As his penitential exercise was met with appreciative cheers, applause and laughter, it seemed to restore some mutual trust and confidence. It did not lead, however, to a further appreciation of his scientific interest. Some weeks later, it became clear that his authority to put things down in writing was still suspect. When he tried to conduct a small survey of the socio-economic position of some of the followers, this procedure of obtaining information in written form was simply refused to him: the completed forms were confiscated by some young preachers. Despite having explained and discussed the purpose and method of this form of data-collection at length, he was asked why he needed the forms and whether he was going 'to write or to understand'. Clearly, the process of obtaining knowledge by means of methods that were directly associated with 'book-knowledge' conflicted with the preachers' basic notions of how the 'truth' about the Born-Again movement could be ascertained.

At first sight, it seems that the sheer fact of writing and publishing about the inner characteristics of the movement and its ideology caused confusion and resentment. In retrospect, however, the challenge to van Dijk's authority to write can be related to a politics of perception seated at a deeper level. The questions with which the preachers confronted him, when accusing him of rudeness and spying, were basically a deconstruction of the authority he assumed in his text, that was subsequently related to

other texts and to the interrelations of the contexts in which they could be put to use. The preachers were familiar with the use of the written word, many having completed at least junior certificate secondary schooling while some of them had obtained higher education. Their authority depended on text: the divine inspiration of the Gospel. In other words, it was not the text as such, as much as the indications it provided about a politics of perception that properly belonged to a realm outside their spiritual circle – the realm of gerontocratic power, often associated with witchcraft – that caused anxiety among the preachers.

The preachers were disconcerted by certain signs in van Dijk's text that raised doubts about the basis of his assumption of authority. His putting a word like 'infilling' between inverted commas could be perceived by the preachers as indicating intellectual distance from their discourse and activities, something that the description of their behaviour as 'ecstatic' would only reinforce. His description of the preachers' protest against the power of elders made theirs a *particular* interest that denied the universality of the purification from sin they aimed to achieve. Moreover, there were also suspicious intertextual relationships: originally, *Moni* was a magazine with Roman Catholic orientation and, in the same issue, the opening article discussed the Pope's coming visit to Malawi (in June 1989), where he would be received by President Banda. In relation to wider, global and local, contexts, this was not a recommendation for van Dijk's text: the Roman Catholic hierarchy was seen by the preachers as being closely allied with the main bulwarks of political power, and many preachers feared any sort of interference with their activities by the repressive political machinery. In the eyes of the preachers, the Roman Catholic Church was the prime example of how far removed from inspirational knowledge and power religious authority can become. It was the lack of divine inspiration that supposedly made the Roman Catholic Church so prone to collaboration with the political elite as it seemed (at that time).¹⁹

In the light of these intertextual and intercontextual relationships, the fact that van Dijk's article, in the view of the preachers, did not explicitly acknowledge a form of revelation and inspiration was unsettling. The politics of perception that the article seemed to suggest to them was closer to 'book-knowledge' than to the inspiration by which van Dijk was supposed to be touched in every nerve of his body. The other aspects of his scholarly behaviour, such as interviewing, observing and participating in their meetings, did not challenge the preachers' model of inspiration directly; indeed, a desire to obtain some form of inspiration seemed the most likely explanation of van Dijk's eagerness to communicate, observe and participate. In the end, this inspiration would even assure him academic success as well. But because the authority of the article was supported by a notion of distanced academic observation, it was unclear whether it

would support or threaten the integrity of the Born-Again's spiritual defence. There was no indication in his article that van Dijk was prepared to support it against the evil outside world. Was van Dijk, by writing this article, a 'spy of the Pope' and, by implication, a potential government informer? And if not, what had made him write this article at this exact moment in time? Was God's hand in it? Was it that, by revelation and inspiration, he had heard a call to write something that would explain to Malawian Catholics something of the true power of God, which could not be vested in ecclesiastical hierarchies, but was manifested in the divine inspiration of those who are 'saved' by becoming Born-Again? The anxiety that these questions produced could only be set at rest by a public, oral performance acknowledging the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Thus, the Born-Again preachers seemed to react to a perceptual regime implicit in the article that declared them to be an object of observation (seeing and hearing) without granting them the subject position that they felt they deserved on the basis of their experience of being 'touched' by the Holy Spirit, and of their perception of truth by inspiration. And whatever one might want to say about the grounds of the truth at which the preachers arrived, their interpretation of the perceptual strategy of ethnography, as represented by van Dijk's article, was accurate in the sense that it correctly identified a politics of perception whereby controlled observation and interview became dominant at the expense of the preachers' 'inner tactility'. Text-book-knowledge was the sign of an 'informative' regime of perception corresponding to 'a political situation of more or less direct control', a regime at odds with the 'performative' strategy (Fabian 1990: 19) – divine inspiration as testified by public, oral representation – that served the preachers to subvert, and dissent from, a system of political oppression.²⁰ The preachers' uncertainty about the role this kind of distanced perception of their activities could play within the broader context of Roman Catholicism and Malawian politics occasioned them to ask for a public penance that would safeguard their spiritual survival in the circle of defence they had carved out in Malawian society. For the ethnographer, the display of public humility was a necessary – but, in the 'field', only temporary – act of intellectual survival as well.

Discussion

The two cases presented above are too isolated to allow for conclusions. Their in-depth analysis, however, does point to a number of issues in which these contests of authority affect the future of research into religion and religious movements in Africa. These can be summarised under three headings: the politics of perception, the question of representation, and the blurring of the boundaries between 'home' and 'field'.

The politics of perception, or tactility and fieldwork tactics Few ethnographers will fail to recognise the situation whereby informants with whom an interview was arranged let them feel their superfluity and irrelevance by keeping them waiting or not showing up at all. Elsewhere, Pels has argued that such events, which require physical co-presence of ethnographer and informant, or the feeling of the absence of it, can best be described by a metaphor of 'tactility' or the sense of touch (Pels 1993: 1-18). Such 'tactile' perception, a type of 'feeling' not identical with emotion, makes one, when it is recognised as such, attentive to those events in a fieldwork process that rely on co-presence, the movement and positioning of bodies, and immediate perceptions that defy description in exact terms; anyone but the most disembodied researcher dealing with the anthropology of sexuality will be familiar with these problems.

Wim van Binsbergen has also drawn attention to the similarity of the problems which researchers into trance-healing and sexuality face (personal communication). In the study of religion in Africa, such problems of (the representation of) tactile perception are readily apparent once we consider the possibility that a researcher participates directly in ritual.²¹ Pels found little difficulty in dancing to Luguru ritual rhythms – something with which some researchers from an older generation might have more problems – but rarely mustered sufficient spiritual energy to endure the hardships of sitting and kneeling on wooden benches during one of the interminable Catholic services he attended. Van Dijk felt uncomfortable when he had to occupy the pulpit to deliver his penance, while van Binsbergen has also drawn attention to the hardships of dancing during the ceremonies he attended both before and after his initiation (personal communication).

It is hard to say right now what a more sustained attention to tactile perception will attain in the study of religion in Africa, especially since scientific rhetoric seems to have little room for its description, which leans towards narrations of subjective experience rather than objective generalisations. Two directions of enquiry, however, suggest themselves. First, that a politics of tactile perception seems an obvious tactic for the people observed to get their own back from a researcher who tends to rely exclusively on sight and (controlled) sound for obtaining his information. The physical hardships of initiation are an example of this, as van Binsbergen pointed out; the condition being, of course, that the researcher puts his body at the disposal of his informants. Second, tactile perception seems closer to the kind of 'inner' perception (of paralysis or disease and its cure, of trance-like vibration) that seems to occasion many of the conversion experiences that anthropologists, as sorcerer's apprentices, undergo. A phenomenology of perception that does not privilege distanced vision and controlled sound seems necessary to future research into religion in Africa, although it remains unclear to us to what extent this will include moving towards psychotherapy or conversion.

Text and context: the question of representation As we have tried to show by presenting the two cases, alternative forms of textual representation do not seem to solve the problems of the politics of representation: the contradictions between paradigms of perception and the contests of authority associated with them are not affected by literary experiments. That does not mean, however, that the issue of representation itself becomes obsolete; on the contrary, by identifying its politics, we have urged a recognition of the fact that the politics of perception and its representation are themselves part of the contexts in which religion is studied in Africa today. It is just as much part of the object of study as it poses a problem for the subjects that study it.

The practical relevance of this issue of representation becomes, perhaps, most clear when one considers the current question of the professionalisation of 'traditional' medicine in Africa (cf. Last and Chavunduka 1986). Clearly, if an African government aspires to register and professionalise 'traditional' healers, a whole array of questions about what is represented by 'traditional', and how this representation affects the practitioners in question, arises: does it not change their work completely by, for instance, shifting the emphasis from religion to medicine?; what kind of politics of representation is involved?; are healers represented by a Ministry of Health official or by one of their own members in a separate body?; is the leadership of this separate body representative of 'traditional' healers as a group? It is also clear that, in such cases, given the simultaneous existence of institutions based on a scientific model of medicine, the whole set of contradictions between perceptual paradigms will be operative. If, as van Binsbergen has argued in his paper, his healing practice is based on a practical knowledge that is hard to convey in scientific writing, how can one call for the registration and professionalisation of 'traditional' healers, as this requires precisely the kind of textual representation that van Binsbergen says is so difficult to achieve? The point to be made here, of course, is that clinical practice has, for a long time, been faced with similar problems, and that a more thorough comparison of African healing with clinical reasoning – in particular, that of the Western medical practitioner, whose reasoning may be as fuzzy and practical as that of his African counterparts (see Ginzburg 1983) – is necessary.

In addition to the area of healing and therapy, another field in which the practical relevance of representation, and its relation to perceptual regimes, comes to the fore is the institutionalisation of religion in Africa and its role in (de-)legitimising changing forms of political power. On the one hand, since the advent of the democratic political changes on the African continent many of the established mission churches have involved themselves in practical politics by offering religious legitimations for imagined 'Africanised' or 'traditional' forms of democratic power. Such contemporary concepts of 'indigenisation' often bypass the indigenisation

of Christianity practised by Africans since the first missionary encounter (through, for instance, 'witchcraft' and 'devilry': Meyer 1992) and, as a consequence, downplay the political significance of their (missiological and ethnographic) regimes of perception and ignore their potential conflict with locally held perceptions of political power and its legitimacy.²² As Bayart (1989) has shown for Cameroon and other West African societies, political power is often perceived in olfactory and tactile terms, of a *politique du ventre* of *manger* and *bouffer*. Schatzberg (1993), too, alludes to tactile perceptions of the legitimacy of political leadership, as physically-felt forces of leadership that benefit or hurt the local population (see also Geschiere, n.d.). In other words, the representations of 'tradition' and 'Africanity' by the established mission churches, while influencing the discourses on democratisation in Africa, have seldom been related to the perceptual regimes that mediate both politics and religion.

On the other hand, the increasing institutionalisation of African churches puts them in a position in which their leaders not only read and adopt, but also criticise the analyses made of their (political) development by European academics. When Matthew Schoffeleers recently interpreted the South African Zionist churches as politically conservative and acquiescent, his views were heavily challenged by Zionist leaders (Schoffeleers 1991; Ngada 1992). In a manner recalling the Born-Again's challenge to van Dijk's *Moni* article, Zionist leaders argued on several occasions that 'book-knowledge' and observation give only partial accounts of protest (see also Hallencreutz and Palmberg 1991). The central theme of, among others, Bishop Ngada's intervention in the debate about Schoffeleers' interpretation of the Zionist churches was also what spiritual experiences really might do to a person living in harsh circumstances of political coercion, and why these can hardly be represented in text. In all these cases, the conventions of representation and the politics of perception of academic anthropology play a role and call up protest. They remind us that the solution of the problems of representation adopted by Stoller, and, with more misgivings, by van Binsbergen and Jules-Rosette – of self-representation by a narrative of personal experience – need not be the only one available.

The interpenetration of 'field' and 'home' The issue of the professionalisation of 'traditional' medicine also shows to what extent these issues can no longer be 'localised' in a 'field' away from 'home'. As Dutch psychiatry increasingly has to face the necessity of confronting or incorporating, for instance, Surinamese *winti* practitioners or Ghanaese *imams*, similar problems arise within the Dutch nation-state. The postcolonial world is a world of migrants, and we do not need to stretch our imaginations very far to recognise that anthropologists were, with colonial administrators and missionaries, some of the first professional migrants

to herald the coming of a world in which global inequalities are increasingly a feature of everyone's everyday life. Yet, few researchers have taken academic anthropology or its so-called 'amateur', missionary and administrative counterparts as an element of a globalisation movement that transformed religious practice in Africa. Just as the issue of experimental representation often serves as a cloak to hide irresolvable political contradictions in anthropological practice, just so did the historiography of anthropology use a professional self-image to deny or ignore its rootedness in colonial practice (cf. Pels and Salemink 1994). The two cases presented above seem to suggest that anthropologists have used a number of tactics in the field, and textual strategies out of it, that keep 'home' and 'field' apart. It is becoming clear, however, that they do this against a background of an increasing interpenetration of cultural realms that eventually questions any form of cultural hegemony, whether based on distanced, ethnographic observation, or on a privileging of the olfactory or tactile, or on another perceptual regime.

In the field of the study of religion in Africa, this interpenetration of cultural realms should lead to a recognition that the identities of both subject and object, of scholarly and religious authority, have a long history of mutual (de)construction. In the field of the study of missions in Africa, for instance, it is remarkable that the concepts of 'culture' and 'history' have worked for so long to reify 'European' and 'African cultures', keeping the 'contact zone' in which so much of religion in Africa has been (de)constructed out of the analysis (as is shown, for instance, by the fact that only recently, the concept of 'syncretism' has been subjected to critical scrutiny; see Stewart and Shaw 1994). In the field of Christian missions, at least, this gap is now quickly being filled (for an overview, see Pels 1993: 1–18). As van Dijk's work with Born-Again preachers in Blantyre shows, present-day religious developments are also very much shaped by the assessment that religious leaders make of globalised forms of religious and political organisation and their intercontextual relationships. Lastly, now that a growing number of scholars acknowledges that, when confronted with magical healing, the researcher cannot fall back simply on a number of scientific conventions of authority, it seems necessary to consider the legitimacy, and acknowledge the political necessity, of this deconstruction of authority and identity by those whom anthropologists study.

Notes

We would like to thank Wim van Binsbergen for discussing the topic of this paper with us while it was being written, and Dick Werbner for his productive editorial comments.

1. These scholars are often designated 'postmodernists', but the use of the term in this way – usually meant as derogatory – is highly problematic (Pool 1991a).

2. For the distinction between 'strategies' (implying a decontextualised subjective position from which strategies are drawn up) and 'tactics' (implying a *bricolage* of political calculation without a single locus), see de Certeau (1984: xix, 36-7).

3. We owe the fruitful juxtaposition of 'fieldwork' and 'homework' to discussions with Smadar Lavie during a conference in Amsterdam in June 1993.

4. Compare also C. G. Seligmann's statement that 'Field research in Anthropology is what the blood of the martyrs is to the Church' (cited in Lewis 1976: 76).

5. A closely related argument can be set up for those anthropologists who underwent a religious conversion (cf. Jules-Rosette 1976); however, we do not have the opportunity to go into the relationship between initiation and conversion, interesting though this may be (but see Pels 1994).

6. This has been argued by scholars as diverse as Walter Benjamin, Marshall McLuhan and Walter Ong. Martin Jay (1993: chs 2 and 3) gives an overview of the changes that occurred within European 'scopic', that is, visual, regimes through technological innovation.

7. It should be noted that this position does not deny that some sensory regimes can be more practically effective – more powerful – than others; we hesitate, however, in equating the practical success of these more powerful regimes (in the domination of nature as well as of humans) with a higher 'truth'.

8. We do not use 'occult' with the derogatory meaning it has acquired, but take it to refer to knowledge that has been rejected by the dominant intellectual establishment (cf. Webb 1974).

9. Which led Martin Jay to distinguish between alternating 'models of speculation, observation and revelation' within the history of Western 'scopic' epistemologies (Jay 1993: 236).

10. Despite Stoller's assessment, however, we should point out that Evans-Pritchard's politics of perception was more complex: by identifying himself with Zande nobility, he could not become a witchdoctor and therefore had to send a proxy.

11. Van Binsbergen also uses the term 'evocation' (1991: 333), but as his account differs in a number of respects from those of Stoller and Gibbal, it will be dealt with elsewhere. 'Evocation' is also important for Stephen Tyler (1986).

12. It is unfortunate that Olivier de Sardan does not elaborate on the latter in his paper. However, Malinowski pointed out sixty years ago that it is possible to look for magic in Western prayer, advertisement and legal procedure (Malinowski 1935), and, one might add, in medicine (e.g. psychiatry and the placebo effect).

13. Which is the reason why we argue in the introduction that the paradox of polyphony (of simultaneously relying on and suppressing it) has *always* been integral to ethnography. See, for the relationship between the experiencing 'I' sensitive to polyphony, and the observing 'eye' that tries to reduce it, Pratt (1985). Olivier de Sardan also notes (*contra* Stoller) that the experiencing 'I' is just another form of realism, not an escape from it (1989: 130; 1992: 10).

14. Professional 'ethics' seem, moreover, to be a specifically 'ethnic' preoccupation of the US American academy, given that the AAA code of ethics was both the first, and is the most frequently redrafted, ethical code in anthropology (see Fluehr-Lobban 1991).

15. Van Binsbergen, personal communication; see also his comments on anthropology's 'Faustian rationality' (van Binsbergen 1991: 336). Stoller suggests Olivier de Sardan's 'intellectual arrogance' without accusing him directly (Stoller 1989a: 116).

16. Van Binsbergen writes: 'The practical knowledge I claim to have acquired

(enough to convincingly play the role of a *tuwaza* novice and to come out as a fully-fledged *sangoma*), is at the same time more profound and complete, more personal and idiosyncratic, and (as all practical knowledge) more superficial and patchy, than that which my learned colleagues have produced on this topic over the decades' (van Binsbergen 1991: 333). One longs for a lengthy elaboration of the contradictions sketched in this paragraph.

17. He writes: 'If I have discovered anything from my experience of Songhay sorcery, it is that sorcery is a metaphor for the chaos that constitutes social relations – Songhay and otherwise. We all suffer *zamba*, a good friend's betrayal [Stoller has just been robbed by his most trusted assistant]. Things crumble and are reconstituted in all societies; we are *all* in sorcery's shadow.' This discovery that 'things fall apart' is hardly novel and is shared by writers as different as Yeats and Achebe. It is similar to the arbitrary closure of the hermeneutic circle that Michael Taussig offers when ending a discussion of Peruvian phantasies of Western cannibalism by saying that we are all cannibals (Taussig 1987: 241), an observation that goes back, in anthropology at least, to Lévi-Strauss (1977: 441).

18. Van Binsbergen, personal communication.

19. This position of the Roman Catholic Church *vis-à-vis* the political regime changed dramatically when the Catholic bishops' Lenten letter of 1992 initiated unprecedented, concerted and mass protest against the Banda regime. The church took the lead in changing the coercive political climate and was more or less able to force the ruling party and Banda to negotiate the more democratic system that was eventually installed in 1994.

20. In the same way, the suspicion of the preachers about the kind of supervision suggested by the questionnaire which van Dijk handed out some time afterwards can be interpreted.

21. For an exploration of such participation, see Turner et al. (1992), although we feel uncomfortable with its emphasis on vision (e.g. 'seeing' spirit manifestations) and the consequent lack of questioning of the 'evidence of the senses' (*ibid.*: 4).

22. We might add that the politics of representation of missiology and missionary ethnography – especially the relation between cultural relativism and political conservatism – is a little researched field in any case.

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